Killing the Father:
‘Cultural Fathers’ and Paternal Influence in Hibernian Philhellenism

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Classics, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

(June 2026)

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Word Count: 89,591

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how certain tensions present in what W.B. Stanford previously termed the 'Irish Classical Tradition' manifested in the lives, works, and relationships of several prominent figures in Irish literary culture from the late nineteenth century to the present. In order to demonstrate the effects of this cultural milieu, I consider three principal (male) figures against the critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence', but inevitably other major 'cultural fathers' are drawn into the discussion. My central focus is Oscar Wilde and I examine Wilde's direct and indirect relation to two further key characters: J.P. Mahaffy and Colm Tóibín. In order to contextualise this examination, Chapter 1 first re-defines and re-conceptualises a tradition of classicism in Ireland to show how it is neither hierarchal nor linear, but rather a complex cultural mosaic wherein each member is an active constructor of the tradition responding to their own fictive position within the same tradition. This chapter provides the architecture for the thesis' overarching argument which offers a new way of understanding classical Greek engagement in Ireland through the concept of 'Hibernian Philhellenism' imagined as akin to Tim Ingold's 'rope'. The idea that 'the rejection of influence is still influence' is paramount. Chapter 2, therefore, establishes an agonistic exchange of influence between Wilde, Mahaffy and Tóibín framed by the patriarchal and parricidal nature of Greek tragedy. Since this thesis also places an understanding of the 'author as reader' at the forefront, Chapter 3 interrogates the lived experiences of my predominant figures through their interaction with Platonic conceptions of homosocial and homoerotic relationships. Overall, this thesis does two things. Firstly, it establishes a new way in which a history of classicism in Ireland can be mapped, concluding that the current model rests somewhere 'in between' theories of 'tradition' and 'reception'. Secondly, it illustrates what this approach may look like in practice by providing a thematic exploration of my selected figures across a number of chosen domains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my sincerest gratitude to Professor Ahuvia Kahane for supervising this thesis. Your guidance and inexhaustible wealth of knowledge were invaluable to me during the completion of my PhD. Thank you also for the enormous amount of time, effort, and thought that you have put into my personal and professional development. I will forever be thankful that you believed in this project and facilitated me pursuing my dream of completing a PhD in Classics.

They say, 'it takes a village'. Well, the Classics Department of Trinity College Dublin has been that village for me over the last 9 years (and 3 degrees). To every member of the Department, I am so grateful for your friendly faces and words of encouragement. Special mention must go to Dr Suzanne O'Neill, my (unofficial) mentor and the most positive, warm, and empathetic person that I know. Everyone needs a Sue in their lives. My deepest thanks also to Professor Christine Morris: for your selfless offers of help in all facets of (PhD) life, and for being a constant inspiration. Also, to Dr Ashley Clements, Dr Martine Cuypers, Professor Anna Chahoud, Ms Winifred Ryan, and Dr Patricia Stapleton, thank you for your kindness, interest, and support. My journey over the past 4 years could have been very lonely without the Trinity Long Room Hub. I am so appreciative to the entire Hub team, and my fellow ECRs, for making me a more well-rounded researcher (and person!), but particularly to former Director Professor Eve Patten, who is exactly the type of academic I aspire to be. I am lucky to have had so many wonderful teaching opportunities, and I thank the students for so enriching my days. To (as Oscar Wilde said) 'my first and best teacher', Olivia Duggan: thank you for not only providing the finest introduction to the subject, but also for bringing me to my first ruins!

To my dearest friends (including godmothers!), your genuine care and cheerleading over the past couple of years (forever indebted to Mallory for proof-reading!) has only underlined how lucky I am to have you all. Thank you for all the laughter and therapy sessions. To my lovely granny, Bairbre, it is so special to share these interests with you. Finally, my biggest and most important thanks must go to my Mum and Dad: it is impossible to put into words how important you both are to me. I am so privileged to have had parents who let the little girl who loved books decide exactly what she wanted to be when she grew up. My life has truly been like if Matilda lived with (Mr and) Ms Honey all along. All of this is for you, my greatest and fiercest champions. That, of course, extends

to my siblings, Holly and Max: ‘my first and best’ team. Lastly, to Rory: you continuously hold me up (and keep me sane) with your love and patience. I’d be lost without you.

Billy Joel was right; Vienna waited for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES **VII**

INTRODUCTION **1**

CHAPTER 1
***GREEK IN ESSENCE, CLASSICAL AT HEART*: ESTABLISHING HIBERNIAN PHILHELLENISM** **18**

1.1. Introduction: Unwinding the Rope 19

1.2. Hibernian Philhellenism: Towards an 'Untraditional Tradition' 25

1.3. *The Most Assimilative and the Most Sensitive Nation in Europe*: 'A Certain Greek Kinship' in Ireland 43

1.4. Conclusion: Strands of a Rope 53

CHAPTER 2
A NATIONAL TRAGEDY: ATHENIAN DRAMA, POLITICS, AND RELIGION **69**

2.1. Introduction: (Post)Colonial Considerations 70

2.2. The (Ab)Use of the Archetype: The Tragic Father 76

2.3. Role-playing: *Oedipus* and Oedipal Frameworks 91

2.4. Bridging the Hellenised Divide: Tóibín and the Troubles 130

2.5. Conclusion: The Knot Untangled 155

CHAPTER 3
IRELAND'S 'BLOTS': PLATO AND (HOMO)SEXUALITY **158**

3.1. Introduction: The Mesh of (Homo)Sexuality 159

3.2. Societies of Silence: The Desexualisation of (Homo)Sexuality from the Victioran to Catholic Context 167

3.3. Lessons in Antiquity: The *Poetics of Pedagogy* and Homosociality 185

3.4. The Absent Body: Plato's *Symposium* and Elevated Male Friendship 218

3.5. Conclusion: Highlighting the Margins 249

CONCLUSION **254**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **271**

TABLE OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. A table illustrating a set of prescribed tensions that exist within Hibernian Philhellenism and J. P. Mahaffy, Oscar Wilde, and Colm Tóibín's relation to them.

By: Sophie McGurk

οὐκοῦν ἑρμηνέων ἑρμηνῆς γίγνεσθε

"So your role is to be interpreters of interpreters?"[1]

Plato, *Ion* (535a)

[1] Plato, 2005: 56 (trans. Trevor J. Saunders).

INTRODUCTION

"Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinion, their life a mimicry, their passions a quotation."[1]

~ Oscar Wilde

[1] Wilde, 2013: 118.

Oscar Wilde once remarked to a friend, William Rothenstein, that "in literature it is always necessary to kill your father."[2] Among other things, this thesis will attempt to interrogate the extent to which this statement, with regard to literary influence and tradition formation, is true in a very singular Irish context. Wilde's statement, at a cursory glance, sums up a consequence of what Harold Bloom called "the anxiety of influence."[3] In what follows, my focus is on the tensions that produced a particular tradition of classicism in Ireland, from the late nineteenth century to the present.[4] The 'anxiety of influence' is itself an oxymoron: it marks a need to simultaneously rely heavily on the past and to differ distinctly from one's immediate predecessor, setting a paradoxical statute of limitations on the use of the past. When dealing with classical allusion, predecessor and successor are naturally drawing from the same ancient well. And yet, method and interpretation differ. For that reason, this thesis argues against ideas of universality and believes that the most important thing to remember when looking at traditions of influence and the very formation of a tradition itself is: the repudiation of influence is influence nonetheless.

This study aims to explore the idea of 'cultural fathers' in Irish classicism and how the tensions present in what W. B. Stanford previously termed the 'Irish Classical Tradition' manifested in the lives, works, and relationships of several prominent cultural figures.[5] Here, my re-naming of the tradition goes beyond contributing to an established frame but, rather, works to redefine said frame. Applying this idea of 'cultural paternal influence' as a critical theme, I examine a formulated set of domains that are responsible for constructing the conditions of Hibernian Philhellenism between the late nineteenth century and the present. By 'cultural paternal influence', I mean primarily a joint cultural and pedagogical influence over education, beliefs, artistic style, and social perspective. The use of the word 'cultural' also comments on how "notions that had always been considered 'natural' (like history, humanism, tradition, freedom, patriarchy, etc.) turned out to be specific constructions of the (Western) mind; they were in fact 'cultural'."[6] The critical theme of this thesis thus comments on both the reception of and resistance to classical materials and one's literary predecessors, or 'cultural fathers'.[7] I see this thesis as doing

[2] Rothenstein, 1935: 184. This was originally remarked in French: "dans la literature il faut tuer son père."
[3] Bloom, 1997.
[4] To clarify, 'classical' will appear capitalised when referring directly to the Classical period of ancient Greece (c. 510 BCE – 323 BCE) or when used in titles/specific terms, and in lower-case when referring to the subject/discipline.
[5] See Stanford, 1976.
[6] Decreus, 2010: 246.
[7] See Said, 2004: 62-76.

two things. Firstly, it is re-conceptualising notions of classicism in Ireland and establishing a new way in which the tradition can be mapped. Secondly, it is providing a thematic exploration of what this can look like in practice.

We will consider three main figures in order to demonstrate the complexity of the relations and conditions within modern Hibernian Philhellenism, but inevitably other major figures will be drawn into discussion. My central figure is Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) – poet, dramatist, and classical scholar. I consider Wilde's relation to two further key characters. The first is J. P. Mahaffy (1839-1919), who was Wilde's tutor at Trinity and with whom he had a close personal relationship. The second figure is Colm Tóibín (1955-), one of Ireland's current prime authors and critics who has engaged heavily with Wilde's works.[8]

This study, too, has to deal with the "perennial problem that is the 'down-side'" of studying a history of classicism; that is, "its enormous range, both chronologically and in terms of subject matter."[9] I have chosen to focus on a chapter in the history of engagement with Greek materials, thought, and sources. Thus, in no way does this thesis demonstrate the "extent of classicizing imitation"[10] in Ireland. The Latin/Roman tradition in Ireland is a rich repository, ruled by its own set of circumstances and tensions. Contributors like Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland, and the ensuing tradition itself, are deserving of their own (re)consideration. Nevertheless, the Greek and the Roman cannot be fully removed from one another. The presence of a Roman tradition fully intersects with understandings of the adoption of the Greek, particularly since the Romans themselves "not only drew and refashioned Greek material but also engaged in cultural exchange across their empire, with effects right up to the present day."[11] Therefore, a tradition of philhellenism in a country historically affected by a (once) Romanised empire, and largely controlled by a Latin-Christian context, can never be fully unambiguous. My central figures, although favouring the Greek, remain firmly within that socio-politic setting.

My use of the word 'tradition' rather than 'reception' means to acknowledge the "deeply embedded stereotypes about the elite western association of the study of classics and its contextual associations, ancient and modern."[12] However, my removal of the word 'tradition' in my naming of 'Hibernian Philhellenism' hopes to track the shift from more conservative understandings of 'tradition' to more diverse and contemporary movements

[8] The particular reasons as to why these specific figures were chosen will be elucidated later in Chapter 1.
[9] Hardwick and Harrison, 2013: xxvii.
[10] Poppe, 2014: 39.
[11] Hardwick and Stray, 2008: 1.
[12] Hardwick and Harrison, 2013: xx.

of ‘reception’. Really, this thesis demonstrates an active process, something akin to what has been termed in reception studies as a ‘democratic turn’. That ‘turn’ involves moving the “focus away from the association between the study of antiquity and a limited elite group with the necessary education, wealth, and leisure and towards a wider constituency of users.”[13] I believe that Irish classicism is in a moment of flux between ‘tradition’ and ‘reception’. Throughout this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that this moment of ‘turning’ is manifested through Colm Tóibín who appears ‘in between’ – an important concept to my analysis, as will be demonstrated – the territories of ‘tradition’ and ‘reception’. The action of this ‘turn’ is just one of many processes chronicled within this thesis that shape the ‘untraditional tradition’ of Hibernian Philhellenism. However, while this turn may now be taking place, we cannot deny that at one point the social and historical contexts demanded a model of ‘tradition’ and not ‘reception’.

Whilst ‘reception’ is “thought to be the less problematic concept of the two,”[14] we cannot fully abandon the idea of a ‘tradition’ since the afterlives of these contexts still linger today in the contemporary moment. To do so would be to re-write difficult histories, and disregard the condition that the “study of tradition and that of reception [depend] on its material.”[15] In other words, while this project necessarily deals with the traditional model due to its historical context, in its dismantling of the same it also hopes to demonstrate Budelmann and Haubold’s claim that, “there is no one single kind of relationship between tradition and reception, different texts require us to define this relationship in different ways, depending on the value they place on continuity, cultural authority and political relevance.”[16] Therefore, since “each reception ‘event’ is also part of wider processes,”[17] I believe that terms ‘tradition’ and ‘reception’ can occupy a mutually beneficial and fluid space in these discussions.[18]

The chronological span of this project not only places us ‘in between’ concepts of ‘tradition’ and ‘reception’, but it also engages with the era of modern Irish social history when questions of identity were at the forefront. Historically, the Irish have considered their literary history to be a defining feature of a collective identity. This identity, as I will show, is heavily reliant on past works and thought from antiquity. My project aims to advance our

[13] Ibid: xxii.
[14] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008:14.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid: 23.
[17] Hardwick and Stray, 2008: 1.
[18] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008: 23.

knowledge of such reliance while reconsidering the structure of its underlying frames, and contribute to a new understanding of pivotal figures in Hibernian Philhellenism and, more broadly, in Irish culture.

I interrogate this topic by re-reading a wide range of familiar textual primary sources, both ancient and modern. These include a wide variety of archival sources, diaries, newspaper articles, letters, novels, poetry, drama, popular works of non-fiction, and scholarly writing. I have consulted a range of secondary literature that primarily revolves around the study of the 'Irish Classical Tradition' and its members, the analysis of literary works and their classical influences, alongside proper consideration of these influences themselves, against relevant critical theories. My critical framework, indebted to Tim Ingold's anthropological explorations on generations and traditions, Harold Bloom's theories of influence, and Julia Kristeva's development of the idea of intertextuality, and the lens of 'cultural paternal influence' I apply will allow us to look at this topic from a significant new angle. My understanding of the concept of intertextuality is fundamentally fuelled by the idea that any creative act is really a heterogenous blend of previous creative acts.[19] No text ever exists in isolation and this fact strengthens the positioning of my central figures as both 'author' and 'reader'. The important thing is not just that these texts and figures have overlapped, but that they have undergone a "transformative process."[20] In our case, that process is one of 'entwining'. The critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence' combines these factors "in a certain way"[21] to create Hibernian Philhellenism. My approach ultimately emphasises that classical engagement is a continuum. Therefore, I stress what came before, what comes after, and their impact on the present.

The way I am conceptualising this tradition, Hibernian Philhellenism, is not by a 'Schliemannian' stratigraphic schema – but, rather, as reactions to reactions. Each of my Chapters act as a separate domain in which tradition is constructed in dialogue with the figures I have chosen as case-studies. With regards to this construction, this study will remove the model of succession that we are very used to in Western thinking when it comes to canon and tradition. One model is not replacing the other. Instead, these conceptions are

[19] 'Intertextuality' is just one of five subcategories of 'transtextuality' established by Gérard Genette, and commented on by Alfaro: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality (Alfaro, 1996: 280-281). Intertextuality is described there as "the relation of co-presence between two or more texts, that is, the effective presence of one text in another which takes place by means of plagiarism, quotation or allusion" (Ibid). A well-understood example of intertextuality is James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1986) and Homer's *Odyssey* (2016).
[20] Genette, 1982: 5.
[21] Ingold, 2015: 9.

overlapping on a plain that is made up of choices of acceptance and rejection; and can be seen as a fluid transformation of how we can read 'belonging'. I want to expand perceptions to show how Irish classicism is not a hierarchical tradition, but rather a complex cultural mosaic wherein each member is an active constructor of the tradition and each member responds to their own fictive positions within the tradition.

Chronology is certainly important when tracking influence and cultural conditions, but the historical approach of dealing with time-lines is restrictive. Instead, linear history must appear as an "abstraction,"[22] and we must imagine cultural players and their works on a multi-dimensional plane that allows for changes, movement, and collisions that do not necessarily follow a strict 'number line'. It is in this conception that intertextuality will merge with the anxiety of influence so that we can "understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness … shaped by repetition and transformation of other textual structures."[23] Overall, the study of my central figures in the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism will underline the difference between 'imitation' and 'interpretation', showing that "imitation is not repetition but the completion of an act of interpretation."[24]

In his 2015 work, *The Life of Lines*, Ingold explains how humans like to 'cling' to things, but it is in that 'clinging' to one another that there is an "entwining of lines."[25] This metaphor of 'entwining' rather than the typical 'stacking' will be the most useful in our growing understanding of the concept and formation of Hibernian Philhellenism. Each Chapter in this study will demonstrate a different way that this 'entwining' can be seen. Its principle model is that of the rope, with each player, influence, and cultural condition making up an individual strand that entwines to create the central line. Further ways in which the nuances of the tradition can be mapped then present themselves in the form of a 'knot' on said rope, or the idea of an area of 'mesh'. While either can be used in the place of the other, each will be separately demonstrated.

The rope itself is Hibernian Philhellenism, but ropes can become knotted. It is these knots that act as smaller microcosms and contexts in which specific circumstances need to be examined. In this study, the 'knot' will take the form of the way that classical allusion and reference was relied upon in matters of politics and religious identity in the period of

[22] Kristeva, 1980: 65.
[23] Alfaro, 1996: 268.
[24] Ibid: 269.
[25] Ingold, 2015: 3.

the late nineteenth century to the present. As mentioned, the model of the knot can be replaced to account for "when everything tangles with everything else, the result is … a mesh."[26] In this case, the 'mesh' will take the form of an exploration into conceptions of homosexuality in Ireland that rely on classical influences and models. These metaphors will act as a framework against which each Chapter and its sections are constructed, and the theories of Tim Ingold and those introduced below will support this.

Influence is never straight-forward and I do not pretend to have an insight into the thought-process, or the creative subconscious, of figures dead or alive. Rather, this study tracks tradition formation as not just a binary set of acceptances and rejections, but rather a complicated web of *misreadings*.[27] Through analysing these choices, I will consider how "literary influence is primarily concerned with the author and the process of their creative consciousness."[28] Two scholarly works were fundamental in the development of this thesis. The first is Noreen Doody's *The Influence of Oscar Wilde on W. B. Yeats* (2018). In it, she tracks how traditions can be shaped, and further formed, by explaining how it is "individual authors who contribute to and perpetuate the tradition.[29] In this exploration of literary influence, Doody shows a very useful example of what I call 'cultural paternal influence' and the role of the 'cultural father'. She offers a steadfast model of the form that 'cultural paternal influence' can take, and how it relates to the established methodology of "the individual author enter[ing] into a pre-existing, ever-present literary tradition."[30]

The second work that similarly balances my view of 'cultural paternal influence' with accepted literary theories is Eibhear Walshe's *A Different Story: The Writings of Colm Tóibín* (2013). Here, Walshe's purpose reflects my approach in how his "study is not directly biographical but, as [Tóibín] makes clear in interviews, key elements from his own life find their way into his fictions again and again."[31] As I am hoping to show, some of these 'key elements' include the factors of Hibernian Philhellenism and instances of literary influence that come either directly or through the canon. That is to say that there is an "unmappable element of individual consciousness at play within the parameters of influence,"[32] and although for Tóibín, say, there is a "motley collection of artists and

[26] Ibid.
[27] Bloom, 1997: xxiii.
[28] Doody, 2018: 13.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Walshe, 2013: 4.
[32] Doody, 2018: 17.

historical figures that are in different ways important to him,"[33] the filiation between him and Wilde has specifically been chosen to chart the development of the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism.

An important tension that underlies this study is the claim that "no poet, I amend that to no strong poet, can choose his precursor, any more than any person can choose his father."[34] In order to demonstrate this in practice, I look to Harold Bloom as an example of how one can employ canonical figures like Sigmund Freud to one's advantage. As suggested by the very title of this thesis, Freud exists in the background of any 'family' model – be it cultural or biological. This dissertation's critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence' also immediately calls to mind Oedipal frameworks. While I do believe that any discussion of Oedipus is unavoidable when dealing with these types of relationships, I agree with Bloom that Oedipus should be treated first and foremost as a "rhetorical flourish."[35] Nonetheless, the most important feature of the Oedipus complex, and the most in keeping with this thesis' title, is the idea of intergenerational competition, or *agon*.[36]

Michel Foucault purported that our society views narrative or writing "as something designed to ward off death,"[37] while Bloom proposes that "there must be *agon*, a struggle for supremacy, or at least for holding off imaginative death"[38] with a literary precursor. This brings us back to Oscar Wilde's quote that began this discussion: 'in literature, it is always necessary to kill your father'. Here, *agon* does not necessarily mean death in a literal sense, but it regards a mindset like Wilde's that reminds us that "competition is a central fact of our cultural tradition."[39] It should be viewed not as a zero-sum type of competition but rather a competitive space that fosters creativity and kinship among the players wherein "the precursor is praised for having been *what one has become*."[40]

Freud's conception of 'the father' is a useful and inviting convenience.[41] Likewise, Jung offers a generalising archetype that is tempting, and in a later Chapter, I will briefly give in to this temptation for the purpose of historicising conceptions of influence and 'cultural paternal influence'. It is important to acknowledge that this is done in a cursory

[33] Delaney, 2008: 14.
[34] Bloom, 1975: 12.
[35] Bloom, 1997: xxii.
[36] Although Bloom prefers to call it the 'Hamlet Complex' (Ibid).
[37] Foucault, 1998: 206.
[38] Bloom, 2011: 6.
[39] Bloom, 1997: 7.
[40] Ibid: 126. Italics original.
[41] For the origins of Freud's Oedipal theories, see 'Letter from Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess', 15th October 1897 (in Freud, 1985: 270-273).

way to show the power of the psyche in these types of characterisations, especially in relationships that include a power dynamic (be it personal or canonical). I could have chosen Jacques Lacan or Luce Irigaray to feature in this part of the discussion, and their theories do still appear as terms of reference throughout.[42] However, in keeping with the idea of agonistic influence, I decided that the later debunking of Jung and Freud's works by critics like Lacan and Irigaray offers another concrete example of how the rejection of influence is still influence. The language of family and paternal influence is useful in this study and relevant to my choice of critics, not simply because Bloom sees literary influence as stemming from what Freud called "the family romance,"[43] but also because the mainstream literary figures in Irish classicism or the Irish literary sphere have been predominantly male. In the Conclusion, we will consider how this has now begun to change, but the fact that there are cultural conditions that predicated why it is fathers and 'paternal' influence that are at play here, and not mothers and 'maternal' influence, cannot be ignored.

It is important to continuously reiterate that Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín are male in a world otherwise heavily inflected by masculinity. In a throw-away statement by W. B. Stanford who is describing the difficulty of linguistics when it comes to a study of classics in Ireland, he claims that "in most other countries the classical historian needs only to know one vernacular language … in Ireland he requires skill in at least two of the four vernaculars used in various epochs in Irish history.[44] Here is a blatant picture of the Irish classicist: a 'he'. Stanford was a man of his time and his work is situated in a very specific period in Irish society. He cannot necessarily be blamed for reporting on his environment. However, this same environment was continuously fashioned and perpetuated by preconceptions such as this.

In a more recent 2005 publication, classics in Ireland is again painted as a male pursuit. In *Hellenising Ireland: Greek and Roman Themes in Modern Irish Literature*, Brian Arkins certainly acknowledges the fact that "women were excluded, to a great extent, from the world of classics, entry to which formed a kind of initiation rite for upper class males, with a particular social cachet attaching to Greek."[45] However, he follows this with perhaps an unconscious, but decidedly unnecessary, justification as to why that has been

[42] See Lacan, 2007; and Irigaray, 1985.
[43] Bloom, 1997: 8; Freud, 2001.
[44] Stanford, 1970: 14.
[45] Arkins, 2005: 17.

the case: "even when a woman does acquire knowledge of the Greek world, macho male behaviours on the parts of gods or heroes may disturb."[46] While, for example, "Yeats can view the rape of Leda by Zeus (in the shape of a swan) as the Greek Annunciation,"[47] female classicists, apparently, cannot. It is clear from both Stanford and Arkins' work that "the figure of the classicist has also been strongly influenced by models of classical antiquity,"[48] so that historically, the "classicist is disproportionally likely to be white, male and moneyed,"[49] further reflected by the fact that Greek/Latin could/can only be studied in primarily fee-paying boys' schools.

The ubiquitous nature of classicism amounts to what Adam Nicholson suggested is "the colonisation of the mind by an imaginative presence from the past."[50] This colonisation begins with Homer, who was "conferred with nearly biblical stature already in antiquity."[51] Since then, "Western culture remains predominantly under the spell of classicism."[52] Athenians of the fifth century BCE were just as indebted to and reliant on Homer as we remain now, demonstrating how Homer can be "shaped differently to match each occasion,"[53] and also "stand[s] for nothing less than the sanctity of the classical tradition itself and its transmitted ideals."[54]Aside from Samuel Butler's *Authoress*,[55] Homer is decidedly male – regardless of where one stands on the matter of the 'Homeric Question'.[56] Thus, a discussion containing applications of 'paternal influence' as a critical theme must acknowledge Homer, 'Western' civilisation's first 'cultural father'.[57] Any other ensuing 'cultural father' one may examine (Shakespeare, Keats, Yeats etc.) was not formed as a cultural pillar in their own right but as a product of the millennia-old 'paternal' tradition stemming from Homer. Oscar Wilde's own scrawled copy of the *Iliad* in the Library of Trinity College Dublin is testament to that.[58]

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid: 18.
[48] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 34.
[49] Ibid: 187.
[50] Nicolson, 2014: 28.
[51] Porter, 2021: 1.
[52] Porter, 2005: 29.
[53] Porter, 2021: 39.
[54] Ibid: 38.
[55] See Butler, 1922.
[56] The 'Homeric Question' refers to the debate over the authorship of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that has remained relevant since antiquity (see Parry, 1971; West, 2011).
[57] So too does my lesser focus on the non-professional classicist, who writes for a general audience, draw attention to Homer since "Homer was never just a highbrow conceit" (Porter, 2021: 13). Akin to Ireland's oral tradition, Homer's epic, oral poetry was disseminated to people of all classes and literacy levels.
[58] *Julia Rosenthal Oscar Wilde Collection*, TCD MS 11437/4/2/1.

Although Homer is central to the Western canon and, I believe, central to a general knowledge and understanding of the classical world, my three figures do not directly engage with Homer, or epic as a genre. As a result, I will not deal directly with Homeric epic or its various receptions in this thesis. W. B. Yeats contended that Greek literature and civilisation could be divided into "three clearly-marked periods"[59] of social and political development, "each of which had been defined by the rise of a dominant literary genre."[60] These periods were: "the period of narrative poetry, the epic or ballad period; next the dramatic period; and after that the period of lyric poetry."[61] He explained that the value of these works was "dependent not solely on the talent of the individual writer but rather on the way in which that writer's work met the contemporary moment in national history, each genre expressing aspects of a nation's evolution."[62] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Ireland "stood in its epic period."[63] Due to Ireland's cultural and spiritual oppression by England, it was believed that a national craft had not been allowed to develop and, therefore, there had been no respective epic period to rival that of the Greeks. There had been "no Irish Homer."[64] Strictly speaking, this is only true of literature produced in the English language during this period and completely ignores the rich tradition of epic composed in Irish. In true colonial fashion, only works in the colonial language are deemed to count. The role of Homer's epic poems as "cultural icons, as signifiers of value and as landmarks in the evolving relationship between literature and culture"[65] was not lost on the 'cultural fathers' of this period who were attempting to establish Ireland as culturally independent, and as existing firmly in the Western canon as 'Ireland' and not as 'Ireland occupied by Britain'. Throughout this thesis, we will continuously see this postcolonial and paradoxical compulsion to step "backward as well as forward."[66] Homeric epic being utilised in this way is crucial to the context of Hibernian Philhellenism, and although it does not directly relate to my central figures, it cannot be divorced from them.

During the Gaelic Literary Revival, which will be further detailed in the next Chapter, Yeats believed that "a new national epic composed in Anglo-Irish would emerge."[67] Yeats probably imagined that he would be the one to compose it. In his poem,

[59] Yeats, 1970: 269.
[60] Baker, 2022: 58.
[61] Yeats, 1970: 269.
[62] Baker, 2022: 58.
[63] Ibid: 66.
[64] Ibid: 60.
[65] Porter, 2021: 1.
[66] Ellmann, 1977: 567.
[67] Baker, 2022: 60.

No Second Troy, Yeats asks, "was there another Troy for her to burn?,"[68] and had himself tried to find this other 'Troy to burn' in his work, *The Wanderings of Oisin*,[69] a retelling of Irish folklore in imitation of epic-narrative style. The very fact that Oisin is 'wandering' relates Yeats' purpose back to Odysseus. However, we know that this new 'national epic' was not to be Yeats', but rather James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Joyce as an inheritor of Homer does not need to be proven but in our period of consideration it can act as a preliminary example of Irish writers reclaiming "the culture of the coloniser"[70] and the social and cultural currency attached to the classics. In *Ulysses*, Joyce "puts us into a world that is a peculiar mixture of the strange and the familiar,"[71] showing how, like with my central figures, it is possible to use the ancient canon to "invoke the collective past as well as [their] personal moment."[72] At a foundational level, Homer is a "cultural history, in abbreviated form"[73] and speaks to how "there is no literary work that does not evoke … some other literary work, and in that sense all works are hypertextual."[74]

Concepts such as intertextuality and hypertextuality speak directly to Marina Carr's emphasis on the influence of "dead writers, more specifically great dead writers."[75] In a 1998 lecture and essay entitled, *Dealing with the Dead*, the contemporary Irish dramatist known for her classical re-tellings acknowledges and discusses her indebtedness to the work of writers of the past as inspiration for her own. She states: "the whole world and all its civilisations have been shaped by this great panoply of the dead, whose voices we hear all around us."[76] One glance at the canon reveals the undeniable effect of influence alongside a reliance on the past. It is not just living, contemporary writers who are partial to this. Carr calls Shakespeare "Apollo's pet,"[77] reminding us that he "too paid homage."[78] Carr continues, remarking that "he took from everywhere, but what he did with his plunder!"[79] She explains the nuance behind this homage to the past, and does not count her

[68] Yeats, 2010: 140.
[69] Yeats, 1889.
[70] Denvir, 1997: 44.
[71] Wilson, 2018: 5.
[72] Ellmann, 1977: 567.
[73] Porter, 2021: 5.
[74] Genette, 1982: 9. Gérard Genette describes the hypertext as "any text derived from a previous text either through simply *transformation* … or through indirect transformation, which I shall label *imitation*" (Ibid: 7). These processes of transformation and imitation will remain relevant as we explore the active processes creating and shaping Hibernian Philhellenism.
[75] Carr, 1998: 190.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid: 195.
[78] Ibid: 196.
[79] Ibid.

heavy use of influence and allusion to past works as 'stealing' (despite her previous use of the word 'plunder') so long as the material is properly respected:

> And this points up something else about all these great dead writers. It seems that you are allowed to steal what you need while learning the craft and that there is no crime in that. The crime would be to diminish or desecrate what you have stolen.[80]

Carr's statements echo those made by J. P. Mahaffy, in his 1887 *Rambles and Studies in Greece*. He asserts that "it is a most original gift to know how to borrow; and that those only who feel wanting in originality are anxious to assert it."[81] Here, he suggests a difference between the Romans, "who borrowed without assimilating, [thus] always asserting their originality,"[82] and the Greeks "who borrowed more and better, because they made what they borrowed their own."[83]

Mahaffy and Carr's discussions reflect common attitudes that feature throughout this study. We will see that although Oscar Wilde liked to advertise that he lived in rejection of influence, works like *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*,[84] a fictional investigation into the mysterious male figure to whom Shakespeare's sonnets are dedicated, undermine this. Colm Tóibín's later trend of historicising in fiction certain great (male) artists who came before him (most notably Henry James and Thomas Mann) offers a further instance of this attitude in practice.[85] Carr's essay thus provides a useful overview of the history of 'cultural paternity',[86] and from the evidence extrapolated in this thesis we will see how, in Hibernian Philhellenism, my central figures are following the tradition of the Greeks who "were ever ready and anxious to borrow from others."[87]

[80] Ibid.
[81] Mahaffy, 1887: 58.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Wilde, 2018.
[85] Tóibín, 2004; Tóibín, 2022b.
[86] Despite Carr ushering in a new era of 'maternity' in classical reception, her examples of 'great dead writers' are all male. This is due to the demands of the historical context but is also in keeping with the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism.
[87] Mahaffy, 1887: 58.

Structure of the Dissertation

Following this Introduction, **Chapter 1** will offer "an interpretation of 'tradition' and the 'historical sense'"[88] by displaying the cultural conditions and singularities that result in my naming of the tradition as 'Hibernian Philhellenism'. It will problematise existing terminology surrounding classics, classical traditions and classical reception, concluding that this study will focus on a model 'in between' 'tradition' and 'reception'. After questioning the existence of so-called "classical properties,"[89] I will apply a label to the Greek tradition in Ireland: Hibernian Philhellenism. As has already been established, it is a Greek tradition, in particular, that is the focus of this study on Irish classicism. That is not because the Roman tradition is any less rich or important, but rather because it requires its own separate consideration. The Roman and the Greek are, at times, inseparably linked. Thus Roman materials can be considered as just one hypertextual part of Hibernian Philhellenism, as the Greek should be treated a similar Roman study.

Chapter 1's sections will jointly provide a breakdown of the conditions and the theories surrounding the formation of Hibernian Philhellenism, and will end with a detailed introduction to Mahaffy, Wilde, Tóibín, and the relationships between them. My three central figures exist in a larger context of which they are aware, and which they interacted with. As a result, they present a "case of infectious hosting and being hosted,"[90] "creating themselves as they go along."[91] In Hibernian Philhellenism, they are similarly creating their own *position* in the tradition, at once contributing to its formation and continuation. This is the lens through which every Chapter and section to follow will be considered. In Chapter 1, discussion of the political and cultural contexts and their effects on literature formation in a (proto-)postcolonial society will prepare us for the following two Chapters which will focus on Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín and how they "ventriloquise the ancient Greeks and Romans."[92] to deal with the respective knots and meshes of sectarian politics and (homo)sexuality against two broad pillars of ancient literature: Greek tragedy and Greek philosophy.

Chapter 2 will begin with an examination of filiation and how it was affected by the political and religious conditions that exist in the period of the late nineteenth century

[88] Frank, 1971: 151.
[89] Porter, 2005: 30.
[90] Dimock, 2013: 738.
[91] Ingold, 2015: 140.
[92] Beard, 2014: 12.

to the present. In real direct relationships (Mahaffy and Wilde) and in drama and fiction (Tóibín), "Irish engagement with classical models raises a unique set of (post)colonial tensions."[93] Establishing these conditions will show how and why Greek tragedy is so heavily relied upon in emerging creative and cultural movements, revealing how in Ireland "receptions of the ancient world, both classical and Celtic, became pivotal forces in the 'nationalist imaginary'."[94] Here, there will be an examination of Oedipal models in relation to the works and relationships of my case-studies, as well as an overarching look at how Ireland was in the process of removing the 'colonial father' in this period.

Ireland's 'post-coloniality'[95] means that "constructions of identity are particularly fraught; how the past is remembered, and how it is interpreted, is much contested."[96] Colm Tóibín states that "the urge to kill the father"[97] is among the tropes which "followers of the Irish tradition will recognise."[98] This literal literary manifestation of 'cultural paternal influence' demonstrates how my central figures "twist around one another."[99] In the case of this domain, the twisting results in 'knotting'. The added political tension of the period and its relationships contributes to the tensile strength of the knot, demonstrated particularly by Mahaffy and Wilde who show how "the inclination of particular lives to go their separate ways exerts a fiction that tightens the bonds of community."[100] By trying to 'kill the father' we are at the same time tightening the knot. This is seen in practice through Wilde's public and Oedipal rejections of Mahaffy's scholarly work. An examination of Colm Tóibín's *Pale Sister* and *House of Names* in dialogue with the Troubles in Northern Ireland follows and places Tóibín in this tradition of the "politicised rewriting of Greek tragedy."[101] The form that classical reception takes in his work "bears the traces of a prolonged engagement with and, more often than not, an anxious interrogation of the past."[102] The focus on the "battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites"[103] will continue in the

[93] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 22.
[94] Baker, 2022: 4.
[95] McClintock, 2013: 294.
[96] Frawley, 2008: 70.
[97] Tóibín, 2001: xxi.
[98] Ibid. The other 'tropes' he names are: "the murdering of women, the fascination with fire, the use of the dancehall as an arena for terror and death, [and] the dread of the familiar figure turned stranger back from exile" (Ibid).
[99] Ingold, 2024: 2.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Torrance, 2022: 207.
[102] Delaney, 2008: 9.
[103] Bloom, 1997: 11.

next Chapter and its examination of 'cultural paternal influence' in the domain of (homo)sexuality in Hibernian Philhellenism.

In **Chapter 3**, we will continue to monitor my central figures' 'movement of correspondence,'[104] exploring "if repression has been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age"[105] in an Irish context. Since Chapter 2 looks at "where history is often in progress, and where the past and the present are seen to collide,"[106] this Chapter will focus on how in the case of sexuality these collisions form a mesh that is connected through classical engagement. In this case, we will perceive Bloom's notion of "how one poet helps to form another"[107] most acutely at play.

Following the religious context that is established in Chapter 2, it will become clear how absence and the shadow-side to homosexuality led to breakdowns in relationships between my central figures. This perspective can also be gained through the subtle ways in which (homo)sexuality is dealt with in their works. These subtleties are often heavily reliant on classical allusion and reference. Furthermore, there is an evident Platonic trend towards a simultaneous desexualisation of male relationships and elevation of idealised male friendships. Due to the oppressive and repressive religious and political context that is constant from the Victorian period through to the end of the twentieth century, exploring classical receptions of (homo)sexuality will underline how literature is the "perfect expression of life"[108] even when this expression was considered taboo. This Chapter more than any other will present a "confrontation between two eras"[109] through the works and lives of Mahaffy, Wilde and Tóibín, shown respectively (and primarily) through *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander*, *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *De Profundis*, and *The Blackwater Lightship*.[110]

Collectively, these Chapters will have suggested some answers the question of "where, if at all, does the classical world fit into the mosaic of modern Irish identity."[111] The **Conclusion** will both look back on the discussion that been conducted in this dissertation, and look forward to where this discussion can go in the future. The conversation will briefly turn to gender, and return to issues of terminology and ideas of

[104] Ingold, 2015: 11.
[105] Foucault, 2020b: 5.
[106] Frawley, 2008: 79.
[107] Bloom, 1997: 5. 'Poet' is the original word used by Bloom but I mean it to be interchangeable here with 'writer'.
[108] Wilde, 2019: 46.
[109] Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010.
[110] Mahaffy, 1874; Wilde, 2018; Wilde, 2017; Tóibín, 1999.
[111] McGing, 2019: 143.

'belonging' and 'becoming' in order to underline how we can exist 'in between' the past, present and future, 'in between' models of 'tradition' and 'reception'. A series of questions posed by Harold Bloom underline the research methodology of this thesis: "What is literary tradition? What is a classic? What is a canonical view of tradition? How are canons of accepted classics formed, and how are they unformed?"[112] A tradition is an unstable, changeable, and often subjective entity. In our case, "with so many overlapping threads, it is impossible to say at what point one generation ends and another begins."[113] However, as we track the tradition we will come to realise that: "to receive antiquity is to continually begin something anew."[114] Through this very interrogation into this "process of correspondence,"[115] we can say that "the rope itself continues."[116]

This thesis ultimately argues that "tradition is not a matter of mere submission to the past."[117] Rather, it will show how 'it is always necessary to kill your father' in Hibernian Philhellenism – but only once 'the father' counts not as a cultural predecessor (historically, male, in Irish classicism), but rather as a preconceived idea of the tradition within which one exists, and one's own fictive position in relation to it. In other words, by 'killing', we are at the same time 'clinging', "hoping that the friction of our contact will somehow suffice to countervail the currents that would otherwise sweep us to oblivion."[118]

[112] Bloom, 1975: 31.
[113] Ingold, 2024: 9.
[114] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 61.
[115] Ingold, 2015: 154.
[116] Ingold, 2024: 9.
[117] Frank, 1971: 154.
[118] Ingold, 2015: 3.

CHAPTER 1

Greek in Essence, Classical at Heart:

Establishing Hibernian Philhellenism

"In Irish fiction we speak of tradition all the time, because of its strangeness."[1]

~ Colm Tóibín

[1] Baker, 2022: 68; Tóibín, 2001: xx.

1.1. Introduction: Unwinding the Rope

The study of classics in Ireland, and its importance, dates back to the beginning of the Middle Ages.[2] While the properties of 'classicism' are everywhere "ambiguous,"[3] classicism in Ireland is unique for a number of reasons. That Ireland was never conquered by Rome is significant to the island's history of classical interaction. This thesis deals with a Greek tradition, but how the Greek material was received and approached cannot be divorced from the significance of Roman (more specifically, Roman-British) contexts. For example, Laurie O'Higgins convincingly argues for the cultural significance of Irish uses of Latin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[4] This study and its focus on the Greek tradition does not want to distort the bigger picture of 'classicism' in Ireland. Instead, it simply argues that while there have always been affinities between Irish literature and both Greek and Latin literature, the story of the latter can be read elsewhere.[5] In this thesis, I am examining a selection of the strands of Irish classicism, focusing on Greek strands, but that is not to say that there are no other strands.

This Chapter will examine how classics has always lurked in the background of Irish public life – in education, literature, politics, and identity. This context is essential in order to understand the conditions under which 'cultural paternal influence' between my chosen figures takes place. The Chapter will explore how "indigenous and classical frames of reference are intimately interwoven"[6] in Irish classicism. Another major feature of

[2] This rich history of classical interaction in the medieval period is outside the chronological bounds of this study, but Ralph O'Connor describes how "Ireland has long been framed as a bastion, indeed a wellspring, of classical learning in the early and central Middle Ages" (O'Connor, 2014: 1). This is supported by W. B. Stanford who contends that "the classical tradition has influenced the ideals, actions and thoughts of the Irish continuously for more than fifteen centuries" (Stanford, 1976: 75). This history traced by Stanford and others show us that "the mosaic of Irish identity is made up of many different pieces, not just the Catholic and nationalist, and the classical world is one of them" (Stanford, 1976: 68).[2] Some of the first original texts of the classical tradition in Ireland include, *Togail Troí* ('The Destruction of Troy'), which dates back to the tenth century in its original form; *Merugud Uilix Maic Leirtis* ('The Wandering of Ulysses, son of Laertes'), which can be dated to the early thirteenth century; and *Imtheachta Aeniasa,* a Gaelic version of Virgil's *Aeneid* translated into Irish by 1150 [see '*Togail Troí'*, *The Book of Leinster*, TCD MS H 2.18; 'Togail Troí', 1966; '*Merugud Uilix Maic Leirtis'*, *The Book of Ballymote*, RIA MS 536/23 P 12; Meyer, 2006: xiii; '*Imtheachta Aeniasa'*, *The Book of Ballymote*, RIA MS 536/23 P 12; Calder, 1907; Virgil, 2005 (trans. Stanley Lombardo); Logan, 1964; O'Connor, 2014; Poppe, 2004: 74; and Poppe, 2014]. These texts not only demonstrate the awareness of classical texts in medieval Ireland, but also provide an invaluable example of the Irish storytelling tradition through its "complex fusion of oral and written sources" (Hillers, 1992: 63, see also Hillers, 2024). For comprehensive discussions on classics in medieval Ireland, see Clarke, Poppe and Torrance, 2024; and Ehrmantraut, 2025.

[3] Hall, 2022: 2.

[4] O'Higgins, 2017.

[5] O'Higgins, 2017: 174.

[6] O'Connor, 2024: 15.

Hibernian Philhellenism is the importance of non-professional classicists. To a general audience, Irish classicism presents as cultural before it does collegiate.

There have been studies before to establish roots of interaction between Ireland and the classical world. That is not my purpose and this Chapter, and those to follow, do not seek to cover old ground. There is still a long way to go in order to understand Ireland's classical tradition. W. B. Stanford released his seminal work, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition,* in 1976 but in another broad overview named 'Towards a History of Classical Influences in Ireland', he stated that "no comprehensive history of these influences has ever been written."[7] He did not suppose that his work would fill this gap and merely, but very successfully, sought "to stimulate further work in a neglected field."[8]

Stanford's work is essentially a catalogue of classicism in Ireland. It usefully provides a chronological and interdisciplinary overview of classics in Ireland but Stanford's perspective places him in many ways within a very specific time. Examples of his biases and those of 20th century Ireland will be found in the ensuing discussion. A consideration of the operation of literary influence is absent in Stanford's construction of the tradition, whereas my approach emphasises the idea that "it is the author who is central to the process."[9] The author's choices, whether conscious or unconscious, should be viewed as integral to this study's aforementioned "process of correspondence."[10]

Nevertheless, a point in which this thesis wholeheartedly agrees with Stanford's study is how the weight of the significance of Greek thought is generally overlooked in Ireland in favour of home-grown Celtic materials. Stanford's work provides the groundwork to explain why the classical, specifically Greek antiquity, was embraced in such profound ways. Roman literature and neo-classical architecture were of course adopted as well but not in the same, almost spiritual, way that the Greek legacy is treated. At a surface level, this probably has to do with the association of Rome with Empire, which was not very welcome in Ireland in the period of the late nineteenth century to the present. As discussed, *both* the Greek and the Roman traditions can be considered "culturally active presences"[11] in Ireland, particularly with their deep association with colonialism. However, the purpose of treating the Greek and Latin traditions as separate is to avoid what Lorna

[7] Stanford, 1970: 14.
[8] Ibid: 87.
[9] Doody, 2018: 13.
[10] Ingold, 2015: 154.
[11] Hardwick, 2003: 111.

Hardwick calls the "uncritical sense of relief."[12] Instead, these traditions need to be considered products of colonialism in their own right.

My study aims to contribute to the discourse of classicism in Ireland in a way that goes beyond cataloguing, and that sits 'in between' the concepts of 'tradition' and 'reception'. In order to do this, we must problematise the terminology of 'classics' and the 'classical tradition' in Ireland. Can we truly say that there is a 'classical tradition' in Ireland, as we understand it generally? As mentioned, I propose that we conceptualise 'Hibernian Philhellenism' as Tim Ingold does his 'rope', as "a whole that is made up from individual parts [which] is a totality in which everything is articulated or 'joined up'."[13] These 'individual parts' can take the form of figures (like Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín) or cultural conditions that all combine and intertwine to form one 'rope'. The analogy of the rope allows not just for a retrospective look at a tradition, but also for one that looks forward as "the rope is always weaving, always in process and – like social life itself – never finished."[14]

In tracing the process of the formation of the 'rope' of Hibernian Philhellenism in this Chapter, we will encounter a new way of reading 'belonging' within this tradition. In previous models of succession, "we are quick to treat each generation as its own layer, in command of the present, having supplanted its predecessor but destined to be supplanted in turn."[15] Whilst a sense of 'belonging' to a tradition might appear to be rooted in the present, it is as much about engaging in a relationship with the past, as 'belonging' suggests a 'longing'. A yearning for the past is thus transformed into a present state that hopefully looks forward to a future legacy that will feed a tradition or canon. The tradition now "reappears as a punctuated series of generational turning points, each claiming the present for itself,"[16] yet always firmly rooted in attitudes of the past and future. Hence, 'belonging' is an active process as opposed to a sentimental state of mind. This fits in with Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality and its emphasis on "the text as a dynamic site."[17]

Literary influence creates a certain 'Bloomian' anxiety, that is often mistakenly construed as an attempt to supplant a predecessor. If, however, we re-imagine it instead as a process of belonging, we can see that "life is not confined within generations but forged

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ingold, 2015: 11.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid: viii.
[16] Ingold, 2024: 20.
[17] Alfaro, 1996: 268.

in the collaboration of their overlap."[18] This 'overlap' is the weaving of strands that form a rope which will, in my thesis, replace the model of succession that Tim Ingold conceptualises as a 'stack':

> This kind of stratigraphic thinking is deeply seared into modern sensibilities and leads to an easy equation of generational layers with layers of sedimentation in the history of the earth, of deposits in the occupation of an archaeological site, of documents in an archive, even of consciousness in the human mind.[19]

Replacing the metaphor of the stack with the rope "casts these concerns in an entirely different light."[20] Rather than replacing or 'killing' their predecessors, authors make themselves part of the tradition, but also, make the tradition itself.

One could wonder if the metaphor of a 'chain' would be as useful here as the rope: we are much more familiar with the idiom 'a link in the chain' than a 'strand in the rope'. With the chain, we would be inviting similar problems that we find with the 'stack' or with a different linear analogy. While the components of a chain might have a more sophisticated relationship than a stack as each piece does not simply follow the other, but is interlinked in a fundamental way, the 'chain' does not hold memory. In essence, it is "an articulated structure, [and] since it remembers nothing, it has nothing to forget."[21] This is where the rope offers a more elegant metaphor, not just because of the entwining of its composing strands, but also because "if you untie a knotted rope, however much you try to straighten it, the rope will retain kinks and bends and will want, given the chance, to curl up into smaller confirmations as before."[22] One cannot undo the processes that went into forming the rope, they remain inherent parts of it, as "the memory is infused into the very material of the rope, in the torsions and flexions of its constituent fibres."[23] This memory, at the metaphorical level, is at once collective and cultural.[24]

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[18] Ingold, 2024: vii.
[19] Ibid: 4.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ingold, 2015: 26.
[22] Ibid: 25.
[23] Ibid.
[24] We can understand collective memory as being "funded by tribal or familial interactions" (Frawley, 2008: 71); and cultural memory as stretching "beyond the limited horizon of several generations and functions instead as a repository for the narratives, records and symbols on which a culture draws its shape and identity" (Ibid).

To belong to something logically denotes that a person or thing has been 'begotten', a state resulting from the active process of 'begetting'.[25] Here, I am of the firm belief that through authorial intention "texts come into being by means of other texts."[26] Julia Kristeva's argument that 'text creates text' is a crucial process in this idea of 'begetting' a tradition.[27] A text "does not function as a closed system"[28] and this thesis will to continue to shift the emphasis "from an individual text to the way in which texts relate to each other."[29] Since an author's reading of one text creates the next in a tradition, we can say that "every begetting thus introduces a new thread."[30] It is in this process that we can confidently move further away from the 'stack' where one generation is seen to replace the previous. Tim Ingold speaks of filiation as being "compounded of talks of begetting and being begotten"[31] and the metaphor of the rope allows us to see the development of the tradition as a "carry-on, not a crossover."[32] Therefore, as a result of the author's active role in both reading and writing, text creates text – or, rather, text *begets* text.

In the Introduction, there was a discussion as to how 'cultural paternal influence' will act as a critical theme throughout this study. That my central figures belong to the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism immediately denotes a form of filiation. Filiation has "long been recognised as a salient metaphor for poets' struggles against their literary predecessors."[33] As mentioned, this thesis is located in a period in time when the tradition was inflected by masculinity and male figures. This can be seen in the basest terms, for example, Freud's ubiquitous Oedipus Complex. Here, instead of the lasting image of filiation being conflict or competition, I draw attention to the Latin *filum*, which can mean both 'thread' and the 'build (of a person)'.[34] Thus, the conditions and people that form this tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism under the lens of 'cultural paternal influence' through the word *filum* are threads and "filiation, then, is an entwining of threads."[35] We must re-

[25] Ingold states that 'to come and to long (from which we get 'becoming' and 'belonging'), to age and to beget, to lean and to last, to care and to attend, to unearth and to undergo, and behind all these, to human … are [all] words of process" (Ingold, 2024: viii). It is from this list that I pull the idea of 'to beget' or the passive 'to have been begotten'. This idea also relates to Kapferer's simple clarification that "human beings exist immediately in the context of other human beings and are intentionally embroiled with them" (Kapferer, 1997: 194).
[26] Doody, 2018: 12.
[27] Kristeva, 1980.
[28] Alfaro, 1996: 268.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ingold, 2024: 6.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Greensmith, 2020: 226.
[34] de Vaan, 2008: 220; Ingold, 2024: 6.
[35] Ingold, 2024: 7.

frame our understanding of a successor 'taking from' or 'imitating' their predecessor, and instead apply the same language of the family model to say they are instead 'inheriting'.[36] Not only does Tim Ingold's rope-like structure help us to understand the dynamics of Hibernian Philhellenism, but so too does the critical theme of 'paternal influence' (or filiation), "fractured through the prisms of locale and memory."[37] Here, "memory and filiation work together to produce"[38] Hibernian Philhellenism.

[36] Ibid: 13.
[37] Foster, 2008: 21.
[38] Greensmith, 2020: 245.

1.2. Hibernian Philhellenism: Towards an 'Untraditional Tradition'

A classical tradition is ruled by the assumed 'classicism' of its members and contributors. Immediately, we are presented with a problem since the term 'classicism' itself "is not an ancient concept."[39] This section will examine the meaning of and complications associated with the terms 'classics' and 'classicism' and how they apply to an Irish context. Alongside that, we will continue to interrogate the rigidness of the 'classical tradition' approach,[40] working towards our conclusion that Irish classicism is currently in a period of flux between 'tradition' and 'reception'. This discussion will then culminate in the establishment of the conditions and terms of Hibernian Philhellenism, which in itself is a type of idiosyncratic classicism."[41] This section, and the continued use of the term 'Hibernian Philhellenism', is intended to demonstrate the weakness of the term 'classics', but more specifically how every 'classicism' takes on characteristics of its own time.

'Tradition' is likewise a "remarkably open and wide-ranging concept,"[42] and my approach to examining classicism in Ireland emphasises how one cannot discuss 'reception' without fully considering 'tradition'.[43] This project attempts to account for the "supercilious attitude"[44] adopted by my central figures who were highly educated in the classics and were working at the beginning of my time-frame; but also to acknowledge the "ways in which both ancient and newer works have become better known among less privileged groups, not only through education but also through social institutions and entertainment, with the modern receptions sometimes acting as an introduction to the ancient."[45] I consider these factors to be a defining distinction between 'tradition' and 'reception' studies, accounting for why I cannot fully commit to a reception model in my study. However, through my case-studies, I will attempt to bridge these two terms. Each of my central figures had an elite education in which the ancient texts acted as their 'introduction to the ancient'. It is for this reason that I have avoided the concept of the 'non-specialist' in favour of the 'non-professional classicist' since the 'non-specialist' should really only account for "people who had not had a formal classical education of any kind."[46]

[39] Ibid: 2.
[40] Torrance, 2024: 398.
[41] Hall, 2022: 1.
[42] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008: 13.
[43] Ibid: 23.
[44] Hall, 2008: 386.
[45] Hardwick and Harrison, 2013: xxi.
[46] Ibid: xix.

This cannot apply to my central figures, thus Wilde and Tóibín's status as 'non-professionals' is driven more by the intended style and audience of their works. I believe that an analysis of the kind seen in this thesis must speak to both 'tradition' and 'reception' since classics did, at one time, signify 'the gentleman'.[47] That may no longer be the case yet, in my chronological span, we cannot pretend that that attitude did not at one time exist, nor can we ignore its resonances which remain evident.

The theoretical framework required to underlie a 'classical tradition' versus 'classical reception studies' is "context-dependent."[48] Since much of my analysis is focused on the late nineteenth and twentieth century, the context demands more consideration of a tradition. However, that does not mean that a tradition should be viewed in the 'traditional' sense. Instead, its receptions can be viewed "dynamic processes that flow in two directions at once, both forward and backward"[49] along our rope. Instead of getting too caught up in the distinction between the terms of 'tradition' and 'reception' which can both be treated as vague umbrella terms, [50] it is more important to stress that in either case "the past is actively produced as much as it is actively received."[51] No matter whether you term it 'reception' or 'tradition', it is not a strictly linear progression. It is a kaleidoscopic maelstrom of contexts and tensions that supports certain active processes and reflects the cultural conditions of a particular vignette of the 'rope'. An acknowledgement of tradition therefore *enables* the study of reception. Budelmann and Haubold maintain that "there is no objective way of establishing whether something is a tradition,"[52] and I would add that there is no definite point where we can draw the line between a conservative tradition and a progressive reception. The most important thing about a study of classicism should instead be that its focus is on the "cultural processes that shape responses to classical material."[53] It is for these reasons that I put forward Colm Tóibín as a figure that represents the afterlives of the 'tradition' model whilst also encompassing the shift to 'reception'. In other words, Tóibín is 'in between' tradition and reception.

In order to examine the conditions of this 'untraditional tradition' and how it manifests itself as 'Hibernian Philhellenism', we must first turn back to W. B. Stanford's, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*. It would be impossible to discuss a tradition of

[47] O'Higgins, 2017: 7.
[48] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008: 24.
[49] Porter, 2008: 474.
[50] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008: 24.
[51] Porter, 2008: 474.
[52] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008: 24.
[53] Torrance, 2024: 398.

classicism in Ireland, without first acknowledging this seminal work. In it, Stanford produced what is really more *Quellenforschung*, which is often the case with reception studies. I previously mentioned that Stanford's work reflects the thoughts and approaches of the period in which he was writing. To illustrate this, I will give an example of his dealing with Wilde and Mahaffy as major players in the classical tradition in Ireland. I hope to show both a difference in approach since Stanford's work was published in 1976, and to provide a overview of longstanding attitudes in the tradition. My thesis diverges from Stanford's in its thematic nature. It does not treat literary influence as a "benign process"[54] as Harold Bloom has decried, but rather as a cultural milieu in which influence, canon, cultural conditions, and personalities collide to create their own unique god particle: Hibernian Philhellenism.

W. B. Stanford's *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*

Regardless of its shortcomings, Stanford's work has made a foundational contribution to the study of the classical tradition in Ireland and gives a comprehensive account of Ireland's engagement with classics through schools and universities, literature, art and architecture, and society and politics.[55] Each chapter is structured chronologically, so that every topic is explored from its earliest use in Ireland up until the 1970s. This structure is effective but I would argue that Stanford's work is thematically limited.

This work is an example of Stanford's interest not only in the Irish classical tradition, but in the history of Anglo-Irish relations.[56] Yet, his definition of 'Anglo-Irish' appears inconsistent across his works. He makes the point of having separate chapters entitled 'Literature in Irish' and 'Anglo-Irish Literature', but his main subjects in the latter are W.B. Yeats and James Joyce (with a fleeting, one sentence mention of Oscar Wilde). Stanford appears to consider 'Anglo-Irish' to mean either historically a member of the Protestant Ascendancy or sympathetic to English rule. However, this definition is not necessarily reflective of his subjects: W.B. Yeats, while of Protestant descent, was a known agnostic and one of the most fervent leaders of the Gaelic Revival; James Joyce was a Catholic; Oscar Wilde was also both a strong believer in Irish nationalism, and a convert to Catholicism. The effort to distinguish between 'Irish' and 'Anglo-Irish' literature

[54] Bloom, 2011: 4.
[55] For more on classical education in Irish schools, particularly hedge schools, see O'Higgins, 2017.
[56] See Stanford and McDowell, 1976; Stanford, 2001; Stanford and Finopoulos, 1984.

appears strange and pointed, and is in keeping with Mahaffy's boast that "the pure Irish have always been led by these splendid mongrels,"[57] the Anglo-Irish. Stanford's opinions are glaringly clear throughout the text. He seems disparaging of 'Irish' attempts to engage with classical materials and allusion and gives his idea of the 'Anglo-Irish tradition' much more credence: "one finds a use of classical symbols which is both distinctive and remarkable."[58] He employs this umbrella term of 'Anglo-Irish' without nuance and according to his immediate purpose. This lack of consistency renders the term void of any real meaning and shows colonial bias.

In another chapter, objectionably entitled 'Faith and Morals', Stanford's personal views and agenda are again palpable. In this chapter, Stanford offers a negative view of Oscar Wilde's sexuality and Stanford's own opinions come across clearly in his often loaded language: "the scarlet example for those who wished to shake their heads over the ill effects of a classical education was Oscar Wilde"[59]; or, "by this time Wilde had consciously abandoned the moral discipline that is inherent in the mainstream of the classical tradition."[60] Wilde's rich engagement with the classical tradition and his personal philhellenism is disregarded, and he is instead accused rather emphatically of corrupting and diminishing the discipline.

Stanford acknowledges Wilde's impressive scholarly potential stating, "in other circumstances he could have been an erudite classical don,"[61] but his legacy here amounts to nothing more than mere "disgrace."[62] An admirer of J.P. Mahaffy, Stanford explains how Wilde was "corrupted in his youth by classical influences,"[63] but ensures this was not due to Mahaffy's tutelage.[64] An account of "the very different life of another Irish student who studied classics under Mahaffy in Trinity College, John Sullivan, who is now a candidate for beatification in Rome,"[65] is given as evidence for this claim.

This chapter firmly situates Stanford's work in a less progressive time in classical scholarship in Ireland, alongside a willingness to pick-and-choose the 'comfortable' elements for discussion. Stanford vehemently defends Mahaffy against a critical review

[57] Mahaffy, 1911: xviii (in his 'Introduction' to Murray, 1911).
[58] Stanford, 1976: 90.
[59] Ibid: 235.
[60] Ibid: 238.
[61] Ibid: 236.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid: 235.
[64] See Stanford and McDowell, 1971.
[65] Stanford, 1976: 239.

written by Wilde of his 1877, *Greek Life and Thought: From the Age of Alexander to the Roman Conquest*, and denounces Wilde's opinion of Mahaffy's work:[66]

> An ancient Greek writer might have detected signs of fatal hubris in such pronouncements during this period of Wilde's great social and literary success. In 1895 Nemesis struck when the Marquis of Queensbury provoked Wilde into legal action.[67]

Here, Stanford seems to delight in Wilde's tragedy as a matter of divine retribution for daring to challenge Mahaffy. A later Chapter will deal explicitly with this public rejection of Mahaffy by Wilde, but this example of Stanford's work reveals his bias in the conclusion that Wilde's only contribution to the 'Irish Classical Tradition' was to damage it.

While there is much in Stanford's work that needs updating, there is also much that should be celebrated. It is fair to say that Stanford was "the most public interpreter of classical culture in its Hibernian context."[68] One of his study's primary research questions was: "what has the classical tradition done for the Irish, and what have the Irish done for the classical tradition?"[69] This question remains his legacy in the field of classical reception in Ireland and a core way of approaching this topic for this study. It can also be reflected in projects like that headed by Isabelle Torrance in Aarhus University and funded by the European Research Council, *Classical Influences and Irish Culture*.[70] This project, which began in 2019 and finished in 2025, is the biggest compendium of classical reception in Ireland since Stanford. Torrance and her team aimed to show "how classical models expose the shifting political structures of the nation through the politics of language, of conflict, of (post)colonialism, of gender, of identity."[71] One of the main outcomes of this project was a comprehensive database of classical allusion and reference in Irish literary texts with the data sorted according to the Project's nine central themes: Language, Land, Migration, Troy, Satire, Platonism, Female Voices, Material Culture, and Global Influences.[72] This database serves as a more improved, updated, and inclusive version of Stanford's first 'catalogue'-type study. This thesis' critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence' hopes to

[66] A full discussion of Wilde's position on Mahaffy's works can be found in the Chapter 2.
[67] Stanford 1976: 239.
[68] McGing, 2007: 108.
[69] Stanford, 1970: 15.
[70] Torrance, 2019-2025.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

complement and engage with these other themes that also contribute to Hibernian Philhellenism.

Formerly: The Irish 'Classical' Tradition

Before interrogating classicism in an Irish context, we must acknowledge the problems that arise from the word 'classical' itself and the fact that "one cannot begin to speak of the classical without becoming categorical."[73] The purpose of this section is not to re-hash previous discussions of this question, but to show the relevance of this debate in an Irish context.[74] 'Classical' is often used as a one-size-fits-all label for the ancient Greek and Roman, and often Mediterranean world, despite the fact that "not even all of antiquity is considered equally classical,"[75] nor does the designation account for "a group of figures so heterogenous in time and place and medium and style, [that] whatever they have in common may also prove to be a matter of accident rather than substance."[76] Classics is the name given to a discipline, but it is not easily defined. Its many uses can result in a confusion that "springs from the fact that the term is applied to literature and to the whole complex of interests and modes of behaviour and society of which literature is a part."[77] Therefore, any tradition claiming to be 'classical', especially a modern tradition, only adds more confusion to the term.

Classicism can be considered a 'sensibility' and that is a sentimental view definitely adopted in the case of Ireland, particularly in the period we are examining, from the late Victorian era to the present. The very "language of classicism is steeped in the language of feeling and affect."[78] It is treated as "a quality that nowhere gets defined but is rather everywhere assumed, or felt."[79] If you asked a classicist what the properties of 'classics' are, they would respond with very different answers. Any classical tradition thus "seeks to label something that as yet has no name."[80] Despite its frequent idealisation and

[73] Levin, 1957: 38.
[74] The term 'classics' has been widely interrogated but such a discussion is relevant here in the re-naming of a tradition from the late nineteenth century to the present as the word 'classics' "was not current before the nineteenth century" (Levin, 1957: 41). This is corroborated by many other scholarly sources, but examples include: Hall, 2022: 2; and Ziolkowski, 2015: 3.
[75] Porter, 2005: 29.
[76] Levin, 1957: 39.
[77] Eliot, November 1923.
[78] Porter, 2006: 308.
[79] Porter, 2005: 38.
[80] Ibid: 37.

romanticisation, 'classics' can be "constituted as a dialogue between the study of a body of ancient material, on the one hand, and the intellectual and sociocultural frameworks(s) of our own era, on the other hand."[81] When thinking about a classical tradition in Ireland, it is important to recognise that "classics is a cultural form not (merely) a scholarly field."[82] This is certainly true in this thesis, but a classical tradition must also be recognised as a complex system and because of that, in Ireland, it can be considered a "structure of feeling."[83]

How the tradition presents as a 'structure of feeling' is most aptly summed up by Baker's quote, "Greek at heart, classical in essence,"[84] which highlights the spiritual and emotive place that the classical finds in Irish identity. By its use of the words 'Greek' and 'classical', this quote from Baker also accounts for the presence of an equally important Latin tradition, while still acknowledging that they are separate designations. Synge spoke of a "certain Greek kinship"[85], but we can also understand classics as a "socially conditioned … consciousness, experience, or feeling,"[86] that provides us with a way to vocalise the "collective experience"[87] and "unspoken knowledge"[88] within a cultural tradition that also encompasses a more clearly defined scholarly one.

The term 'classics' is a term laden with cultural capital which has historically contributed to elitism in society and that can be considered as a "'dead white European male' sort of subject that has far too often acted as a convenient alibi for a whole range of cultural and political sins."[89] 'Classics' is an invention of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, as a concept, was "deeply enmeshed in shoring up the status-quo in the class-based societies of Britain and Ireland."[90] Similarly in Ireland, a classical education generally connoted an Anglo-Irish heritage and the Protestant faith.[91] That being said, a

[81] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 4.
[82] Ibid: 9.
[83] Porter, 2005: 40. Here, I understand 'structures of feeling' to be the "lived experiences shaping and shaped by cultural practices" (Worman, 2018).
[84] Baker, 2022: 68. See the title of this Chapter.
[85] Synge, 1966: 365.
[86] Porter, 2005: 40.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Beard, 2014: 5.
[90] Arkins, 2005: 14.
[91] This historical and social association of Protestantism with the discipline of Classics is strengthened by the fact that many of the leaders of the Gaelic Revival who worked to reclaim the Celtic past often through classical means were Protestant (see Deane, 1986: 28). Thus, this was a paradoxical time where Protestantism was associated with the gate-keeping of culture on the one hand; and on the other, it was directly involved with the nationalistic celebration of Celtic and Gaelic literature and civilisation. In either scenario, each "badly needed the other, for the purpose of defining itself" (Kiberd, 1995: 2).

distinction needs to be made between the class-based classics and the 'classics' being put to daily use, which in Ireland constituted Latin as the "language of Catholic liturgy."[92] Thus, in a paradoxical way, Latin could be a marker of the Catholic faith at the same time that a reliance on ancient Greek material could signal anti-colonial or republican inclinations. The elitist form of classics is exhibited by Mahaffy who was "a powerful advocate for the value of Greek education, but only to the right sort of person."[93] Historically, the 'right sort of person' to Mahaffy, and by extension the discipline and institution he represented, was a white Protestant, Anglo-Irish male.[94]

Edith Hall similarly speaks to the association between classics and class in her 2022 work, *Tony Harrison: Poet of Radical Classicism*.[95] Here, Hall describes how Harrison "resents the historical connection between the classical curriculum and the Anglican hierarchy, 'the vicar teaching classics' representing sexual and colonial repression."[96] Harrison's opinion here directly extends to J. P. Mahaffy, a Protestant Reverend teaching classics. Alastair Blanshard, too, describes how "it was with a Protestant eye that [Mahaffy] read Greek culture."[97] Chapter 3, Mahaffy's 1874 *Social Life in Greece* will provide a direct example of the sexual repression that results from the 'Reverend teaching classics'.

It was the belief that "the responsibility of the classicist is not just to the past but also to a more abstract notion of tradition,"[98] including a tradition that was exclusive and elitist. Due to this lingering belief, there is often a problem in the progression of classics as a discipline to meet the standards and attitudes of the contemporary world. It is in the dismantling of the tradition that this thesis hopes to examine classicism in Ireland without preconceptions and assumptions, while still acknowledging that they did at one time exist. Not all of the members of this tradition exist formally, or stereotypically, within the bounds of a 'classical tradition'. Therefore, who is to decide who is a proper classicist and who is not? What separates the classical scholar and the creative writer who uses classical

[92] O'Higgins, 2017: 10.
[93] Blanshard, 2018: 32.
[94] See Vance, 2004.
[95] It is important to note that Tony Harrisson was, of course, English and so here Edith Hall is speaking of him in that context. However, this is a context that, of course, bleeds into the Irish context as a result of England's occupation of Ireland. An interesting sidenote to this discussion, triggered by Hall's use of the word 'radical', is how Paul Allen Miller describes Foucault as "one of the most radical voices in twentieth-century philosophy" (Miller, 2021: 1), and while that could apply to him in a variety of ways, I am struck by the use of the word 'radical' to describe people who subvert general uses and interpretations of the classics.
[96] Hall, 2022: 4.
[97] Blanshard, 2018: 28. In fact, this could be equally true of Stanford.
[98] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 34.

allusion? Without both the tradition would not exist, but without which one can it remain officially designated a 'classical tradition'?[99]

The word 'classics' can mean many things to many different people so we must employ the idea of 'ambivalence' according to Julia Kristeva's understanding of how a word can be given a new meaning while still retaining the meaning it already had. In this way, a term like classics can come to have multiple significations and "becomes ambivalent."[100] The word 'classics', but also the traditions it has inspired, is "the result of the joining of two sign systems."[101] That is to say, classics is both an understanding of the word as referring to the general study of the ancient world, and as a societal designation of wealth and class. This ambivalence is something that has begun to be unpacked, but it is really the power behind the 'label' that needs to be considered.[102] Would that power wane if classics was to go by a different name? This label has produced what is essentially a "carnivalesque structure,"[103] creating something that is at once "a signifier, but also a signified."[104] The problem of this ambivalence comes from the label itself which is:

> Inherited and ubiquitous [and] for the most part taken for granted rather than questioned – or else clung to for fear of losing a powerful cachet that, even in the beleaguered present, continues to translate into cultural prestige, authority, elitist satisfaction, and economic power.[105]

The ambivalence of this label, and the tradition itself, can be recapitulated by realising that "as a descriptive term for specific historical phenomena, classicism has become narrower and narrower, while as a theoretical tool it has been indefinitely expanded."[106] It is precisely a result of this "uncertainty, or rather indeterminacy of and within the notion of the classical which helps explain why the notion exudes definition."[107] At the same time, this allows us to continue to use classics and continue to be active

[99] Here, I recall Yeats' question of "how can we know the dancer from the dance?" [Yeats, 2010: 296 ('Among School Children')]. The question posed by Yeats highlights the ambivalence that is at the heart of the discipline of classics.
[100] Kristeva, 1980: 73.
[101] Ibid.
[102] I think particularly of the conversations found in *Postclassicisms* (2020).
[103] Kristeva, 1980: 78.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Porter, 2005: 28.
[106] Zerner, 1988: 36.
[107] Ibid: 38.

constructors of a classical tradition, as the figures at the heart of this study do in Hibernian Philhellenism.

Questions of canon are imperative here as it is canon that allows for the creation of a tradition, and it is canon by which members of a tradition try to abide. To return briefly to the connection that class and elitism have to classics, it used to be the case (and very often still is) that class "determines whether and how individuals gain access to the means of literary production."[108] This access is often restricted for those who "happen to be a woman or a person of colour or from another traditionally underrepresented group."[109] In Rachel Poser's 2020 feature in the *New York Times Magazine*, Princeton Professor and advocate for change in the discipline of classics, Dan-el Padilla explores how he can "take his education in Latin and Greek and make it into something liberatory."[110] One way this is being attempted is through the adoption of terms like 'postclassicism'.

Advocates like Padilla ask that we start to make the 'post' of 'postclassicism' actually do something more than just appear as a prefix. Terming anything as 'post-' can be problematic. The discipline of classics is still, after all, a "work-in-progress."[111] In her interrogation of the term 'post-colonialism', Anne McClintock explores how it can be "prematurely celebratory."[112] The 'post-' prefix alleges that the problems associated with this term belong solely to an era of the past. Instead, McClintock states that 'post-colonialism' should not be understood as everything that has happened since colonialism 'ended', but rather everything that has happened from the very beginning of colonialism.[113] It is imperative that 'postclassicism' is thought of in the same way. It must account for the harm of the past, while also moving towards a more constructive and liberatory future. 'Postclassicism' does not mean an end to classics as a discipline, but a rejuvenation of it. It means to "reclaim ancient texts as rich and unexpectedly generative resources,"[114] and "to discover unexpected ways of interpreting antiquity within the rich tradition of antiquity's reception."[115] In short, it means to continue to keep it relevant. The ambivalent nature of the terminology surrounding classics and its ensuing traditions lends itself to this "transitory stage"[116] of the discipline.

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[108] Guillory, 1993: ix.
[109] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 122.
[110] Poser, 2nd February 2021.
[111] Beard, 2014: ix.
[112] McClintock, 2013: 298.
[113] Ibid: 293.
[114] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Kristeva, 1980: 89.

Mahaffy and Wilde, as case-studies, fit the original 'classics' stereotype and its use as a signifier for ancestral wealth and elite education.[117] However, Colm Tóibín was raised Catholic and did not have formal classical education. Much of Tóibín's fiction and non-fiction is obliquely full of references to Catholicism and its inextricable link to the charged political history of Ireland. These matters are often approached and understood through classical allusion, as seen in his first collection of poetry, *Vinegar Hill*, published in 2022. In the poem, *Late*, Tóibín includes the line, "Anglo-Catholic in religion, classicist in literature."[118] Anglo-Catholic is a culturally-laden term in Ireland as it could describe to someone like Oscar Wilde who was of Anglo-Irish descent but who also converted to Catholicism (and who has long been recognised as "something of a cultural catholic"[119]). But it could also apply (with often negative connotations) to someone Catholic and Irish who undertook a 'Protestant endeavour' like studying classics at Trinity College Dublin.[120] Classics was taught at other Universities, but Trinity College Dublin was considered its leading force in Ireland.[121] Because it was a Protestant Institution, Catholics were banned from studying there until 1793. Nonetheless, religious restrictions were effectively only removed at the end of the twentieth century.[122] By order of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, students had to be granted special dispensation from the Bishop to attend the Trinity College due to its Anglican ethos up until 1970.[123]

The tensions between classics, religion and politics will be explored more deeply in the next Chapter, so too will the Irish phenomenon of "cultural Protestantism"[124] and cultural Catholicism. In Ireland, religion is marked as much by cultural practice as faith. This discussion serves to show how 'classicist' does not always mean something as simple as 'someone who studies the ancient world,' especially in nineteenth and twentieth century Ireland. Rather, the term 'classicist' has acted and can still act as a form of cultural capital

[117] This 'stereotype' has long been established, though is hard to pin down beyond shared collective opinion. See Greenwood, 2019: 579, and Hall, 2022: 10-11, for examples of how classics having been historically dominated by the elite is everywhere taken as fact.
[118] Tóibín, 2022c: 94.
[119] Kiberd, 2000: 330.
[120] In this period particularly, this attitude was fed by the "overwhelming, almost claustrophobic centrality of Dublin, particularly Trinity College Dublin" (Vance, 2004: 288). In Vance's 2004 work, he begins to pin down the traces of an Irish intellectual aristocracy, the members of which are described as being "Protestant like other families of this kind" (Ibid: 284-286).
[121] Vance clarifies how "with the foundation of Trinity College Dublin in 1592 the new and, usually, rather Protestant Anglo-Irish learning could be institutionalised" (Ibid: 283). The word 'usually' is key here as this is not a firm rule but speaks to the general case.
[122] 'History', *Trinity College Dublin*.
[123] O'Kelly, 25th June 1970. One of these students was Mary Robinson who would become the first female President of Ireland, and also the first female Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin.
[124] Kiberd, 1995: 42.

or as a socioeconomic signifier. Interestingly, to refer back to the second part of Tóibín's couplet, one can be 'classicist in literature', but again that does not mean that a classicist needs to be someone who has received a formal classical education. Therein lies one of the biggest issues with the idea of this tradition, but also the use of the word 'classics', in Ireland.

A New 'Middle' Term

We have now seen that "classicism is no one thing."[125] Classicism, by nature, thus appears to be "forever mediated by a middle term."[126] This Chapter began by begging the question: what is the 'Irish Classical Tradition'? We will now answer it by problematising the way in which it was asked, but also by proposing a new 'middle' term.

There is an instant tension apparent in the 'Irish Classical Tradition', stemming from the simple fact that the Roman Empire never colonised or annexed Ireland (Hibernia).[127] This basic fact, alongside the complication that "classicism cannot be traced to some originary moment"[128] has created a very intricate cultural mosaic. Historical sources have shown that Ireland was the only Celtic land to not fall under Roman rule. Therefore, Ireland's relationship to antiquity is immediately different to the majority of Europe and the Mediterranean. Due to this, the evidence would point towards the fact that Ireland came to Roman, and by proxy, Greek ways, later than many other places, and after the fall of the Roman Empire.[129]

I argue against the belief that the validity of a tradition depends on direct contact by recognising that "the classical is never directly apprehended: it always comes indirectly and second-hand, which is to say that it is the transference not merely of a perception, but an illusion, or fantasy, about the past."[130] There are a number of complicated relationships present between Ireland and antiquity. These begin with the observation that while Rome may have captured Greece, it was Greek culture that captured Rome. That means that

[125] Porter, 2005: 54.
[126] Ibid.
[127] From ancient sources, we know that Rome did have Ireland, or Hibernia, in its sights a number of times. Agricola had planned an invasion during AD 81-17 (see Tacitus, 2010; McLaughlin, 2012: 17). Previous to that, Julius Caesar, in what is thought to be the earliest reference to Ireland, wrote about the island in an account of his campaigns in Gaul, which would have first been seen c. 50 BCE (*see*, Caesar, 2008: 5.13; Adams, 1996: 21). Tacitus remains the best source for Roman thought on Ireland (*Agricola*, 24).
[128] Porter, 2005: 37.
[129] Haverfield, 1913: 1.
[130] Porter, 2005: 54.

everywhere else that was colonised by Rome was receiving Greece through the Roman Empire. Since, Ireland was never annexed by Rome, they came to Hellenism by choice and have been consistently philhellenic.[131] This independent 'Greek kinship' was probably a direct response to Ireland's relationship to a Britain with a past of Roman occupation. Ultimately, the real influence of the Roman Empire on Ireland was Christianity, St. Patrick being a Romanised slave-turned-missionary, but it is important to clarify though that Ireland's relationship to a Catholic Rome is very distinct to a 'classical' Rome. Thus, there are multiple concurrent narratives resulting from interactions between English-Irish culture that are prefaced by past interference from a Hellenised Rome.

Next, does the classical tradition in Ireland only pertain to literature, or is its influence felt across society? Well the tradition began as literary, and literature certainly stayed as its root across all levels of interaction. However, it is apparent that its ideology also pervaded civic matters, such as politics. For example, during the Gaelic Revival, despite the original intentions of reviving and celebrating a distinctly Gaelic and Celtic past, we actually see new classically-inspired works of literature, drama and poetry being produced by leaders of the movement like W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge.[132] Classics was used as a "proto-postcolonial" [133] tool in the construction of an Irish identity that could be considered as distinct from that of the British Empire. Later in this Chapter, the literary nature of this tradition will be underlined by a brief discussion of Ireland's contribution to a 'minor literature', the creation of which speaks to James Joyce's observation that, although being a country rich in literary history and tradition, Ireland has no sense of cultural purity and was instead a "vast fabric, in which the most diverse elements are mingled."[134] One of these elements is the classical.

Lastly, can the 'Irish Classical Tradition' be restricted only to the study of classics in the academic sense?[135] I argue emphatically, no. In Ireland, "a classical background is

[131] Stanford, 1970: 87.
[132] The Gaelic Revival was a wider movement in the late nineteenth century that promoted a renewal of interest in Irish Celtic culture and the Irish language, headed by the Gaelic League (see 'Gaelic League', 1900; Ó Lúing, 1973). At the same time, W. B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory were leading the Irish Literary Revival, which aligned with the Gaelic League in that it promoted new, Celtic works of theatre, art and literature. This latter movement differed in its lack of focus on the Irish language, which was generally only spoken in *Gaeltacht* areas, and not in urban centres like Dublin where Yeats and Gregory were founding a National Theatre (see Menon, 1965; Allt, 1952; Hunt, 1979).
[133] Baker, 2022: xv.
[134] Joyce, 1989: 165. Joyce's use of 'fabric' as a metaphor also speaks to our entwining threads and strands. This sentiment also speaks to Homi Bhaba's concepts of cultural hybridity (see Bhaba, 1994).
[135] For a discussion on the values of the 'non-professional classicist, see Goldhurst, 1955.

not a necessary condition of the continued influence of the classics."[136] Only very few of those individuals that loom large as the 'Irish Classicists' have actual formal training in the languages, literatures, and cultures of Greco-Roman antiquity. Cultural figures, particularly those outside of canonical traditions are no longer "deterred by the canonical and establishment status of Latin and Greek."[137] W. B. Yeats, who heavily utilised classical influence and allusion in his works, would be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923.[138] Yeats did not have formal classical training and he would remark in his *Autobiographies* that he regretted having to work through translation and his neglect of the "builders of [his] soul"[139] whilst a young man attending the High School in Dublin.[140] Despite this, Yeats and figures like Colm Tóibín contribute to the tradition by the "continual reprocessing of the ancient through the modern."[141]

By comparison, in the United Kingdom, Mary Beard and Michael Scott appear as publicly recognised classicists, and both have specialised training and academic careers. The same can be said for someone like Daniel Mendelsohn and Anne Carson in North America. In Ireland, those generally considered part of a popular 'classical tradition' are figures like Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Seamus Heaney, W.B. Yeats and Marina Carr, to name but a few (none of whom, bar Oscar Wilde, have third-level specialised *classical* training).[142] This elucidates the phenomenon unique to Ireland that sees classics as a cultural tradition rather than a strictly intellectual one.

Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín all received an elite third-level education that exposed them to classical literature and culture.[143] Although Wilde and Tóibín, in particular, write in a non-specialist, non-academic style and, for the most part, for a non-specialist, non-academic audience, they cannot strictly be cast as 'non-specialists' as this term is generally defined in classical reception studies because of their education. This is not then a study of the 'non-specialist' in classical reception, but rather a "study of interest"[144] in a classical tradition, once again placing the author at the fore. The more informal 'interest', fuelled by cultural paternal influence, "provoke[s] both sharp thematic engagements with classical

[136] McGing, 2019: 147.
[137] Harrison, 2009: 3.
[138] 'All Nobel Prize Winners 1901-2022', *Nobel Prize*.
[139] Yeats, 1989: 124.
[140] Ibid: 122-124.
[141] Harrison, 2009: 15.
[142] Stanford states that Wilde was "perhaps the best educated in classics of all the major figures of the Anglo-Irish literary tradition" (Stanford, 1976: 236).
[143] Colm Tóibín holds a B. A. in History and English from University College Dublin (see McCourt, 2005).
[144] Kraemer Jr., 1927: 485.

subjects and a broader transformation of style"[145] in their works. In the twentieth century, the growing primacy of this type of engagement has led to the introduction of the concept of the 'non-specialist', which has much to do with the "democratisation of classical literature."[146] In the Conclusion, we will examine further the transition from 'tradition' to 'reception' with Tóibín acting as the link between where the tradition was, to where the reception is now; in other words (and in terms of classical reception theory), between the 'non-professional classicist' and the 'non-specialist'. These figures can be termed, again in Joyce's words, as a "shy guest at the feast of the world's culture."[147] Interestingly, Colm Tóibín's first collection of essays is titled *A Guest at the Feast*.[148] Something that can be debated when examining this phenomenon in Hibernian Philhellenism is how 'shy' these contributors really are … I would argue, not very.

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Therefore, the 'Irish Classical Tradition' in Ireland needs to be mapped within these three broad categories:

1. As having resulted without primary direct contact with an ancient power, yet remaining pervasive in society and civic life;
2. As being consistently philhellenic;[149]
3. And as characterised by literary works driven by an author's 'interest' and influences.

This will account for the reason why, in my research, I have elected to use a new term to denote this very 'untraditional tradition': 'Hibernian Philhellenism'. It will be clear in each following Chapter and section, and when looking at my central figures, that these three conditions remain at the forefront. To break down the individual parts of the term: 'Hibernian' speaks to the Irish context and links the Roman name of 'Hibernia', while also accounting for the inseparable association between the Greek and the Roman; the 'Hellenism' speaks to this general trend towards the Greek (to be illustrated in what

[145] Baker, 2022: 8.
[146] Harrison, 2009: 3. See Goldhill, 2002.
[147] Joyce, 2000a: 372.
[148] Tóibín, 2022a.
[149] This was initially apparent from the introduction to the colonial tensions associated with classics in Ireland, and will be further expounded upon in the next section.

follows) in Irish classical scholarship, Irish classical allusion and adaptation by my central figures and others; and the 'philhellenism' works to incorporate not just a scholarly tradition but also the predominance of those who have adopted classicism because of a "certain Greek kinship."[150]

Conclusion

In his novel, *The Magician*, Colm Tóibín fictionalises another literary figure: Thomas Mann.[151] In this case, Tóibín is actually putting into practice a philosophy that Mann knew and lived by, that "one cannot write a novel without remembering another novel."[152] Mann, in his essay, *Freud and the Future*, presented his own take on 'cultural paternal influence' and filiation:

> Infantilism – in other words, regression to childhood – what a role this genuinely psychoanalytic element plays in all our lives! What a large share it has in shaping the life of a human being; operating, indeed, in just the way I have described: as mythical identification, as survival, as a treading in footprints already made! The bond with the father, the imitation of the father, the game of being the father, and the transference to father-substitute pictures of a higher and more developed type – how these infantile traits work upon the life of the individual to make and shape it! I use the word 'shape', for to me in all seriousness the happiest, most pleasurable element of what we call education (*Bildung*), the shaping of the human being, is just this powerful influence of admiration and love, this childish identification with a father-image elected out of profound affinity. The artist in particular, a passionately childlike and play-possessed being, can tell us of the mysterious yet after all obvious effect of such infantile imitation upon his own life, his productive conduct of a career which after all is often nothing but a reanimation of the hero under very different temporal and personal conditions and with very different, shall we say childish means.[153]

Mann's statement here reaffirms how this process of influence is not benign but active, particularly in how one is 'shaped'. This includes how one chooses in whose likeness to be shaped, and eventually how one puts themselves forward to be used as a later model to

[150] Synge, 1966: 365.
[151] Tóibín, 2022b.
[152] Bloom, 1997: 55.
[153] Mann, 1959: 377.

shape someone else. It is what Mann called the 'profound affinity', and what Synge called a "certain Greek kinship,"[154] that allows for this type of filiation to take place in Hibernian philhellenism. To this 'childlike' or 'infantile' intrinsic need to imitate a 'father-figure' we can add an understanding of the specific process of "creative revisionism"[155] that helps to form our 'rope', which is Bloom's concept of the clinamen or 'swerve'.[156]

Mann's description, alongside Tóibín's relation to Mann and other figures that shadow his artistic life, proves that it is because of this swerve that we do not consider this type of 'cultural paternal influence' to be "sonship."[157] For, it is the successor who "creates their precursors."[158] Mann describes this process as a 'psychoanalytic element', and while it is not within the bounds of this thesis (nor would it be particularly useful) to offer a psychoanalysis of this tradition and the figures within it, something that exists at the core of influence and ensuing tradition formation is the fact that "the poet is condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of *other selves*."[159] These 'other selves' are as important to an understanding of Hibernian Philhellenism as my central three figures are.

Colm Tóibín's 2004 novel, *The Master*, opens with the lines, "at night, he dreamed about the dead."[160] If we look at this outside the context of the novel, this really speaks to a trend in literature in Ireland that has long been recognised by scholars – that of an obsession with the past. As I see it, not only do proceeding authors lurk in the background as 'cultural fathers', but so too do the classics and Greece, as one of Ireland's cultural forefathers.

The next section will emphasise a paradoxical element of most postcolonial literature that can appear at once "extremely old and extremely young, of ancient lineage and in a sense yet unborn."[161] The discovery, invention, idealisation, and imagination of an ancient, historical, and spiritual connection between Ireland and Greece that will be explored is part of this aforementioned 'proto-postcolonial' response. In this proto-

[154] Synge, 1966: 365.
[155] Bloom, 1997: 42.
[156] Bloom categorises the 'swerve' as a "movement away from [the precursor], a primary revision that imputes error to the father" (Bloom, 1975: 13). However, in the case of our 'rope', I conceptualise this swerve as rather a 'wrapping' motion. The swerve is an initial movement away that is inevitably going to wrap back around and create an 'entwining'. See also Greenblatt, 2012.
[157] Bloom 1997: 26.
[158] Ibid: 19.
[159] Ibid: 26. Italics original.
[160] Tóibín, 2004: 1.
[161] Kiberd, 1995: 292.

postcolonial and postcolonial context which looks to recreate and rewrite a past that disregards British interference, one of the roles of classical reception was "to preserve in the vaults of collective memory not only the great splendour of the vanquished past but also the idea of its utter destruction."[162] The next section's study of how this kinship leads to "an idealization and blurring of the past"[163] will be further evident in the detailed exploration of my three central figures and their works in the following two Chapters.

[162] Ibid: 32. Kiberd clarifies that 'postcolonial' writing begins not "when the occupier withdraws: rather it is initiated at that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance" (Ibid: 6).
[163] Porter, 2021: 38.

1.3. *The Most Assimilative and the Most Sensitive Nation in Europe*: 'A Certain Greek Kinship' in Ireland[164]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there was "a persistent strain in Irish culture and political rhetoric … in which Ireland and Greece were seen as somehow in alignment."[165] This will be a major feature of the next Chapter where each text in Hibernian Philhellenism continues to be "trapped in a network of relations, between the different parts that constitute it, between that text and those which precede it, or that that come after it."[166] In Ireland, this particular network of relations reflects what J. M. Synge called "a certain Greek kinship."[167] This statement is the focus of this section and in order to try and understand it, it is necessary to look at the different levels on which this kinship is visible in Ireland. We will consider why the Irish have felt this connection to the Greeks in the late nineteenth century to the present through an examination of coloniality and legendary ties. By examining both against our underlying family model of 'cultural paternal influence', we will also establish the context necessary to understand the Oedipal tensions in the next Chapter between Ireland and Britain, and between Wilde and Mahaffy. In both of these cases, the relevance is in where they collectively saw the value of the classics lying (cultural capital versus a proto-postcolonial tool), and who the classics were for (the elite versus a national identity).

In a broadcast with the BBC in 1931, Yeats claimed that "Greek literature came like old Irish literature out of the belief of the common people."[168] That is to say that literature is a force in society and a crucial component of a shared identity. Ethnicity, then, is "ultimately a matter of group self-recognition and self-identity."[169] This section will look at how the form the recognition of this identity took was literary, and was constructed according to that which was being emulated (the ancient Greeks) and that which was not (the British). We consider this as a phenomenon that observes the "linkages between history and fiction in Ireland, and the way that historical memory interpenetrates the development of fiction."[170] Here, legendary memory bleeds into historical memory as a proto-postcolonial condition prior to Irish Independence. In an attempt to rebuild a national

[164] Hyde, 1904; Synge, 1966: 365.
[165] McDonald, 1995: 184.
[166] Alfaro, 1996: 281.
[167] Synge, 1966: 365.
[168] Morash, 2020: 219; see also Gould, 1987.
[169] Renfrew, 1998: 275.
[170] Delaney, 2008: 21.

identity that removed prior colonial interference in culture, the focus shifted to links between the Irish present and the Greek past. In other words, the 'ethnic group' formed in this period is "an imagined community'."[171] In countries with a history of colonisation, an effort to take back control of a country's narrative through idealised and fictitious histories is extremely common.

This section relies on the preceding discussion of 'classical' terms to further understand the enduring power of the label of 'classics' in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Throughout this thesis, there is a constant focus on the three-way traffic between the perceived 'classical', the ancient, and the modern. My three central figures engage with what the classics mean(t) to their modern moment and in each case, classics is used to support and compliment their version of modernity. What results from this effort is a type of "hybrid culture"[172] in Ireland and within it, classics can be seen across the historical, political and legendary sphere.

The 'Grecian Gaels'[173]

In Thomas Davis' song, *A Nation Once Again*, he speaks of the fuel of nationalism: "when boyhood's fire was in my blood/ I read of ancient freemen,/ For Greece and Rome who bravely stood,/ Three hundred and three men."[174] Davis was not alone in his use of classical imagery to articular an idea of national identity. In fact, this identity stretches back into the realm of legend with the ancestral group called the *Fir Bolg*, who were considered to be offspring of Nemed a descendant of Noah, who sought refuge in Greece after being forced out of Ireland by a great flood."[175] Davis' nationalistic creed, inherited by Pádraig Pearse, resulted from a perceived "harmony of classic and Gaelic ideals."[176] The identification of the *Fir Bolg* as cultural ancestors had much to do with Ireland's Hellenising tendencies yet those tendencies remain underexplored.

In an interview with Jody Allen Randolph, Colm Tóibín states his belief that "Ireland is a construct and I think it might be worth deconstructing [,] like any nation, it is an imagined community rather than a community."[177] This observation directly reflects this

[171] Hall, 2002: 16.
[172] Canny, 1982: 114.
[173] Stanford, 1970: 40.
[174] Davis, c. 1840. Thomas Davis was an Irish writer and founder of the *Young Ireland* movement.
[175] Currie, 2020: 173.
[176] Stanford, 1970: 86. Pearse will be discussed in Chapter 2.
[177] Randolph, 2010: 176.

Chapter's purpose to deconstruct preconceived notions of the tradition and to reconceptualise how it has contributed to a shared national identity. The origin legends of the *Fir Bolg* are relevant to this discussion as they create a link between Ireland and Greece that disregards any or all interference from Britain or Rome. The *Fir Bolg* were enslaved in Greece and "forced to transport earth in leather bags to make fertile ground."[178] When they earned their freedom and returned to Ireland:

> They partitioned the country into five provinces and ruled as kings, before being defeated by the next wave of invaders and driven to the Aran Islands, where they built colossal forts to defend themselves and turned bare rock into fertile land, just as they had done in Greece.[179]

Thus, some of Ireland's earliest settlers and ancestors are figures associated with both Ireland and Greece. Like a charter myth, they also work to establish the basic framework of early Ireland – geographically and politically.

The *Fir Bolg* were not always spoken of in elevated terms. J.P. Mahaffy used 'firbolg [sic]' as "clubby shorthand for unsophisticated and uncouth."[180] It is significant that the *Fir Bolg* were considered to have eventually lived on the Aran Islands, a place of huge inspiration for the leaders of the Gaelic Revival.[181] The Aran Islands became like Ithaca to the Gaelic Revivalists who wanted to go 'home' to what they saw as the real and idealised Ireland. Through the Aran Islands, we see "the reconstitution of the setting as a landscape in the individual consciousness."[182] Seminal figures like J. M. Synge, who famously spent much time there, contributed to the "persistent classicizing tendency of Aran writing."[183] Synge believed the ancient forts like Dún Aonghasa, and the seemingly 'cyclopean' ruins of the Aran Islands, to be work of the *Fir Bolg*. The 'certain Greek kinship' he felt in this remote and romanticised part of the West coast is reflected in the memoir of his time there, Synge describes himself going to the cliffs to "prop [his] book

[178] Currie, 2020: 173. The name *Fir Bolg* literally means 'Men of the Bags', which relates back to their role in Greece of fertilising the land. Thomas O'Rahilly, in 1946, unsatisfied with this, "traced 'bolg' back to an Indo-European word for 'thunderbolt', imagining the *Fir Bolg* as Zeus-like figures" (Ibid: 177).
[179] Currie, 2020: 173.
[180] Ibid: 177. Mahaffy still recognised the "Irish island of Arran" as once supporting a "race in grey antiquity" (Mahaffy, 1887: 15).
[181] This was particularly the case for figures like Yeats and Gregory who drew on the Celtic mythic past, which we now can understand as being closely linked with a Greek mythic past, alongside their romanticisation of the 'peasant' culture they found there (see Tóibín, 2002).
[182] Kiberd, 1995: 287.
[183] Currie, 2020: 175.

open with stones touched by the Fir-bolgs [sic]."[184] It was here that he found much inspiration for major works of the Gaelic Revival movement. Time and time again, "Ireland's heritage was to be mobilised for the sake of Ireland's present."[185]

Mahaffy, despite his dislike of the Gaelic movement (and its sentiment), also spoke of the Irish landscape in a romantic way and was struck by the natural connections between Ireland and Greece. In his 1887 book of travel-writing, *Rambles and Studies in Greece*, Mahaffy observes:

> I can never forget the strong and peculiar impression of that first sight of Greece; nor can I cease to wonder at the sea which rose in my mind, and which made me think of the bays and rocky coasts of the West and South-West of Ireland.[186]

Similarly, he writes: "nowhere have I seen a like purple colour, except in the wilds of Kerry and Connemara."[187] Even if they disagreed in their ultimate purpose, Mahaffy and his opponents were alike in their tendency to define Ireland against Greece. Pádraig Pearse offers an explicit example of this: "now I claim for Irish literature, at its best, these excellences: a clearer than Greek vision, a more generous than Greek humanity, a deeper than Greek spirituality."[188]

It is of no surprise then that "the course of Ireland's own struggle for freedom was influenced by classical Greek and Roman history."[189] Here, Stanford includes Rome in the reckoning. However, in an earlier statement, he correctly observes that "the leaders of the modern struggle for Irish independence drew their inspiration more from Hellas than from Italy."[190] It is a well-documented, if simplistic, attitude that Rome was too representative of empire and the 'colonial father' that Ireland was trying to be free of. However, modern Greek independence was a more contemporary model that the Irish leaders attempted to fuse with the ancient models they so favoured. Therefore, I agree with Stanford's claim that:

> The Irish did not forget that according to the legends of their origin they were 'the Grecian Gaels', and the imaginary bonds of kinship that had been forged in early

[184] Synge, 2008: 55.
[185] Deane, 1986: 70.
[186] Mahaffy, 1887: 4.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Pearse, 1998: 133.
[189] Stanford, 1970: 84.
[190] Ibid: 40.

> times between the greatest heroes of the eastern world and of the west remained unbroken when their neighbours in Britain, France and Spain were looking chiefly to Rome for their exemplars.[191]

The promotion of 'legendary Ireland' during the Gaelic Revival led to an idealised form of nationalism, a due response to colonialism that remained pervasive in Ireland after the construction of the Free State.[192] We will see the damage that the creation of this idea of 'Ireland as a Utopia' had in Chapter 3's exploration of homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual relationships. In the meantime, Colm Tóibín has summed up one of its consequences: "because Ireland is built on such dreams, there remains no fixed, formed place where one could stand and say: this is Ireland."[193]

Hibernian Philhellenism: A Carrier of Culture[194]

The colonial context is a major feature of the next Chapter, but here it is relevant to understand how this 'certain Greek kinship' emerged from the "unequal relationship, [in which] England saw itself as politically, socially and culturally superior to its neighbouring island."[195] In its engagement with colonial subjects, England thought itself to be the natural inheritor of the classical tradition.[196] The shadow cast by Britain and "the disjunction of power and imposition of foreign attitudes seriously affected Irish identity"[197] and "we were left instead with something broken and insecure, a post-colonial society which remained in spirit part of the one-time mother country, … and part of its own invention."[198] Yet, in spite of this, there has long been an understanding and reciprocity between the Irish and the Greeks. Yeats records something that Oscar Wilde said to him: "we Irish are too political to be poets; we are a nation of brilliant failures, but we are the greatest talkers since the Greeks."[199] The comparisons between the Greeks and the Irish does not just end with a believed cultural oratory skill, but with the nation's struggles. We can consider Ireland's

[191] Ibid.
[192] See Said, 2003.
[193] Tóibín, 1987: 8.
[194] Thiong'o, 2013: 177.
[195] Doody, 2018: 63.
[196] See Kumar, 2012.
[197] Doody, 2018: 64.
[198] Tóibín, 1987: 6. See Buckley, 2002.
[199] Yeats, 1922: 25.

role as the 'colonised',[200] its subsequent draw towards a romanticised link with the Greek past, and as "the home of an ancient idealism"[201] as a "colonial legacy of sentimentality and abject victimage."[202]

In the immediate period following Independence, Ireland occupied a unique space, as described by Isabelle Torrance and Donncha O'Rourke:

> Now a breakaway colony of empire that identified strongly with a Roman 'SPQR mentality', Ireland could read Latin literature and Roman culture as a cipher for imperialism and elitism, and it is perhaps no surprise that Irish authors of the past hundred years have tended to identify more commonly with classical Greece, which fended off would-be colonisers from Persia, than with ancient Rome.[203]

The parallels between Rome-and-Britain and Ireland-and-Greece are clearly apparent but it is striking that the metaphor of Persia remained absent during this period. The first professional Irish staging of Aeschylus' *Persians* only took place in March 2024,[204] in an Irish-language version of the play, *Na Peirsigh*, in the Peacock Theatre in Dublin.[205] In 2022, prior to this production, Torrance remarked on this gap in Irish classical engagement, highlighting how the "drama relates the extraordinary historical defeat, against the odds, of a well-equipped and powerful imperial force, the Persians, by a much smaller but fiercely independent-minded collective of ancient Greeks, with whom the Irish have often identified."[206] The 2024 production was performed in the Irish language and presented itself as a notable cultural and postcolonial response, particularly when considering how it treated the Persians as the victims. 'Language' here is a "carrier of culture,"[207] and the way in which it was utilised in this play refers back to earlier semantic discussion about the power of labels and terms, while also mirroring Ireland's histories of failed national struggles.

Irish political and cultural figures often have a love/hate relationship with the classical tradition, as will be elucidated in the next Chapter. One of the primary reasons for this is that the classical languages were often viewed as a carry-over from Empire when the

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[200] Later Chapters will examine how this role is often characterised as 'effeminate'.
[201] Yeats, Gregory and Martyn, 1897 (the 'Manifesto for Irish Literary Theatre' was originally published in 1897, reproduced in Hunt, 1979: 19).
[202] Roche, 1988: 249.
[203] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 3.
[204] Torrance, 2022: 203.
[205] Directed by Conor Hanratty and adapted into Irish by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (Hanratty and Ní Dhomhnaill, 6th March – 6th April 2024).
[206] Torrance, 2022: 204.
[207] Thiong'o, 2013: 177.

emerging focus was on the native Irish language. Moreover, the "unionist sympathies of the custodian of that tradition at Trinity College Dublin, together with a keen sense of Celtic cultural inferiority that had been fostered in large measure by classical scholarship itself, meant that the classical tradition did not appear, on the surface at least to be a natural ally of cultural nationalism."[208] Brian McGing, in his presidential address to the Classical Association of Ireland of 2019, observed that "walking across College Green into Trinity College would impress upon anyone that Dublin was a place where the Classical world had laid deep roots."[209] With its impressive neo-classical façade and history, Trinity represented a stronghold of Protestant, Anglo-Irish, and monarchist sympathies in the centre of Dublin. It was considered a "remote bastion of Hellenism … contemptuous of the nationalist cause [and] openly hostile to it and to any attempts to foster a national literature."[210] After centuries of Irish interaction with classical texts, the Classical Association of Ireland (CAI) was founded in 1905.[211] Following the founding of the CAI in 1905, prominent classicists at that time, including Trinity's J. P. Mahaffy and R. Y. Tyrrell, decided to remain members of the Classical Association of Great Britain and not partake in the activities of this new Irish organisation.[212] Classics in Ireland was torn between the Protestant, Anglo-Irish elite and the history of British occupation, and a new, emerging Irish identity.

Since "one of the tactics of colonialism was to deprive a people of their past precisely in order to deny them their future,"[213] it is of no surprise that the past was used as an important weapon in the movement against colonialism in Ireland. The 1916 Rising was unsuccessful, and Irish Independence would not come until the next decade, but the draw towards classical material spoke to the "'mixed' nature of the experience of Irish people, as both exponents and victims of British imperialism, which makes them so representative of the underlying process."[214] The Irish were able to combat colonialism, and create a new global identity through classical means so successfully, because they occupied a space that was at once inside and outside the action of colonialism. As a result of Ireland's colonisation, "by the nineteenth century a strong dual culture had evolved," which left Ireland "fraught with ambiguity and riddled by acute internal cultural tensions."[215] Noreen

[208] Macintosh, 1994: 3.
[209] McGing, 2019: 143.
[210] Macintosh, 1994: 4.
[211] Stanford, 1976: 68.
[212] Seaver, 2019: 129.
[213] Kiberd, 1995: 292.
[214] Ibid: 5. See Ohlmeyer, 2023 for more on the relationship between Ireland and empire.
[215] Doody, 2018: 65.

Doody describes Ireland as "ambivalent and confused,"[216] and this designation extends to the figures within it, their relationships, and how they contributed to the reception of the classical past in the Irish contemporary.[217]

The Hibernian Philhellenists were using Greek antiquity as a way to construct their own national and personal identity, but we can also class this use as a way of combatting colonial stereotypes of the 'educated and civilised coloniser', and the 'uneducated or uncivilised colonised'. Although the original intention behind the use of the classics was to distance themselves from Britain, they were also responding directly to how "for some of the English, the Irish represented barbarism."[218] The next Chapter is focused on the myth-making of this era but here, it is of immediate consequence that there was a concerted effort in the days after the Rising to ensure that the rebels are remembered as "men of literary tastes and training, who went into battle … with a revolver in one hand and a copy of Sophocles in the other."[219] The effort to invoke the classical not only "brought a certain gravitas"[220] to the Rising, but worked to give the Irish social, historical and intellectual legitimacy as a nation and group in their own right. This was done by using the very same legacy of the classics that had previously been utilised by the coloniser against them.

We must concur then that, however unintentionally, "the English helped to invent Ireland,"[221] even if it was as a model to rail against. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hyde and Pearse were strong believers in the 'Celt' as a national group. The use of the word 'Celt' "carried with it a proud, ancient, literary character and conferred this distinction on its members,"[222] while simultaneously placing the Irish in a Celtic canon that predates British colonisation. The use of the 'Celt' also attempted to refigure British identity. It was as if to say that since Britain had been colonised by Rome, and since they were both once Celtic societies, they were on the same level. We cannot divorce the role that the Greek and the classical played in the invention of Irish identity from colonial contexts. While the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism is formed from a variety of strands

[216] Ibid.
[217] The word 'ambivalent' is one of the primary theories in the re-defining of Hibernian Philhellenism, as previously shown by Kristeva. With regards to another relevant term, 'ambiguity', Paul Delaney states that, in fact, "ambiguity has become a keyword in Tóibín's lexicon over the years" (Delaney, 2008: 15).
[218] Foster, 1989: 91. See also de Nie, 2004; Ashley, 2001; and Ignatiev, 1995. The reliance on Greek materials to combat this speaks to E. R. Dodds' observations that the Greeks were immune to being considered 'primitive' (see Dodds, 1973).
[219] Kilmer, 7th May 1916: 3. McGing cites how Michael Collins "commented that the Rising played out like a Greek tragedy" (McGing, 2019: 145; there is no original reference provided).
[220] Moloney, 2020: 61.
[221] Kiberd, 1995: 1.
[222] Doody, 2018: 84.

that have entwined independently, including the 'Greek kinship' described by Synge, we cannot disregard that the British colonial context is coiled in as well.

Ireland is unique in how "unlike most other colonies, [it] was positioned so close to the occupying power" in a "prolonged if forced intimacy."[223] In Ireland, a 'minor literature' revolving around the classical tradition formed from this dynamic. In a colonial context, the Irish literary tradition is 'minor' in how it is resistant to the English literary tradition, but also in terms of its place in greater Western canonical and classical traditions. Ireland is not alone in how its indigenous language was essentially forced into hiding during colonial rule, but it is actually English that is the relevant language here. A 'minor literature' "doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language."[224] In Ireland, the major literature (the colonising force) is constantly being targeted by the minor literature (the developing tradition) through the use of the classics. The next Chapter will see this in action more clearly. My central figures in this thesis use the classics to highlight the 'individual concern' that "becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it."[225] In each case, the individual experience acts as a microcosm that reflects what is happening in the wider social context. The Irish tradition thus reflects another characteristic of a 'minor literature' in how every choice constitutes a charged and shared value in society.[226]

Conclusion

This section has continued to lay the groundwork for the discussions in the following Chapters. In this examination of Ireland's 'certain Greek kinship' and how it helped contribute to the country's burgeoning national identity, it is clear that, as Wilde said, "some selves were more valuable than others."[227] For Wilde, it was through his identity as a 'Celt' that he could claim kinship with the ancient Greeks "whose literature formed the poles of his imagination."[228] Wilde's Irishness was complicated because of his Anglo-Irish heritage. However, associating with the Celtic part of his Irishness conveniently spoke to a

[223] Kiberd, 1995: 6.
[224] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 16.
[225] Ibid, 17.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ross, 2014: 2.
[228] Ibid.

time before such designations and divisions existed in society.[229] Ireland's legendary Celtic past secured Ireland's place as an ancient civilisation that was distinct from England – while also recalling that England too had been colonised. Another integral tension was the spiritual and unique connection that Ireland felt to ancient Greece – one that came before Rome and without the connotations of empire that were so clearly represented by Britain.[230]

The next Chapter will continue this discussion of the challenging formation of a national identity in a colonial context. Colm Tóibín describes how Ireland remains "awash with 'national and intellectual mood', especially national mood."[231] An area in which we will see my central figures vary is in their definition and interpretation of 'nation', alongside previously discussed ideas of 'modernity' and questions of "who should have access to knowledge of the classical world."[232] This brief introduction into literary production in colonial and postcolonial contexts will support the explorations of my central figures in the following two Chapters, who emphasise how "national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature."[233] The works of my central figures, in conjunction with their respective and overlapping cultural contexts, will convey how the critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence' contributes a central strand to the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism.

[229] Markey clarifies how "that Wilde was Irish by birth is indisputable, but Irishness is an evolving concept, not an essential identity, and Wilde's particular brand of Irishness was the multidetermined product of his upbringing, education, experiences and of the sociopolitical and cultural circumstances of his time" (Markey, 2011: 196).
[230] Kumar remarks that "'Rome' meant empire in a way that 'Greece' did not and could not" (Kumar, 2012: 83). This is despite the fact that the Greeks themselves colonised widely and that the "Greek model was not anti-imperial in any simple sense; it opposed not empire as such but a particular conception of empire" (Ibid: 91).
[231] Tóibín, 2001: ix.
[232] Blanshard, 2018: 31. This is an idea of particular importance in Wilde and Mahaffy's Oedipal relationship.
[233] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 16.

1.4. Conclusion: Strands of a Rope

Following the discussions in this Chapter, we have been able to establish a number of things about the classical tradition in Ireland. Firstly, it is an old tradition and its influence has been measured against that of medieval Irish folklore and folktales, reflecting the complicated relationship that Ireland had, and has, with its own cultural past due to its history of cultural oppression. Secondly, the tangibility of the tradition is compromised as a result of Ireland not having a direct, historical relationship with classical antiquity. We have been able to track concrete elements that have contributed to the tradition of Irish classicism, but it is the less-concrete aspects that have emerged that fuel the continuation of Hibernian Philhellenism. We can call these 'shadier' parts the 'certain Greek kinship' that was described by Synge, and is still to be found in Ireland socially, spiritually, and artistically.[234] As exemplified by the *Fir Bolg*, we can surmise that the intertwining of history and mythology is crucial to Hibernian Philhellenism. This will be a key focus of the next Chapter.

We can conclude that Stanford's terminology, while once useful, now needs more nuance. But from this discussion we can, at least, begin to understand why under entries for the words 'Greek' and 'Grecian' in the Oxford English Dictionary, one will find the definition to be 'an Irishman' (1:6 and 4, respectively).[235] 'Grecian' was not a compliment in parts of Western Europe. It certainly was not when the Irish were called it in the nineteenth century when the predominant definition of Greek was "a cunning or a wily person: a cheat,"[236] nor when Shakespeare "was gibing at the 'cogging Greeks'."[237] In Ireland itself, the name "remained a compliment."[238]

This Chapter has been driven by certain processes – entwining, belonging, begetting, swerving. Here, we can add another: carrying-on. The model of the rope ensures the perpetuation of the tradition through this final process. The continued participation of its members' demands that "you may retrace old ways, but every trace is an original movement to be followed in turn."[239]. Without the past and the present simultaneously entwining as a result of my central figures' contributions, the classical tradition could not

[234] Synge, 1966: 365.
[235] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2026, s.vv. 'Greek' and 'Grecian'.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Stanford, 1970: 40.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ingold, 2024: 21.

exist. The 'rope', as a more complex form of the 'line', has constituent parts which are "open-ended … and in carrying on, they wrap around one another."[240] In their carrying-on, they can become knotted or enmeshed and it is in these knots and meshes that we will uncover the domains of the next two individual Chapters. In short, another process is its continuation.

The term 'Hibernian Philhellenism' is certainly not all-encompassing, but neither are the ones we have relied upon in the past. Nevertheless, the inevitable short-comings of Hibernian Philhellenism will be interrogated in the Conclusion of this dissertation. No matter how hard we try, "the word 'classical' tends to escape our control."[241] Similarly, considering how diverse the ancient world was, and how it is Greece alone that is the focus here, "the adjective 'classical' should not be automatically applied,"[242] nor is the "so-called classical tradition … a stable entity."[243] It can mean different things to different people at different moments in time. The question of 'why my central figures are finding the classics they are?' will persist throughout the rest of this thesis. The classical is a constantly moving object and since a tradition is not a fixed repository, ideas of 'belonging' articulated through the language of paternity remain particularly relevant.

In the following Chapters, tradition is constructed in dialogue with my central figures, and we will continue to read the formation of the tradition as established in this Chapter. One of the ideas presented here that will remain integral to the rest of the thesis was first outlined by T. S. Eliot in the *Egoist*. It speaks to the "relation [of] a feeling of profound kinship or rather of a peculiar personal intimacy, with another, probably a dead author."[244] We consider this kinship to, in turn, inform the legacy of the predecessor through "the contribution that their work makes to the formation of later writers; [and how] their ideas are changed to various shapes and forms at each encounter with the creative imaginations of subsequent writers."[245] The crux of what the following two Chapters will demonstrate in practice is the idea of "imitation through emulation."[246] To clarify, this emulation can be equally designated in terms of what someone represents and what they do not. It is this "counterpart of tension and friction, what the ancient Greeks called harmony

[240] Ingold, 2015: 11.
[241] Zerner, 1988: 35.
[242] Arkins, 2005: 9.
[243] Porter, 2021: 38.
[244] Eliot, 1919: 39.
[245] Doody, 2018: 13.
[246] Porter, 2006: 308.

(*harmonia*),"[247] that pulls the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism together. I will now briefly re-introduce my three central figures chronologically.

Strands of a Rope: Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín

This study is not a biographical one, rather, my 'case-studies' are specifically chosen figures who demonstrate the processes and effects of Hibernian Philhellenism. My central figures can be called, among other things: scholars, novelists, poets, critics. In this particular context, I call them, as Foucault did, "founders of discursivity."[248] It is not just the cultural figures and their texts that make up the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism as singular objects, but rather the discourse they create. In the following Chapters and sections, it will become clear that there are other pivotal cultural figures that must feature in this discussion but my central figures were chosen because they met certain criteria. A number of prescribed tensions/themes illustrated in *Fig. 1* are used to identify the varied experiences of each figure and how they, in turn, relate to each other.

Fig. 1 is not meant to be reductive, but rather to provide instant representation and clarity on the themes used to consider and illustrate Tim Ingold's theory of 'correspondence'.[249] The word 'in between' is used purposefully here. Ingold describes how "*there is a difference between between and in-between*."[250] 'Between', he describes "articulates a divided world that is already carved at the joints [,] it is a bridge, a thing, a connection, an attraction of opposites, a link in a chain, a double-headed arrow that points at once to this and that."[251] 'In between' is more suited to our active model because it is "by, contrast, a movement of generation and dissolution in a whorl of becoming where things are not yet given – such that they might then be joined up – but on the way to being given."[252] Deleuze and Guattari similarly write of a 'line of becoming' where the "becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two, it is the in-between."[253] In this tradition as exemplified by these figures, "knowledge grows from the … in-between."[254] Thus, "interaction is between; correspondence in-between,"[255] and, as shall be

[247] Ingold, 2024: 2.
[248] Foucault, 1998: 217.
[249] Ingold, 2015.
[250] Ibid: 147. Italics original.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 323. See also Grosz, 1999; Sartre, 2018.
[254] Ingold, 2015: 157.
[255] Ibid: 154.

seen in the next Chapter, so too is "kinship in-between."[256] As hinted, this thesis will also ultimately conclude that Hibernian Philhellenism currently sits somewhere 'in between' models of 'tradition' and 'reception'.

	Mahaffy	**Wilde[257]**	**Tóibín**
Religion	Protestant	In between	Catholic
Sexuality	Heterosexual	In between	Homosexual
Identity	Anglo-Irish	In between	Irish
Education	Professional	In between	Non-professional
Audience/Style	Academic	In between	General

Fig. 1. A table illustrating a set of prescribed tensions that exist within Hibernian Philhellenism and J. P. Mahaffy, Oscar Wilde, and Colm Tóibín's relation to them.

'Cultural paternal influence', here, is being applied in two senses: one that acts directly and one indirectly across the canon. This was done deliberately to show two dynamics integral to classicism: one that formed part of ancient life – the fundamental pedagogical relationship between an older man and a younger man. Mahaffy and Wilde stand in these roles here. An indirect example was then chosen in keeping with the discipline's entire foundation, and that of the branch of classical reception, as engaging with the past and reframing it in a contemporary context. 'Paternal influence' within the discipline and the discipline's own role as the 'cultural father' to Western literature/civilisation is a contextual case-study in itself.

To be clear, these figures are used to demonstrate the figure of the 'cultural father' in Irish classicism and also the importance of Greece as one of Ireland's 'cultural forefathers'. That is not to say that these are strict distinctions of stand-alone defining relationships. All three of these men had their own wide range of influence throughout their

[256] Ibid: 255.

[257] I wish to briefly clarify how I see Wilde appearing 'in between' these designated tensions and themes. He lived 'in between' the Protestant and Catholic religion, having experience of both. He was raised in the Protestant faith, yet converted to Catholicism before his death. In terms of his sexuality, Wilde had relationships with both women and men, and the terms 'bisexual' and 'homosexual' were not in use while he was alive, nor did he explicitly identify with one sexual preference. Wilde was raised in an Anglo-Irish household, yet engaged heavily with the Celtic parts of his heritage, and with modern Irish nationalism. In the case of Wilde, the domains of 'education' and 'audience/style' overlap. Wilde had formal, professional classical training and his academic prowess would have allowed him to become a 'classical don' had he so wished. However, the style of his writing, despite being authoritatively informed and highly intellectualised, was intended for a general audience. Thus, he exists 'in between' these classifications.

career. For example, Wilde speaks often of Walter Pater and Benjamin Jowett, two men who could arguably be broadly considered figures of greater influence. Nevertheless, Mahaffy was chosen because of the formative and pedagogical dynamic of their relationship, and because he provided the introduction to antiquity and Greece that would become so integral to Wilde's life and works. As we saw Doody explore earlier, Yeats shared a common cultural background and landscape with Wilde. However, she also clarified that "while Wilde has been a major influence for Yeats, there have been many other significant voices and figures that have affected the poet's creativity."[258] This serves as a reminder that the relationships and connections I establish are not meant to be seen as binaries, rather they are fluid examples of how the conditions and tensions of the tradition can map themselves onto active figures within it.

John Pentland Mahaffy (1839-1919)

This study relies on previously established biographical context for each figure. *Mahaffy: A Biography of an Anglo-Irishman* documents the life of John Pentland Mahaffy: Trinity fellow, eventual Provost, and renowned tutor to Oscar Wilde. In this rather favourable account, W. B. Stanford and R. B. McDowell claim to chart the rise of "that urbanely magnificent figure"[259] through the "hard-fought battles"[260] that characterised the ultimate "victory"[261] of his life. Whilst they do exhibit to us the capacity Mahaffy had for creating close bonds with his students, and the focus and dedication he directed towards teaching and tutoring in Trinity College Dublin, there is little analysis of the consequences of this tutelage. A rigorous discussion of the close but fraught relationship he had with Wilde is lacking. Pivotal events such as Mahaffy and Wilde's Grand Tour around Greece, or Mahaffy's denouncement of Wilde in later years, are dealt with perfunctorily.

Stanford and McDowell portray Mahaffy at once as being a mediocre scholar, and as having a seminal effect on Trinity College Dublin. Throughout his academic career, Mahaffy published over 30 books on classical, historical, and philosophical subjects. While many of these works were considered impactful in the field, some were harshly received. A common critique across all of his works is that Mahaffy's "own political views and

[258] Ingold, 2015: 10.
[259] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: xi.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid.

cultural prejudices were generally considered to have exerted too great an influence over his interpretation of the ancient world."[262] Nevertheless, his works are successful in clearly defining the era of Irish classicism in which Mahaffy was deeply entrenched. The definitive example of this is seen in his 1874 work, *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander*, and his engagement with the topic of Greek homoeroticism.[263] This was one of the first times that an Irish classicist had openly discussed this largely disregarded topic. Even though he chose to include it, Mahaffy "was careful to stigmatise this aspect of Greek social life"[264] as "strange"[265] and "revolting,"[266] a "perversion,"[267] highlighting his own views on the subject but also the anathema it represented in society. Stanford and McDowell deal with the controversy over his inclusion of this topic (which will be discussed in Chapter 3) somewhat hastily, despite the fact that it is a critical moment in the reception of Mahaffy's work.

The authors do not include a balanced portrayal of his personal and social life, and deal sparingly with his encounters with the Irish public. A chapter named 'A Sort of Irishman' is given to the discussion.[268] The only point in which Stanford and McDowell are openly critical of Mahaffy is when dealing with his public opposition for the revival of the Irish language, which resulted in him appearing more firmly as an "elitist when it came to education."[269] This close-mindedness and dogged Unionism is the one area in which Stanford and McDowell seem to portray the snobbery that Mahaffy was openly accused of throughout his life.[270] They quote examples of his public denouncements of the growing linguistic and literary movements: "I will always discourage the teaching of Gaelic wherever I can."[271] They also include stories such as Mahaffy's charged encounters with W.B. Yeats, one of the leaders of the Gaelic Revival.[272]

This biography cannot be divorced from the bias with which it was written. Stanford's shared experience of Trinity is palpable throughout, and the account is by no

[262] Mairs, 2010: 52.
[263] See Mahaffy, 1874.
[264] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 156.
[265] Mahaffy, 1874: 306.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid: 314.
[268] The title of the chapter hints at how Mahaffy's "attitude to Ireland and to things Irish was ambiguous" (Boyle, 2015: 433) yet completely underestimates the negative consequences his public attacks on the Gaelic Revival had on his own image and that of Trinity College (see Denvir, 1997).
[269] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 104; Boyle, 2015: 426.
[270] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 89.
[271] Here, Stanford and McDowell (Ibid: 105) quote George Russell ('Æ') quoting Mahaffy in Gregory (ed.), 1901.
[272] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 114.

means written in an objective voice. Stanford and McDowell are speaking as scholars in similar positions to Mahaffy, and so acknowledge his reputation for arrogance and snobbery rather coyly – passing off that he was at least a "dazzlingly successful snob."[273] Stanford is also writing about Mahaffy, ex-Provost of Trinity and stalwart of the Classics department, whilst holding the position of Regius Chair of Greek within the very same department.[274]

Though perhaps not the most distinguished scholar in his field (a sentiment directly inferred by Oscar Wilde, who referred to him as "not so good a scholar as Tyrrell"[275]), Mahaffy must be acknowledged as an important contributor to what Stanford would later consider the 'Irish Classical Tradition'.[276] In fact, Mahaffy cannot be viewed outside of this context and his relationships with his students should have figured more prominently in this biographical discussion. In a letter to 'dear Mahaffy', Wilde directly sums up the sentiment on which Stanford and McDowell neglect to elaborate, by referring to him as "one to whom I owe so much personally, […] my first and best teacher."[277] Nonetheless, they were successful in creating an expression of a very specific time in the discipline of Classics; of contemporary Irish social and historical opinion; and of the stereotypical, nineteenth century 'Anglo-Irish' man. In a more historical account of Mahaffy's life, Peter Boyle's chapter on Mahaffy in *Trinity College Dublin: The Provosts, 1592-1927* paints a more balanced picture of "unquestionably the foremost figure in Trinity College for a whole generation,"[278] who was "in all ordinary senses of the term a snob."[279]

The life of Oscar Wilde has been closely mapped and examined throughout the literary history of the past 200 years, and we can conclude that his Classical education and interaction with the ancient world had a powerful effect on him.[280] As has been seen in the above discussion, any historical biographies of Mahaffy have only dealt with his

[273] Ibid: 89.
[274] See McGing, 2007.
[275] Harris, 1938: 29. 'Tyrrell' refers to Robert Yelverton Tyrrell (1844-1914), Mahaffy's colleague in the Classics Department and Regius Chair of Greek in Trinity College Dublin (see Stanford, 1978).
[276] See Stanford, 1970; Stanford, 1976.
[277] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to J. P. Mahaffy', April 1893 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 561).
[278] An announcement of Mahaffy's appointment as Provost was published in *The Times* on 19th November 1919 (reproduced in Boyle, 2015: 406-407). J. P. Mahaffy spent the entirety of his career in Trinity College Dublin and Peter Boyle claims that Mahaffy believed a Trinity education to be "as good as Oxford or Cambridge" (Boyle, 2015: 433). In a remark to Oscar Wilde, he similarly stated: "You're not quite clever enough for us here, Oscar. Better run up to Oxford" (Holland, 1997: 31). However, what is puzzling is that he nevertheless sent one of his sons to study in Oxford and the other to Cambridge (Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 124).
[279] Boyle, 2015: 426.
[280] Blanshard (2018) and Ross (2014) are much more useful here.

relationship with Wilde obliquely, despite the fact that Mahaffy gave Wilde his "love for the Greek ideal and [his] intimate knowledge of the language."[281] The nature of a student-teacher relationship, or a mentor-mentee relationship, naturally occurs so that the pedagogical figure leaves a bigger impact on the life of the individual student, rather than vice-versa. A teacher may have hundreds of students, a student may only have a handful of teachers. Perhaps this reality can account for why Stanford and McDowell appear to disregard the intimacies and intricacies of the relationship between Wilde and Mahaffy. Their narrative strongly infers that Mahaffy played a much more prominent role in Wilde's world than Wilde did in his. They even suppose that Wilde gained his famous conversational brilliance from Mahaffy.[282] But with only 15 years between the two men, it is clear that their relationship transcended pedagogy to include friendship.[283] In reality, and to rely on familial metaphors again, Mahaffy fulfilled the role of 'Doktorvater' to Wilde during his time at Trinity and beyond.[284]

It is possible that the authors ignored this possibility due to the evidence of Mahaffy's emphatic attempt to distance himself from Wilde's growing controversies in later years. Mahaffy referred to him as "the one blot on my tutelage."[285] The blame for the breakdown of Mahaffy and Wilde's relationship is also completely attributed to Wilde. They decline to even speculate as to whether Mahaffy's strong views on the nature of homosexuality, his detestation for an Irish national government, the revival of the Irish language and any aspect of Celtic culture, or his staunch views on Protestantism, might have fed into this breakdown: "at all events next year Wilde acted in a way that was likely to lead to the ending of their friendship."[286] Whilst Stanford and McDowell succeed in writing an account of a man who was, at once, "much admired and much disliked,"[287] it actually calls us to question whether they saw the tradition of classicism in Ireland as being a tradition of classical dons writing about their predecessor. This thesis will not continue to discount the connection between Mahaffy and Wilde, nor the ensuing ripple effect of that relationship in the tradition.

[281] Harris, 1938: 29.
[282] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 80.
[283] Ibid: 39.
[284] Here, I use this term conversationally to refer to their close tutor-tutee relationship. Wilde did not complete a doctoral thesis under Mahaffy' supervision (or at all).
[285] *Leslie Papers*, TCD MS 4735/44.
[286] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 81.
[287] Ibid: xi.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

Much has been written about the life of Oscar Wilde. This study will rely primarily on the biographies of Richard Ellmann and Frank Harris for an understanding of Wilde's relationship to his surroundings and essential figures in his life.[288] Richard Ellmann was chosen for the obvious reason of his continued reliance in Wildean studies. It is the foremost narrative of Wilde's life and works and remains the most comprehensive, if frustratingly under-referenced. Frank Harris' account is also considered because he was a close personal friend of Wilde, and while his account may contain certain biases that Ellmann's does not, it is still an important perspective from within Wilde's inner circle.

One of Wilde's many instances of interrogating notions of influence and imitation appears in his 1891 novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

> There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr Gray. All influence is immoral … Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such thing as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him.[289]

In this passage, Wilde seems to reject the idea of external influence as the very idea of 'the self' is lost. In fact, Wilde's life and works establish how heavily he drew on his predecessors, interacted with his contemporaries, and how significantly he influenced his literary and intellectual descendants. There are many inconsistencies between how Wilde promoted himself and how he actually lived. This thesis will demonstrate, among many things, Wilde's failure to live in rejection of influence. The charged relationship between Oscar Wilde and J.P. Mahaffy provoked Wilde's life-long attachment to the Classics. Wilde referred to Mahaffy directly as the "scholar who taught [him] how to love Greek things."[290] Despite this, it was to be what the pair disagreed on, and which elements of tutelage and opinion that Wilde rejected, that would come to define the legacy of that relationship. We could say that in many ways, Mahaffy's most lasting effect on Wilde was inadvertently showing him how *not* to think about the Greek world.[291] This is nowhere more apparent

[288] See Ellmann, 1987; see Harris 1938.
[289] Wilde, 2017: 29.
[290] 'Letter from Wilde to Mahaffy', April 1893 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 562).
[291] Disagreement is a primary form of influence. It gives one a foil against which to construct themselves. In this way, as much as 'cultural paternal influence' acts as a critical theme, failure can too be counted as an

than in their polar opposite views on (homo)sexuality, and political independence that, in turn, defined their individual identities.

In his chapter, 'Mahaffy and Wilde: A Study in Provocation', Alistair Blanshard explores the relationship between Wilde and Mahaffy.[292] Unlike what was previously seen with Stanford and McDowell, Blanshard demonstrates how Mahaffy acted as "midwife to one of the most important intellectual relationships in Wilde's life."[293] This relationship introduced Wilde to concepts and ideals that he would grapple with, and model himself on, for the remainder of his life. Throughout his study, Blanshard provides a chronological overview of Mahaffy and Wilde's relationship, and deals with the most pivotal moments in three main Chapters: their joint editorial work on Mahaffy's 1874 volume, *Social Life in Greece*; their travels around Greece;[294] and their drastically different life philosophies in terms of education and its democratisation.

This account looks at Wilde's involvement with Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece*. It is not known exactly the extent to which Wilde edited and contributed to this work, but Blanshard rightly points out that this text is nonetheless crucial when it comes to understanding Wilde's ideas on Hellenism because "of all the general studies on the Classical Greeks, this was the one that Wilde knew best and most intimately."[295] If anything, Mahaffy's work can help to chart Wilde's changing attitudes on Greek life. As is apparent, Wilde would come to vehemently reject Mahaffy's vision of homosexual love as a "strange and to us revolting perversion."[296] This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3 but the most famous example of this rejection was Wilde's speech in defence of the 'love that dare not speak its name'.[297] Their public reactions to each other in the decades following their introduction at Trinity will most clearly show the "cooling in the relationship"[298] that constituted a "reappraisal of the sense of mutual admiration."[299]

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adjunct theme in this thesis. This does not just relate to the gulf that was created between Wilde and Mahaffy, but to the fact that tradition and identity formation always includes some contradiction between a self-constructed image and practice. The word 'failure' implies negativity or shortcoming. However, instead, failure should be considered a symptom of something wider: something that heralds modernity, and without which, the soon-to-be-explored 'Hibernian Philhellenism' would remain firmly in medieval Ireland where it began.

[292] Blanshard, 2018.

[293] Ibid:19.

[294] One of the reasons that Mahaffy was "especially valuable to [Wilde] at that time" was because he "has been in Greece, has lived there and saturated himself with Greek thought and Greek feeling" (Harris, 1938: 29).

[295] Blanshard, 2018: 22.

[296] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 156.

[297] See Wilde, 2013; Hill, 2018; Endres, 2018; Manny, 2018.

[298] Blanshard, 2018: 20.

[299] Ibid.

Blanshard's account focuses more on what Mahaffy and Wilde did not agree on (namely: nationalism, faith, love, sexuality, and social class), as opposed to being a simple praise of Mahaffy and how he inspired Wilde. Unlike Stanford and McDowell's unwillingness to focus too closely on Mahaffy's relationship with Wilde,[300] Blanshard analyses the significance of how "when Wilde thought about his relationship with classical antiquity, Mahaffy stood as a starting point."[301] In *De Profundis*, Wilde asserts that "Art only begins where Imitation ends."[302] As with his pronouncements in *Dorian Gray* about influence, Wilde may have intended to model himself against those principles, but that does not mean he actually lived in accordance with those intentions. In fact, the evidence of his life and work is much more in keeping with an idea found in *The Critic as Artist* that "the tendency of creation is to repeat itself."[303]

All accounts of Wilde underline how "he did not turn his back on approaching or understanding either his age or ages past."[304] With that in mind, I think that "if we are to see [Wilde, and my other central figures] in their right perspective, we need to understand the past of a man as well as his present."[305] Tóibín certainly does this in his biographical studies of Wilde, and I attempt to do so with Tóibín in turn. Wilde, like Mahaffy, was aware that "the ancient Greeks had recognised that the most perfect art is that which mirrors man in all his infinite variety."[306] We will see how for Tóibín, Wilde and the influence he took from the ancient world was that 'mirror'.

Colm Tóibín (1955-)

Colm Tóibín is known for admiring and channelling a plethora of literary figures in his biographies, non-fictions, and fictions (for example, Henry James in *The Master*).[307] His work continuously demonstrates the "dynamism of the precursor/later author relationship."[308] It is significant that Wilde appears among these figures due to shared

[300] See Stanford and McDowell, 1971.
[301] Blanshard, 2018: 19.
[302] Wilde, 2013: 132. Capitalisation original.
[303] Wilde, 2019: 56.
[304] Alexander, 1984: 76. In his own words, he writes: "I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age" (Wilde, 2013: 100). This idea of being in 'symbolic relation' can be understood as responding to the particular tensions and conditions that help to construct a tradition.
[305] Jung, 1988: 58.
[306] Alexander, 1984: 77.
[307] Tóibín, 2004. See Perkin, 2010.
[308] Doody, 2018: 13.

biographical elements including national identity and sexuality, both of which constitute a "common community and cultural experience."[309] Tóibín is an open admirer of Wilde and has written extensively about him. He has also widely taken influence from classical texts, adapting them into novel and drama form.[310]

Tóibín provides an examination of the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism in two ways: through his own primary engagement with the classics, and how this was directed and fed by the work of Oscar Wilde, his predecessor in the tradition.[311] Tóibín, in the wake of Wilde, saw "the value of the Greeks lying in their ability to be a stylistic resource."[312] This is nowhere more apparent than in their joint reliance on ancient myth and Platonic thought in their works. 'Cultural paternal influence' is not always relegated to one figure. For the purpose of this application, I am limiting my detailed exploration to my designation of the connection between these three figures, while still acknowledging their inevitable interaction with other prominent players in Irish classicism. We will turn briefly to Tóibín's 2018 work, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know: The Fathers of Wilde, Yeats and Joyce* to illustrate the latter of the above 'ways' .[313]

In this biography of literal (and literary) families, Colm Tóibín weaves together the lives of three of Ireland's most prolific writers and their relationships with their equally culturally-established fathers. Tóibín's choice of these three writers as subjects cannot be disregarded. The works of all three men have notable classical influence and engagement – one need only point to the title of Joyce's *Ulysses*. They were also all writing at a similar period in Irish history (and Hibernian Philhellenism). Tóibín's work is important as, at its root, it shows the importance that environment and the influence of an older figure can have on a person, whether they choose to live in accordance with or in rebellion against the past in their later life. Here we see Tóibín actually employing 'paternal influence' as a critical theme.

Tóibín's study is particularly effective in the case of Wilde. It pays attention to how, even in his earliest years, Wilde was continuously influenced by his immediate contexts. Tóibín rightly sets the backdrop of the narrative in the familial house on Merrion Square in

[309] Ibid: 15.
[310] Despite being technically a non-professional classicist, Tóibín approaches his subjects like a scholar would and even writes novels with bibliographies (see *The Master,* 2004), "providing [his work] with a particular kind of authority that we do not always expect from or require of fiction" (Matterson, 2008: 135).
[311] One of the key ways that Colm Tóibín approaches classical material is through Wilde. Daniel Mendelsohn also recognises Wilde as a walking example of classical reception. He purports that "it was in Wilde himself more than anyone that the Greek spirit resided" (Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010).
[312] Blanshard, 2018: 22.
[313] Tóibín, 2018.

Dublin. In much the same way that the pedagogical relationship between Wilde and his 'cultural father' (Mahaffy) shaped him, Tóibín explores how Wilde's relationship with his biological father, Sir William Wilde, resulted in him emerging "not like Jay Gatsby, from his Platonic conception of himself, but from a family,"[314] and how "many of the ambiguities in his personality, many of his talents, came from his father."[315]

Tóibín focuses on how Wilde may learned 'how to deal with a scandal' from his father. Tóibín narrates the instance in which William Wilde, an influential and prominent doctor, was the subject of a defamatory public trial in which he was accused of rape and medical malpractice by a female patient.[316] Tóibín likens William Wilde's accuser to the Marquess of Queensbury, both of whom went to great lengths to "embarrass and harass in public and private Sir William and Oscar Wilde respectively."[317] This significance is only heightened with the application of Gregory Woods' observation that in all of Wilde's plays "the fear of scandal looms large; and yet Wilde's characters are continually tempting fate by testing the limits of what they can get away with it."[318] This statement is true not just of Wilde's characters, but of Wilde himself.

Most notable throughout Tóibín's account of Wilde and his father is his employment of an unusual stylistic technique. Tóibín begins by recounting his own first-hand experience of visiting Reading Gaol and does not actually come to explore the life of William Wilde for another 10 pages. His memory of being locked inside Oscar Wilde's cell, and performing a recorded reading of *De Profundis* in its entirety, is the initial focus. The remaining 50 pages of Tóibín's metafictional account exploring the relationship between father and son are interlaced with Tóibín's personal memory. He describes his highly sentimental experience reading *De Profundis* in the exact place it was written, and concludes, "I could imagine the prison as Oscar Wilde might have experienced it."[319] It is a charming, if slightly confusing, feature to the narrative. By placing himself and his own fond, yet naturally indirect, connection with Wilde between tales of Wilde's parentage and childhood, it is almost to say that the effect that Wilde has had on Tóibín through literature

[314] Ibid: 35.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid: 64. The Marquess of Queensbury was the father of Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas, with whom Wilde was engaged in a romantic and sexual relationship. The Marquess of Queensbury instigated Wilde's two trials by leaving a card for him at the Albemarle Club that read: "To Oscar Wilde, posing somdomite [sic]" ('Marquess of Queensbury's Calling Card for Oscar Wilde', (1895), *The National Archives UK*, CRIM 1/41/6). For biographies of Bosie, see Croft-Cooke, 1963; Hyde, 1984; Murray, 2000.
[318] Woods, 1998: 175.
[319] Tóibín, 2018: 27.

has been 'paternal'. Overall, this study shows Tóibín's engagement with Irish classical reception, his admiration for Wilde, and his extensive knowledge of the canon of Irish literature and those who contributed to it. It is not the only biographical/cultural study that Tóibín conducts on Wilde. Tóibín's explorations into Wilde's, and consequently his own, sexuality in his 2003 work, *Love in a Dark Time: Gay Lives from Wilde to Almodóvar*, will appear in a later Chapter.[320] This discussion will show how Tóibín "foreground[s] his own recognition of himself as a gay man with his reclaiming of Wilde as a crucial point of reference."[321]

It is apparent that Tóibín has various literary influences. However, even when it came to writing about Henry James in *The Master*, Tóibín admits that he was inspired to begin this novel because he was fascinated by one particular period in James' life: his reaction to Wilde's success and eventual imprisonment.[322] Speaking about the novel, he says he was interested "in James versus Oscar Wilde, his Irishness being hidden, his homosexuality being hidden."[323] Tóibín processes Wilde and his homosexuality through James, a figure who is historically considered to have remained closeted throughout his life.[324] *The Master* is an example of Tóibín constructing his historical fiction "in light of his own imaginative interest."[325] In an analysis of the novel, Dimock asserts that "even though it starts out as a two-way traffic between Tóibín and James, in the end the field is taken over by Wilde's larger-than-life presence."[326] Culturally, the reach of Wilde's influence cannot be overstated, and for many (including Tóibín and one of his literary heroes, Henry James), Wilde exists in the background as a spectre. Tóibín's canonical connection with Wilde is the most important for demonstrating the aspect of 'kinship' that is fundamental to the construction of Hibernian Philhellenism. This will be examined extensively in the next Chapter but it is important to qualify here, when introducing my central figures and their interaction with figures and models from the past, that "this feeling of intimacy with an author of the past is a strictly subjective experience … [that] can easily be confused by an observer with the relationship of uncritical imitation which does not help to build 'a tradition'."[327]

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[320] Tóibín, 2003c.
[321] Walshe, 2013: 73.
[322] See Tóibín, 2004.
[323] O'Toole, 2008: 197.
[324] Chapter 3 will examine how Tóibín's considerations of homosexuality are consistently marked by ambiguity and uncertainty.
[325] Walshe, 2013: 104.
[326] Dimock, 2013: 744.
[327] Frank, 1971: 157.

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In a letter to George MacMillan in 1887, J. P. Mahaffy insists that it is impossible to make history come alive "without fusing strong modern or personal elements in the writing."[328] This is something that will appear across the works of all three of my central figures, but is also a characteristic of the tradition as a whole. My central figures are at once writers and readers of the tradition, and the literary formation that is enabled by influence "not only draws on many literary and cultural sources that impede the purpose of a single mind," but also the "many different readers who … decipher the text in accordance with their own literary knowledge and expectations and particular set of cultural and life experiences."[329] In *The Anatomy of Influence*, Harold Bloom includes a pedagogical reflection:

> My students often ask me why great writers cannot start out fresh, without any past at their backs. I can only tell them that it just does not work that way since in practice inspiration means influence, as it did in Shakespeare's vocabulary.[330]

If we recall Marina Carr's earlier confessions about borrowing from the past, this firmly lays the groundwork for the Chapters to come and for the tradition as a whole. Not only do the figures at the centre of this study have the entirety of Western culture at their back – if we agree with Bloom that "western culture remains essentially Greek"[331] – but also the individual tensions and self-designed models that come along with their chosen precursors. These tensions result in the "most subversive idea, a new way of killing your father, starting from scratch, creating a new self,"[332] which in the next Chapter will interrogate the idea of "killing your Irish nationalist father"[333] (alongside your colonial one). That "it is hard to think of any other good fathers in the canon of Irish fiction and drama"[334] will be most obviously traced through the work of Tóibín. Nonetheless, no matter whether one is

[328] Stanford and McDowell include this as a quote from an 1887 letter from Mahaffy George MacMillan, but they do not provide further details (Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 147). This is not an anomaly in Stanford and McDowell's work, and I agree with Richard Sharpe's estimation when he names it a "well-informed but poorly referenced discussion" (Sharpe, 2017: 105).
[329] Doody, 2018: 12.
[330] Bloom, 2011: 10.
[331] Ibid: 7.
[332] Tóibín, 18th November 1993.
[333] Tóibín, 2003a: 2.
[334] Tóibín, 2001: xxiii.

'clinging' to or 'killing' their predecessor, "the Irish past is being tested and interrogated."[335]

The next Chapter will tackle the anxiety of an unstable national identity that continues to carry the burden of the idealisation of a mythologised past into the present moment.[336] As much as the canonical uses of the ancient past are integral to this context, "the post-classical uses of the myths are [also] significant for the development of Western culture."[337] I class the study of these uses in Hibernian Philhellenism as in keeping with ideas of the 'post-classical' as it speaks to the move away from generational thinking into a more fluid understanding of historical and canonical correspondence. The next Chapter will look at Oedipal relations and show how an inherent part of kinship is rejection, yet in that rejection, new connections are made.[338] This relates both to Mahaffy and Wilde's fraught relationship, but also to Tóibín who struggles against his own claim that he is "through with history."[339] In the final section of this Chapter, we saw what Mahaffy called the "Celtic craze."[340] The next Chapter and its sections will continue this discussion by looking at the Gaelic Revival, and how art and action at this time were simultaneously driven by classical influence. There, we will observe how the continued importance of classical materials and thought to the Irish leaders, and how the 'Celt' was further used as a bridge to strengthen the 'certain Greek kinship' experience by portions of Irish society.

[335] Walshe, 2013: 36.
[336] See Walshe, 2013: 9; and Frawley, 2008: 80.
[337] Philips, 1978-9: 159.
[338] Ingold, 2015: 20.
[339] Tóibín, 1987: 11.
[340] Mahaffy, 1899: 214.

CHAPTER 2

A National Tragedy:

Athenian Drama, Politics, and Religion

"To live, the poet must 'misinterpret' the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the re-writing of the father."[1]

~ Harold Bloom

[1] Bloom, 1975: 19.

2.1. Introduction: (Post)Colonial Considerations

This Chapter will look at the reception of Greek tragedy in Ireland, specifically focusing on *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Oresteia*, and *Antigone*.[2] It will interrogate the specific way that Athenian drama has been adopted to articulate and deal with issues of Irish nationalism, religion, politics and identity.[3] In keeping with the critical theme of this thesis, we will discover that Greek tragedy and Irish literature, comparatively, have a preoccupation with dead fathers, with overthrowing fathers, and with absent fathers. Building on this, the act of rising up and removing the 'Father', who took the shape of colonial England, gave birth to a new son in the form of the Irish Republic, and with it, a new artistic movement – one that heavily relied on past works from antiquity and within which the "philhellenism of the past prevailed."[4]

In the previous Chapter, we discussed how Irish literature appeared as a 'minor literature' within a British colonial 'major' context. Thus, we can consider the 'philhellenism' of Irish classicism as incorporating the imperial belief that the Roman/Latin tradition is 'major' and the 'Greek' is relegated to 'minor'. In other words, in Ireland's 'minor literature' the Greek became culturally 'major'.[5] This function of literature remains relevant in this discussion's continued focus on the postcolonial movement from the late nineteenth century to the present. In this Chapter and its sections, relationality is a key connecting trope and we will now see a domain in practice: the purpose of which is to demonstrate a new way to think about classical reception in Ireland according to the established framework of Hibernian Philhellenism and my chosen critical theme. Here, this manifests as 'cultural paternal influence' in the literal and metaphorical uses of Greek tragic models.

It has been argued that Ireland, along with Africa, has in recent years become somewhat of a 'poster-child' for classical reception.[6] Simon Perris does not define what parameter is covered by the term 'recent', but for the purpose of the scope of this study, I will consider 'recent' as spanning from the late nineteenth century to the present. In this

[2] Sophocles, 2008a; Aeschylus, 2009a; Sophocles, 2008b. Just to note that throughout this Chapter, 'Oedipus' and 'Antigone' will appear in italics when referring to the plays, and in roman when referring to the characters/mythic figures/symbols.
[3] See Torrance and O'Rourke, 17th December 2020.
[4] Macintosh, 1994: 2.
[5] Here, two 'minor literatures' combined following colonial rejection to become its own new 'major literature': the classically-inspired Irish literature found in Hibernian Philhellenism.
[6] Perris, 2008: 55.

Chapter, I consider how Ireland does indeed act as a 'poster-child' for classical reception through its uses of Classical Greek literature and ideology in the political turmoil that shaped the current identity of the country. As for the second part of Perris' statement, it is by no means inconsequential that Ireland and Africa have been placed together in this summation. Martin Revermann recognises Greek tragedy as an 'Other'.[7] It is unsurprising that it has been embraced in such successful ways by subaltern cultures and voices, in the face of the reality that "Greek theatre and the ancient languages are somewhat compromised by the fact that they often constituted the cultural equipment of the classically educated colonial oppressors."[8] In Ireland, this engagement is relevant not only in a post-colonial context, but in the period prior to colonial liberation. The rise of nationalism in this period thus made use of the "reissue [of] myths and symbols,"[9] to express the shift from colonial to postcolonial dynamics and power structures. Therefore, while Ireland and Africa are thus respective models for the reception of the so-called 'Father' of Western Civilisation, Classical Greece, we can also consider them as the poster-children for the subversion of colonialism and colonial study. In the case of this thesis, it is Ireland that will of course be given due consideration.

Isabelle Torrance and Donncha O'Rourke have claimed that "classical sources … are indigenous to Ireland in a way that does not apply to other colonised nations."[10] This is due to Ireland's unique historical position. As noted in the preceding Chapter, Ireland appears to be "the only postcolonial culture which native precolonial expertise in classical languages and literature [dates] back to the sixth century."[11] Ireland's relationship to Greek tragedy is marked by both precolonial and postcolonial tensions. Chapter 1 discussed how in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Ireland was in its 'epic period', and that was firmly fixed by Joyce's *Ulysses*. My central figures are the primary focus of this Chapter, but it is imperative to also look at other cultural figures' preoccupation with the past and past ideals. In the tumultuous period defined by the 1916 Rising and ensuing War of Independence, rhetoric was distinctly classical, but also markedly focused on dead men and, by extension, dead fathers (literal and figurative). The traditions and shared identity established in this period are continuously echoed and re-invented as classical engagement continues to resound in the contemporary. Even today, we still see the continuous

[7] Revermann, 2008: 109.
[8] Ibid: 110.
[9] Kapferer, 1997: 291.
[10] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 2.
[11] Ibid.

employment of Greek tragedy and Greek models to show Ireland's understanding of "the impact of colonial aggression."[12]

The first section of this Chapter will explore how "it is through its myths that a society is able to trace its identity."[13] This will be investigated by tracing the (ab)use of myths and archetypal models. In order to do so, it is necessary to examine previous 'cultural fathers' like Freud and Jung, who exist in the background of any model of influence. This is done with a central tenet of this thesis in mind: the rejection of influence is still influence. Although I favour the more nuanced and less homogenising approaches by Bruce Kapferer and Tim Ingold, I cannot deny that Freud and Jung did once exist as strands in this rope, and that their perspective has since informed new and diverging ones.

The discussion of the use of classical materials and models during the Gaelic Revival rejects "the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model."[14] At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, we see classical allusion and engagement undergoing its own type of Irish renaissance, at a time when Celtic materials alone were supposed to be at the forefront. However, the two need not be treated as mutually exclusive. As seen in the previous Chapter, the Celt was employed as a means to bridge the gap between a new Irish independent identity and an ancient one linked to Western culture. In this context, debates around national identity show how, "the acculturating processes most closely linked to classics for moderns were 'tradition' and 'mythology', which acquired a new significance at the time."[15] In this Chapter it is the reliance on mythic models that incorporated a blend of Irish and Greek traditions that combine to result in "the mimic spectacle of life that Tragedy affords."[16]

The exploration into the use of classical material by the "generation in revolt"[17] provides context for the reoccurrences of *Oedipus* and Oedipal models that directly engage with 'cultural paternal influence' on a very meta-literal level. This will be apparent through the use of the myth of Oedipus in social and artistic movements, but also in practice through the relationship between Wilde and Mahaffy. They act as an example of direct 'cultural paternal influence' that largely mirror the changing attitudes in society. Their relationship

[12] Torrance, 2020b: 255.
[13] Signorile, 1973: 119.
[14] Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002: 9.
[15] Haynes, 2019: 6.
[16] Wilde, 2019: 50.
[17] Alexander, 1984: 76.

paves the way for the later canonical relationship between Wilde and Tóibín, but also speaks to our understanding of Hibernian Philhellenism and the metaphorical 'killing' of the cultural father within a literary tradition.

The context for the final section of this Chapter will have been introduced by the previous two to explain the "implications of Tóibín's particular brand of liberal post-nationalism"[18] which can be determined as a kind of "sentimental nationalism."[19] Throughout his works, we see Tóibín grappling with the sentimental nationalism that is ingrained in personal and community identities, and that links his position within Hibernian Philhellenism back to processes of memory that incorporate nostalgia, direct engagement with the past, and ideas of belonging.[20] The preceding discussions regarding traditions, historical and cultural nationality, and mythology will be necessary to understand how Tóibín has "advanced an understanding of history which is alive to mythology and fiction, and which privileges instances of ambiguity, discontinuity and rupture."[21] His engagement with Athenian tragedies that incorporate the subversion of society's functions, meanings, rituals, and power structures in his retellings of *Antigone* and the *Oresteia* are the primary evidence for this. These respective works, *Pale Sister* and *House of Names*, in the context of the Northern Irish Troubles prove, like the Oedipal ones of the Gaelic Revival, how "literature in modern Ireland has traditionally been preoccupied with the question of cultural identity and has borne much of the burden of social and political expression"[22] The resulting 'minor literatures' produced across this period present a "new kind of contemporary fiction, one that will link Irish writing to other forms of the contemporary novel in other postcolonial countries."[23] As with *Oedipus*, my approach to *Antigone* and the *Oresteia* is more epistemological than mechanical. My exploration into the use of these ancient texts relies on the social reasoning and conditioning that led to their selection, rather than on the literal and pedantic way they were applied in the modern texts.

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[18] Harte, 2008: 53.
[19] Ibid: 54.
[20] Tóibín writes widely about the conflicting sentimental feelings he has towards Irish nationalism and its historical rebellions. He grew up in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, where "the Rising was important for [them]: from [his] housing estate [they] could see Vinegar Hill where 'our side', the rebels had made their last stand" (Tóibín, 18th November 1993). Similarly, he speaks often of how his grandfather had fought in the Rising as it spread outside of Dublin, and for which he was interned in Frongoch Prison in Wales (Tóibín, 2022a: 27). See also O'Toole, 2008: 183-184; Tóibín, 1995: 239; Costello-Sullivan, 2012.
[21] Delaney, 2008: 7.
[22] Bradley, 1988: 36.
[23] Walshe, 2013: 14.

T. S. Eliot, in a 'Reflection on Contemporary Poetry' for the *Egoist*, describes the feeling of a relationship with a writer of the past which is not categorised by direct imitation but, rather, a maelstrom of tensions and conditions that lead to a type of kinship-led influence: "we do not imitate, we are changed; and our work is the work of a changed man; we have not borrowed; we have been awakened; and we become bearers of a tradition."[24] It is from this intimacy fostered by a social, national, artistic, and subjective affinity that the ability to choose between acceptance or rejection arises. This choice ultimately leads to the same result: the entwining of the rope.

Myths lie both at the heart of Greek tragedy and the primary engagement with Ancient Greek material in Hibernian Philhellenism. In much the same way that we do not want to conceptualise the tradition akin to usual Western models, we also do not want to "employ the word myth in the pejorative sense with which it tends to be used in western circles."[25] This tradition is being re-conceptualised by the model of 'the rope' and we have now established how the rope acts as a "self-perpetuating"[26] entity formed by the actions of relevant figures and their cultural contexts. In this Chapter, we want to explore how we should "describe the interweaving – the interpenetration – of the constituent lines of the rope, of the lifelines of particular beings in the cord of social life"[27] in the domain of religion and politics.

By Tim Ingold's conceptualisation, 'knots' "are always in the midst of things, while their ends are on the loose, rooting for other lines to tangle with."[28] This Chapter and the domain of religion and politics will thus be conceptualised as a knot. In previous models of succession as 'stacked' entities, the 'knot' as a concept has been easily passed over in favour of those like 'the building block'. Here, the 'block' is a specific instance or set of instances that forms the 'stack'. Tim Ingold clearly sets out for us what the 'knot is not'. Most importantly:

> *The knot is not a building block*. Blocks are assembled into structures; knots are bound or tied into nodes or nodules. Thus the order of the block is explicate, in that each is joined to the other by external contact or adjacency; the order of the knot is

[24] Eliot, 1919: 39.
[25] Signorile. 1973: 130. 'Myth' can be considered a useful neutral term. However, its neutrality can have negative consequence as it can falsely assume universality.
[26] Ingold, 2015: 11.
[27] Ibid: 12.
[28] Ibid: 22.

> implicate, in that the constitutive strands of each knot, as they extend beyond it, are bound into others.[29]

We can understand the 'knot' then, as Ingold does, as "the fundamental principle of coherence,"[30] as something that acts as a microcosm in society for which members of a tradition can create a 'collective' through their personal experiences.

In this particular context, the knot is the specific conditions that connect these figures, texts, beliefs, and conditions, into the same temporal and spatial context. The topics covered in this Chapter speak mostly to memory and this in turn, relates to the physicality of the knot. As discussed, the knot is a feature of the rope that exhibits how ropes "retain within their constitution a memory of the process of their formation."[31] Specifically in the case of religion and politics in Ireland, the process of remembering is intertwined with history, mythology, and tradition. Frank explains how 'tradition' as a term is:

> An eminently historical one, implying as it does a chronological sequence and requiring, on the part of the critic, a knowledge of both this sequence and the historical context of each of the constituent elements: of each work, of each poet, of each period.[32]

The consequence of the simultaneous act of re-writing the precursor, and writing in such a way so as to be placed in the same tradition or canon, dually results in a phenomenon of double consciousness.[33] In Ireland, this happens because "personal remembrance and the remembrance of cultures or societies with which we identify become blurred."[34] In this way, "knotting is symptomatic of the binding of lives in relations of kinship and affinity."[35] While the "rope is quite literally, a record: memory rewound,"[36] this Chapter is exploring what happens when you unwind a knot.

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[29] Ibid: 15.
[30] Ibid: 14.
[31] Ibid: 15.
[32] Frank, 1971: 151.
[33] See Winkler, 2002; Du Bois, 2007.
[34] Frawley, 2008: 70.
[35] Ingold, 2015: 20.
[36] Ingold, 2024: 17.

2.2. The (Ab)Use of the Archetype: The Tragic Father

This project is inseparable from family models. Tim Ingold's theoretical framework establishes how the very language of 'knotting' can incorporate familial and biological connections through the "knot of the naval, [where] every one of us retains a memory of that originary moment when we first came into the world, only to be cast off with a cut."[37] This action of separation, our first unconscious and unchosen act of independence, is in keeping with 'Oedipal' understandings of rejection. The previous Chapter spoke of the processes of 'belonging' and 'becoming' in a tradition, and knots are another type of this natural process.[38] As they are natural, they are not always intentional and so a knot on the rope can also be formed through entwining and entangling.

This thesis aims to steer away from convenient 'universals'. But there is an unavoidable 'universal' experience that results from being born into family structures. While remaining wary, this particular 'universal' must cause us to consider certain anthropological contexts. Tim Ingold explains that in the case of tradition formation, ropes, and knots, "it is necessary to speak of 'a collective consciousness' as distinct from an 'individual consciousness'."[39] Thus, in order to understand these shared experiences we must consider, or at least acknowledge, the work of Carl Jung (and by extension but more obliquely in this section, that of Sigmund Freud) as a starting point for this context. It is important to note that, while useful to this section's purpose, in an academic context Jung and Freud's 'experiences' often appear highly selective, generalised, and lacking rigorous cultural distinctions. My approach differs in how I treat myth not just as a universal repository but a thematic scheme. Although I reject the work of Freud and Jung for being overly reductive in our construction of Hibernian Philhellenism, it cannot be denied that they did at one time exist as beacons of influence, or strands of the rope.[40]

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[37] Ingold, 2015: 26.
[38] Knots occur in our gestation, as mentioned, but also elsewhere in nature (for example, tree-knots).
[39] Ingold, 2015: 10.
[40] I would just like to note some points of relevance between these works and my chosen period of study. Jung's thought and the Greeks are not that far away from each other – his theory of archetypes that we will touch on was based on Plato's Forms. Similarly, though not a focus of this discussion is the fact that contemporaneous with the Easter Rising of 1916 and the formation of the Irish Free State is the work of Malinowski, whose ethnographic rejoinder to Freud's reading of the Oedipus myth demonstrated (at the very least) that the patriarchal relation is specific to the West (see Malinowski, 1922). Despite the outdated or simplified form this 'collective unconscious' can take, whether through Jung or Freud's studies, there is still an intrinsic force and understanding that operates on the subconscious level when it comes to viewing a tradition or canon, or even contributing to one.

In essence, this section is trying to avoid the "feeling of uneasiness each time ancient Greece appears as the universal matrix of the modern psyche, each time that its mythologies and tragedies are assumed to provide the scheme according to which our imaginary always functions."[41] I am not trying to place Jung and Ingold within the same frame. Jung is essentialist and, for this reason, largely avoided by many contemporary critics. Jung's archetypes speak much more to the 'building-block' model I am moving this tradition away from. In contrast, Ingold is more interested in multiplicity. Here, I argue that Jungian archetypes can be envisaged through the notion of the rope and the entangled strands of the knot through his role as a 'theoretical father' – a historical one that Ingold will have built his theory against. This is the same principle by which the Irish were constructing an identity through a rejection of conceptions of Britain.

That being said, among the most prominent discussions of the theme of the father in Greek tragedy are Carl Jung's archetypes, "distillate[s] of human experience"[42] that are part of our collective unconscious. Archetypes, according to Jung, reflect the "symbol-making propensities of man."[43] One important such archetype, for Jung, is the 'tragic father' – a key theme in Greek tragedy and, indeed, as we have argued, in Irish fiction. As we have already noted, of particular prominence in such work is the focus on the absence or removal of father figures. In both Greek tragedy and Irish writing, the role of the father is important, not only in (patriarchal) family structures, but also through metaphor – the 'paternal' role of nations and religion (note, 'Father Zeus' and the Catholic 'Father' or priest). The nuance to this archetype as it relates to each singular context must be noted: Classical Athens, in the case of Greek tragedy, and colonial Britain in Ireland. In the Athens of Sophocles and Aeschylus, the political system "vehemently rejected both the notion and practice of 'monarchy', 'tyranny', or even 'aristocracy'."[44] So too in Ireland there was the tension that was present between the burgeoning Irish Free State and 'Father Colonialism' in the shape of Britain. This need to remove fathers is something that creates a connection

[41] Varikas, 2010: 231.
[42] Meadow, 1992: 188.
[43] Jung, 1988: 47.
[44] Griffith, 1998: 21. That is not to say that monarchy was not still portrayed in works of this period. For example: Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (2008a), Sophocles, *Antigone* (2008b), Aeschylus, *Persians* (2009b), and Euripides, *Bacchae* (2008a); all display negative depictions or outcomes from monarchy. The works of Sophocles and Aeschylus will be discussed in this Chapter but for more on the work of Euripides, see Torrance, 2019.

between both literatures, and creates a "setting which allows a parricide to be welcomed as a hero."[45]

From our perspective, Jung's universal characterization of archetype is, nevertheless, unsatisfactory. It is self-evident that the "Greek myths and their enactment in Greek art and literature have given the western cultural and symbolic codes their dynamic foundation."[46] But we must allow for the multiplicity of any such experiences. Jung's archetypes stress for us the prominence of the theme of the father and are, as such, helpful to our argument. But only if we take them as strands of influence that have historically contributed to where the tradition is now. This, to look at it from a slightly different perspective, is the point at which we in this dissertation diverge from Stanford's view of the 'Irish Classical Tradition' in our attempt to describe a more diverse and multiple set of historical strands.

Myth-Making

Before we further discuss these theoretical contexts, it is important to clarify that commonalities in Irish and Greek myth do not signify independent exploitations of 'universal' timeless truths about fathers.[47] Instead, as we will see in the next section's exploration of political rhetoric and artistic movements, the myths are rather 'springings' forth from the same (constructed) family tree. In Ireland, the way we approach these experiences of cultural and biological paternal relationships is through myth: Greek myth and, more specifically, Greek tragic myth. The form these archetypes take can be linked with the literary manifestations from antiquity, speaking to Jung's relation to Freud's theories on "archaic remnants"[48] which are psychic phenomena that "surviv[e] in the human mind from ages long ago."[49] This is just one of the many ways to look at myths,

[45] Fleischmann, 1989: 66. Since Greek tragedy is known to reflect "paradigms of improper and transgressive behaviour" (Griffith, 1998: 22), it is a clear choice for a proto-postcolonial society looking to disrupt social order. A clear example of this is through John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1998), which will be discussed later in this Chapter.
[46] Steiner, 1984: 124.
[47] The discussions of these myths and their uses are in keeping with the thematic model, and we are not at any point reverting back to a single universal model.
[48] Jung, 1988: 47.
[49] Ibid.

"but they are not necessarily rival theories,"[50] instead, they "explain different statements about myth."[51]

Myths are important to the formation of canons, traditions, and identities and "modernity has not succeeded in abolishing the necessity for myth."[52] The myths of Ancient Greece are not a relic of the past, rather they "provide the single most important key for unlocking the rich treasures of the European tradition and its descendants; … [who] have again and again found that the classical world alone provides the vitality and universality that their works demand."[53] The idea of 'universality' can be attractive in a postcolonial context where members are trying to prove that they are worthy of belonging independently to a global canon. This speaks to the need to reach backwards into the past since:

> Man's desire for a model, an example to imitate in his life, is not always satisfied by religion or history; a rather large part is taken by literature, which can transform individuals into archetypes and historical events into patterns of behaviour just as oral literatures regularly did.[54]

This use of myth and the past "produces a distancing effect, so that issues of the present can be explored in a more subtle way through the mirror of a distant past; … so that the individual playwright can manipulate the myth to suit his own purposes."[55] Even though we are not thinking of myths as a universal convenience, nor are we using Jungian archetypes to explain how or why a tradition or national identity has been shaped, "myths in general, whether the Greek ones or those of other cultures, can offer an introduction to a significant mode of human thinking that is deeply embedded within the minds of us all."[56]

Having established this, next we must ask why do we see this emphasis on Greek tragic myths in Ireland? Peter McDonald finds an answer to this question in the:

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[50] Cohen, 1969: 338.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Levin, 1957: 51.
[53] Philips, 1978-9: 155.
[54] This quote from Mircea Eliade is reproduced in Harry Levin's *Contexts of Criticism*, a work which provides no notes, references, or bibliography (Levin, 1957: 51). Wilde was also a supporter of the "centrality of the poet to Ireland's historical past and declares the subversive power of the bard in encouraging passion and strength in a subjugated people" (Doody, 2018: 34). This remains the case in Ireland in this period where the members of the artistic movement overcame the England's historical oppression of the native culture.
[55] Arkins, 2005: 143.
[56] Philips, 1978-9: 155.

> Resistance of 'acquisitive energies' that the essence of the ancient material seems to be located for some Irish writers, and the many adaptations of Greek drama tend to centre upon notions of resistance, integrity, and pride, none of which is without its analogue in more immediately pressing Irish political concerns.[57]

We can also look back to Classical Athens and examine why certain myths were relied upon as tragic models for drama. In times of political turmoil or tension, it can be easier to comment critically on the situation by creating a "safer psychological distance"[58] that will allow "representations of more extreme, bizarre, more dangerous 'actions 'to be played out."[59] For example, as we will see later in this Chapter, it is much easier to portray civic conflict of the kind seen in Northern Ireland by projecting it from one culture to another. Northern Irish poet, Michael Longley, has remarked that: "Ireland must be one of the very few remaining areas in the English speaking world which are still likely to produce poets who write out of a response to religion."[60] Religion in Ireland was, of course, intricately interwoven with politics in this period and the "psychic landscape"[61] where these struggles find their expression is in the "tangled emotional relationship between father and child."[62] For the poets and writers in Hibernian Philhellenism, this response manifests itself in the production of classically inspired works arising from Greek tragedies, of which the action is driven by religious conventions, rules or transgressions.

My central figures, but also other contextual figures mentioned in this tradition, are all 'fathers' of some type – some in the biological sense, and others in the pedagogical and cultural sense. Not all of them are outwardly 'tragic'; they all differ in nature and function and yet can still fit the mould as a 'patriarchal archetype'. This 'archetypal' figure is a manifestation of the viewer, it is a culmination of what they want to (subconsciously) symbolise into that form, especially in the context of a literary tradition or the wider canon. It is an 'image' of the archetype, a fragment of a symbol.[63] We can understand that an archetype is not concrete, but its image is. Thus, "archetypal psychiatry introduces into human life only the traces, or 'footprints', of the archetype."[64] This image is fluid and there

[57] McDonald, 1995: 186. See also McDonald and Walton, 2002.
[58] Griffith, 1998: 21.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Longley, 1975: 104.
[61] Kenneally, 1988: 4.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Davis, 1985: 29.
[64] Ibid: 28.

is no one form in which it will take. This is apparent from the differences between my three central figures, and the dual functions they have as symbolisers and symbols.

In its simplest and least nuanced terms, the patriarchal archetype is a primordial figure that speaks to how "the very foundations of our arts and civilisations … are mythical."[65] It is this very quality of primordiality that "facilitates [the myths and the figures within them] opening out to meaning."[66] Linking back to previous conversations on filiation, we can agree that the figure of the patriarch, in turn, demands the figure of the son and with it, the immediate anxiety that is created in relation to these figures. This father-son relationship has its early roots in Greek myth with Hesiod's *Theogony* providing explicit evidence of that.[67] The beginnings of Greek civilisation and religion were characterised by intergenerational conflict, but more specifically by the anxiety of creating and keeping an ordered, stable hierarchy. In this regard, Kronos and Zeus exist at the fore of our minds, along with Kronos and Ouranos. In many of the myths regarding the births of other gods and goddesses to come, most notably Athena and Apollo, this anxiety of filial rebellion preoccupies Zeus.

At the climax of Homer's *Odyssey*, we see Telemachus and Odysseus supporting and complimenting each other in their battle with the suitors (Book 22).[68] Here, we have a more successful father-son relationship. Even though it is an ultimately positive relationship, "the fact that the plots of both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* concern 'the restoration of order within the small-scale structure of the family' reflects upon how the crucial relationship in archaic social and political structures is that of father to son."[69] It also supports Greensmith's claim that the "filial image as far back as Homer has been used to convey structural and political 'relationships' in dialogue with literary ones."[70]

Lacking the more "reassuring examples of filial co-operation"[71] seen in Homer, Athenian tragedy reverts back to Hesiodic father-son relationships and once again filiation is used as "an image acutely able to express multiple types of power relation."[72] Although fathers are prominent in driving the plot of Greek tragedies, as are their son's responses to them, fathers and sons rarely appear together. They are normally kept separate from each

[65] Steiner, 1984: 301.
[66] Kapferer, 1997: 62.
[67] Hesiod, 2018: 31-96 (lines 104-206; 453-491).
[68] Homer, 2016: 289-301.
[69] Greensmith, 2020: 228.
[70] Ibid: 234.
[71] Griffith, 1998: 33.
[72] Greensmith, 2020: 228.

other on the stage and in the plot. This Hesiodic reversion acutely reflects that it is the "prospect of encountering the father's gaze, face-to-face, that provides the strongest source of anxiety."[73] In Ireland, this has been used to the effect of creating "an exaggerated Oedipus."[74] Bloom echoes this idea in his study of influence through his consideration of Freud, who identified this aspect of the sublime in the uncanny which returns from the flight of repression as "something familiar and old-established in the mind."[75] Patriarchal figures and structures are ingrained into society and are equally relevant to the critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence'. In Ireland, the father's gaze can often be equated with the same lenses and power dynamics as the colonial gaze showing how the notion of the father has been "expanded beyond all bounds"[76] leading to "an Oedipalisation of the universe."[77]

Griffith has observed the "tendencies of Greek tragedy to reimpose those deeply familiar patterns of aristocratic and paternal domination."[78] I agree with this observation as it extends to classical reception. Greek tragedy can show us that as much as the *oikos* can only survive by the proper reverence of son for father, so too can the colonial structure only persist by these terms. I think that Greek tragedy can also work to have the direct opposite effect of Griffith's statement depending on the cultural context. Greek tragedy acts as a cautionary tale for upholding the patriarchal structure, and ultimately peace. However, on the reverse, it also works as an instruction manual for how to dismantle it.

Patriarchal archetypes act as "exemplary models … through which one relives the myths that give meaning."[79] Since man "never perceives anything fully or comprehends anything completely,"[80] it is only through symbolism and familiar narratives that these relationships can be approached. Meadow observes that "the human mind tends to express symbolically that which it poorly understands intellectually."[81] The tragic father as an archetype exists in one way as a model for behaviour and as a reflection of society's standards. Yet, in an example like *Antigone*, Creon as the surrogate father-figure gives us a model that shows how not to behave, and the importance of rejecting the influence of a

[73] Griffith, 1998: 33. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the Corinthian asks Oedipus in similar terms whether "it was for *fear* of this you fled the city? (1000)" [Sophocles, 2008a: 81 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto); italics original].
[74] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 9-15.
[75] Bloom, 2011: 180.
[76] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 10.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Griffith, 1998: 79.
[79] Meadow, 1992: 188.
[80] Jung, 1988: 21.
[81] Meadow, 1992: 188.

despotic ruler.[82] It is a literary symbol that pervades real life and demonstrates how "Irish writers are frequently engaged in obsessive encounters with a past which must be rejected, transformed or accommodated."[83] The myths and the archetypes within them "forcefully put us in mind of something,"[84] that 'something', here, is the patriarch.

In his essay, *Approaching the Unconscious*, Carl Jung recounts an experience that he had with a tribe in East Africa.[85] In it, Jung shows a direct account of how patriarchal authority can shift and change according to context and how the patriarchal authority, in this case taking the form of colonial Britain, can alter the appearance of a society's archetypes. In this particular instance, the figure of cultural and paternal authority was now a foreign, colonial power, and no longer the indigenous elders and learned men of the tribe. To remind ourselves of the previous connection between Ireland and Africa and their reliance on Greek tragedy, in both cases we see male archetypal figures being forcefully interrupted by 'Father Colonialism', and because of this, a colonial or postcolonial society offers an interpretation of parricide as an "acceptable or socially necessary act"[86] that provides a "disruption of the present order."[87] This is nowhere more apparent than in the adoption of Oedipal models and parricidal narratives in Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, exemplifying how Jung clarifies the relationships between instincts and archetypes.

The instincts are the "physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses."[88] These instincts "manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images."[89] These manifestations are archetypes. Therefore, the patriarchal figure is driven to his archetype by instinct, but the similar instinct to reject or overthrow that patriarch's influence is deeply related to the archetype itself. All of this is considered, in line with the next section, with the understanding that Jung's archetypes and Freud's "family romance"[90]

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[82] Sophocles, 2008b.
[83] Kenneally, 1988: 4.
[84] Davis, 1985: 27.
[85] "To my amazement, these tribesmen denied that they had any dreams. But through patient, indirect talks with them I soon found that they had dreams just like everyone else, but that they were convinced their dreams had no meaning. 'Dreams of ordinary men mean nothing,' they told me. They thought that the only dreams that mattered were those of the chiefs and medicine men; these, which concerned the welfare of the tribe, were highly appreciated. The only drawback was that the chief and the medicine man both claimed that they had ceased having meaningful dreams. They dated the change from the time that the British came to their country. The District Commissioner – the British Official in charge of them – had taken over the function of the "great dreams that had hitherto guided the tribes behaviour" (Jung, 1988: 52).
[86] Lloyd, 2011: 64.
[87] Roche, 2001: 104.
[88] Jung, 1988: 69.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Freud, 2001: 235-241.

are useful historical models of influence and understanding. Despite their problems, they did contribute a base-line of understanding to later, more developed models. Bloom effectively articulates this project's attitude towards the works of Jung and Freud when he writes that "no one writing about anxiety, even if it is more textual than human, can evade Sigmund Freud, though I have spent a lifetime trying."[91]

'Theoretical Fathers'

I mentioned how Harold Bloom felt that Oedipus should only be used as a 'rhetorical flourish'.[92] This is how we shall consider the theories of Jung (and in the background, Freud) in this discussion. Although this study does not wish to rely too heavily on Jung, his accounts still do allow us to "discover the full sense of [myth's] primordiality in the diversity of experience."[93] Ultimately, Jung is being employed here as a foil to demonstrate Bruce Kapferer's more succinct elucidations about "the nature of human consciousness and how human beings both make and conceive the construction of their existential realities."[94] This use of myth is not meant to "provide a comprehensive understanding,"[95] as Jung and Freud try to do. Rather, it acknowledges that "the myths have broad thematic structures through which the experiential possibilities and the import or the meaning of particular contexts of action can be constructed."[96] While Jung is useful in examining a base understanding of myth-making, archetypes, and features that drive societies and the collective unconscious, this study's understanding of how myth is relied upon in Hibernian Philhellenism is through clarifying that "the myths are not so much structures of meaning in themselves as instruments through which dimensions of human actualities are enframed and grasped."[97]

Jung is also useful to show how the tradition and theories surrounding tradition formation have changed from Stanford to now. Like Stanford, we cannot deny that Jung existed as a 'cultural father' and continues to exist as a strand of influence in his own right. It is not to say that Jung and Ingold align in the construction of Hibernian Philhellenism, but rather to demonstrate how "after enough time has elapsed, every single one of the

[91] Bloom, 2011: 14.
[92] Bloom, 1997: xxii.
[93] Kapferer, 1997: 62.
[94] Ibid: xi.
[95] Ibid: 62.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

threads that were once running together have given way to those more recently introduced."[98] Through briefly historicising Jung and Freud, I am attempting to actively expand the model to show and contrast the progression of the thinking behind tradition formation, influence, and direct and indirect relationships with a predecessor – but also to acknowledge that you cannot erase things that once, and in many ways still do, inform(ed) thinking. Thoughts and theories can arise from an antagonistic model. There is no form of influence that is artistically destructive since "influence proceeds at both a conscious and unconscious level … [and] the strength of a text is the text that it represses."[99] So in Ingold's newer models and in Bloom's studies, Jung and Freud are, at once, repressed and present through their contribution to the structure of the rope.

The way we approach these different understandings of influence and consciousness is by knowing that "correspondence, in this sense, is a joining *with* rather than a joining *up.*"[100] Here, 'consciousness' is considered "a plurality of individual minds"[101] that maintains the idea that "there are always other words in a work, other texts in a text."[102] We cannot divorce the work of Freud from Bloom's study. We cannot evade Jungian archetypes as a way to historicise how Ingold treats generations. Either way, the use of myth in this context and according to this critical theme is significant as it directly speaks to how "one of the important functions of myth *is that it anchors the present in the past.*"[103] I am approaching tradition formation with an understanding that "the interpretation of a poem necessarily is always interpretation of that poem's interpretation of other poems."[104]

T. S. Eliot describes how tradition, in the sense of following the previous generation, should:

> Positively be discouraged … Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour. It involves in the first place the historical sense … and the historical sense involves a perception not of the pastness of the past but of its presence … This historical sense, which is a

[98] Ingold, 2024: 9.
[99] Doody, 2018: 16.
[100] Ingold, 2024: 62.
[101] Ingold, 2015: 9.
[102] Alfaro, 1996: 268.
[103] Cohen, 1969: 349. Italics original.
[104] Bloom, 1975: 75.

> sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal, and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.[105]

Ingold, for example, is not directly following Jung and Freud, but his historical sense is what allows him to be different yet still contribute to the tradition, equating "the passage of generations to the winding rope, of which every life is a strand."[106] Strands can run out, and at a certain stage in the tradition may not be directly used in the active process of entwining, but they still contribute to the history and the memory of the rope. If this was not the case, Jung and Freud would be forgotten completely as "nothing can hold on unless it puts out a line, and unless that line can tangle with others."[107]

Richard Ellmann writes that Joyce "found the *Odyssey* beautifully all-embracing in its vision of human concerns."[108] The *Odyssey* and the work of Joyce can speak to the universal, and this can be hard to avoid since "classicism always contains within it a yearning for the universal."[109] We can appreciate why archetypes were treated as useful ways of neatly categorising myths for so long. However, it is relationality that we are more in favour of in this reading. Something which neglects to come through in the work of Freud and Jung is the fact that "myths exhaust interpretation [,] [t]hey open out to meaning rather than circumscribe or contain it."[110] A major difference between Kapferer and his predecessor's understandings are how "for Jung, the symbolic structure of the unconscious is a reality, *sui generis*: it cannot be fully reduced to any other level of experience."[111] Whereas, for Kapferer, the myth itself is an experience. It is still necessary to include ways of understanding patterns, sequences, and threads that exist across civilisations. In creation and charter myths across a wide variety of civilisations, we can draw similar themes and characters that can be loosely grouped together into something similar as to what Jung calls his 'archetypes'. This can be problematic as it treats myth "as an irreducible mental property."[112] Despite the oft-criticised generalisations, simplifications, and conveniences of these models and theories, they still allude in some way to the importance of these collective experiences and their anthropological presence in the psyche. The difference is

[105] Eliot, 1951: 14.
[106] Ingold, 2024: 17.
[107] Ingold, 2015: 3.
[108] Ellmann, 1977: 570.
[109] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 182.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Cohen, 1969: 340.
[112] Ibid.

that now we move away from reductionist uses of the universal to instead consider how individuals create the collective, instead of the collective just passively existing.

In Ireland, we see the collective as incorporating a shared reliance on Greek tragedy (and its receptions), patriarchal archetypes, and father-son conflict. This is what Kenneally calls "perhaps the single most recurring impulse in current Irish writing, an obsession with the past, be it personal biography, national history or literary tradition, which … frequently takes on mythic and archetypal dimensions."[113] Due to the unique Irish context and the relationship with colonial power structures in Ireland at this time, we can add a level of "*intentionality.*"[114] Kapferer claims this 'intentionality' "does not include notions of motivation, reason, or value."[115] In Ireland it was fuelled by the problem, articulated by Keats, of "how to confront the worldliness that necessarily inheres in all classical reading, and how to embrace the positive aspects of worldliness (dialogue, experience, wisdom, cosmopolitanism) without reproducing imperial tropes of dominance and appropriation."[116]

The reception of Greek tragedy in contexts of Irish political and religious conflict could be seen as:

> Being merely a matter of literary history (traditional myth, inheritance from epic, etc.) and narratological convention (universal story patterns): but it amounts to an irresistible tendency (at least within Classical Greek literature, as in Elizabethan and Victorian) to affirm the Father as the symbol, or representative, or embodiment (Lacan's transcendental signifier) of social or aesthetic, as well as familial, Order.[117]

This proves that "*history is correspondence*."[118] It is the pattern of life that seemingly exists in our collective unconscious. We could call it a pattern, or we could recognise that "if the same track is trodden often enough, the many individual prints merge into a continuous path."[119] As we cannot trace understandings of mythic models or archetypes from a

[113] Kenneally, 1988: 4.
[114] Kapferer, 1997: 194.
[115] Ibid.
[116] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 187.
[117] Griffith, 1998: 77. Lacan's 'transcendental signifier' refers to a concept that can exceed language, it speaks to the collective understanding that can be difficult to track across different societies that inexplicitly share it beyond clear logic or reason. Lacan has used it specifically in a way that symbolically relates to the agonistic tensions in 'cultural paternal influence' and literary influence through the castration anxiety (Harris, 2017: 112).
[118] Ingold, 2015: 157. This correspondence is "the process in which human lives, in their passage and their self-making, their aspiration and prehension, their imagination and perception, exposure and atonement, submission and master, continually answer to one another" (Ibid).
[119] Ibid: 63.

generalised and convenient 'collective unconscious', so too can we not "then, read individual movements from a path, but only those commonly or collectively made."[120] In this way, the rope, the knot, and the path are social; whereas the footprints and the strands are individual.[121] While Jung and his contemporaries have been criticised for their singularity and simplification in this study, I still support that there has to be an understanding of a collective unconscious that goes beyond the individual. We rely on these perceptions to further place the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism within historical dialogues, and to show through engagement and rejection of them "that every world is but a view of the world"[122] and that is no less the case in the Irish tradition.

Conclusion

In her 2004 work, *Mocked with Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton*,[123] Emily Wilson concludes that "what has remained constant is significant."[124] Greek myth is something that has 'remained constant' in Western civilisation (more generally), and as allusions and frameworks in the literary and theoretical canon (more specifically). This has much to do with the different functions that myth can perform for a society and an author. No matter how nuanced an understanding we have of the formation of traditions, collective memory, and identities, for the non-professional classicist or a general reader "the classical … remains the archetypal."[125] It also remains a reliable route into a tradition. This section has argued extensively against universality but still acknowledges that "the universal characteristics of the collective unconscious of mankind takes local forms which are expressed in the varieties of myth."[126] Here, the universal is most applicable to uses by non-professional classicists but I am more interested in how they take what they *think* will allow them entry into a universal canon and apply it to the local. In doing so, they (consciously or unconsciously) create a new tradition of reception for those myths that is specifically tied to their identity.

In order to understand the function of myth, we must approach it with a certain theory in mind. The most important distinction to make is that the myths "are not

[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ingold, 2015: 135.
[123] Wilson, 2004.
[124] Marsh, 2011: 119.
[125] Levin, 1957: 50.
[126] Cohen, 1969: 340.

representations of lived realities but rather thematic schemes."[127] This will be made abundantly clear in the next section through the specific myths chosen in the reception of the classics in Ireland, and the double layer of the engagement of myth within Greek tragedy. This is, of course, considered with the added tension of the colonial oppressors' supposed 'ownership' of Greek tragedy and other classical material.

Throughout this remainder of this Chapter, I want to employ a joint understanding of how Kapferer approaches myths, and their simultaneous mythopoeic use, to how my central figures are seen to engage with them.[128] This is especially evident in their method of using tragic myths and mythic models to interact with society, and feed into new conceptions of identity arising from times of political and religious crisis. The late nineteenth century to the present sees much mythologising in the name of certain causes – whether in terms of the bolstering of a national identity in reaction to a colonial power, or a community identity across a sectarian divide. This myth-making, with our understanding of the term 'myth' itself can be thought of as "one way of using language for expressive purposes, through the symbolic devices of metonymy and synecdoche, … that is an end in itself."[129] My central figures respectively are "not an interpreter in the sense of one who simply repeats in another form a message that has been put into his lip to say,"[130] but one who interprets the society around them in their own act of classical reception. Since the works are created in line with particular myths, the myths that are used act as an example of "the processes of the mind as projected onto the world."[131] Most importantly, they are examples of how "myth is a way of anchoring the present in the past"[132]

The next section will further elaborate on how "Ireland's identity was compromised; England was always implicit in Ireland's image of self."[133] The relevant question in this colonial context then "isn't how to become free in relation to [the predecessor] (an Oedipal question) but how to find a path there where [the predecessor]

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[127] Kapferer, 1997: 62.
[128] The mythopoeic is "that which treats myth as a form of explanation and, in particular, a form which occurs at a certain stage in the development of human society and culture; that which treats myth as a form of symbolic statement which has the function, not of explanation, but of expression as an end in itself, and which reflects a particular type of thought, the mythopoeic; that which treats it as an expression of the unconscious; that which accounts for it in terms of its function in creating and maintaining social solidarity, cohesion, etc.; that which stresses its function in legitimating social institutions and social practices; that which treats it as a form of symbolic statement about social structure, possibly linked with ritual; and, finally, there is the structuralist theory" (Cohen, 1969: 338).
[129] Ibid: 339.
[130] Wilde, 2019: 83.
[131] Cohen, 1969: 340.
[132] Ibid: 350.
[133] Doody, 2018: 71.

didn't find any."[134] *Oedipus* is relevant in this period in Ireland "not as an allegory for the ways in which social and family structures constrain our desires but as the dramatization of a particular relation 'between political power and factual knowledge'."[135] Miller describes how Foucault's understanding of *Oedipus* is as "dramatizing a specific moment in the history of the constitution of truth and its relation to power in the west."[136] There could be no clearer mythic paradigm for Irish writers of this period to adopt as a way to combat colonial Western powers, and to position themselves as a worthy and culturally independent member of the Western tradition. This is exactly what we will see, following an investigation into the reliance of *Oedipus* in this period, in practice between Wilde and Mahaffy through Wilde's public rejection of him. This example will speak to the context that is tied into the discussion of kinship in the previous Chapter where "in societies on the brink of revolution, the relation between fathers and sons is reversed."[137] This need to invent "a better father necessarily demanded that Irish writers invent an alternative version of the past"[138] that allows an opportunity to explore "how the topic of the individual and the classical tradition might be addressed."[139]

[134] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 10.
[135] Miller, 2021: 27.
[136] Ibid: 28.
[137] Kiberd, 1995: 380.
[138] Ibid: 386.
[139] Riley, 2018: 11.

2.3. Role-playing: *Oedipus* and Oedipal Frameworks

In 1913, Pádraig Pearse declared that "it is from Greece that we have received our standards."[140] This was meant in terms of how classical reception can be understood as a baseline for Western literary and cultural influence. In this Chapter, the focus is on how Greek tragedy was employed in periods of political turbulence and conflict in Ireland from the late nineteenth century to the present. If we are to understand Pearse's statement in this context, the 'standards' received from Greek tragedy in this regard are the absence and removal of authoritarian father-figures from civic life. This is consequential, not just because, as observed by Tóibín, "fathers in Irish writing are absent, or angry, or mad, or strangely silent;"[141] but also since the 'father' figure stands for much more than just a parent in the Irish context.

In this section, we will identify a dependence on Greek tragedy, specifically the "affective currency of Oedipalised family narratives,"[142] as a way to understand and represent the removal of 'Father Colonialism' in Ireland.[143] Pearse's statement is also relevant to the debate over 'classical' terminology, as seen in the previous Chapter. This section similarly raises the question of not just *which* but *whose* classics are being adapted in Ireland, and how much (or little) Irish interest in the classics on approaching these issues has to do with the 'Classical' as opposed to the 'Greek'? As this project is concerned with influence, it emphasises the "interactive relationship between the source culture and the receiving culture with a focus on the cultural processes that shape these relationships"[144] in the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism.

It is undeniable that classical material and classical allusion played a prominent role in the fight for Irish Independence, and in the formation of a new Irish identity that coincided with the formation of the Free State. Ireland's literary history acted as a

[140] Pearse, 1998: 132.
[141] Tóibín, 2001: xxiii.
[142] Cleary, 1999: 509.
[143] As elucidated in the previous section, this is done through Kapferer's mythic lens, and Ingold and Bloom's theories of influence and tradition formation (see Kapferer, 1997; Ingold, 2014; Ingold, 2024; Bloom, 1975; Bloom, 1997; Bloom, 2011). In this period, nationalist cultural figures saw the presence of English rule in Ireland as "a pollution here in our midst, long-standing. This must we expel, nor let it grow past remedy (96-96)" [Sophocles, 2008a: 51 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto)]. In antiquity, this miasma could refer to a spiritual or social stain that result from transgressing religious or community conventions. Here, we can consider it to mean how certain figures saw the consequences of English colonial rule as having 'polluted' Irish culture and identity.
[144] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 16.

"revolutionary force"[145] with "revolutionary conditions,"[146] proving that "if colonialism is a system, so also is resistance"[147] (once again reminding us of its place as a 'minor literature'). Ireland's coloniality is unique in how "the cultural revival preceded and in many ways enabled the political revolution that followed,"[148] due to the "cramped space [that] forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics."[149] This section analyses the use of classical references, allusions, and models in the artistic and civic resistance against patriarchal colonial structures, alongside the blurring of public and private conflict. The models chosen in these periods speak directly to the critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence' and the agonistic nature of influence. One of the primary goals of a minor literature is the "purification of the conflict that opposes father and son and the possibility of discussing that conflict."[150] By enacting and exploring this tension, the minor literature hopes to make these canonical models a "political program,"[151] contributing to a tradition, but also bringing these roles to completion. In other words, they have to play out the father-son dynamic in order to be able to move beyond it.

Prior to the Gaelic Revival, "the country had no outlet in which to express its national imagination."[152] But it would quickly become clear that Ireland's "'fountain of nationality' was to be classical at its source,"[153] and the identity of the country was to be shaped by the "the ancient promise and powerful allure of classics."[154] The Gaelic Revival fused the ancient Greek tradition with the Celtic to try and "produce a new Ireland greater than the sum of its parts."[155] As we saw in the previous Chapter, the application of 'fictive kinship' to new interpretations of ethnicity is not unusual in colonised nations. In this period it was the 'certain Greek kinship' that was implemented "to decolonise Irish art and to restore Ireland to its place among the great world cultures."[156] The works of the Gaelic Revival are thus inextricably "imbued with political agency,"[157] in their guise as a "method

[145] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 19.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Kiberd, 1995: 13.
[148] Ibid: 4.
[149] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 17.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Baker, 2022: 60.
[153] Ibid: 94. Referring to what Yeats' called the 'fountain of nationality' in a 'Letter to the Editor of *United Ireland*', 17th December 1892 (Yeats, 1970: 256).
[154] Baker, 2022: 31.
[155] Kiberd, 1995: 425.
[156] Nolan, 10th May 2022.
[157] Walshe, 1996: 161.

of colonial protest under the cover of art."[158] We will see that this "impulse to employ receptions of classical antiquity became a means to promote nationalist interests and the revival"[159] that will continue to be reflected in a later discussion of classical engagement during, and in reference to, the Troubles.

Declan Kiberd wonders "were the Irish a hybrid people?"[160] Identity is a major preoccupation of this section. We will discern how Wilde, Mahaffy, and Tóibín all contributed to separate conceptions of an Irish national identity that was fuelled by their respective contexts. The imagery and sentiment surrounding the 1916 Rising was ubiquitously classical. Fr Patrick Dineen, a leading scholar in Irish and classical languages, compared the "destruction in Dublin after the Easter Rising of 1916 to the burning, sacked city of Troy."[161] The nationalist leaders and the new cultural movement at this time were "drawn to the symbolism of the dynamics of power of the chronicles … because they expressed the process of power, its dynamics, in which they were already active."[162] An analysis of the Gaelic literary and political revival is interesting, not only because it "reveals the importance of culture as a factor in destabilizing empires,"[163] but because many of the figures at the forefront were non-professional classicists who were flourishing at this time when native Irish literature and culture were supposed to be at the forefront. Therefore, they inadvertently challenged their own desired, prescribed outcome of the Gaelic Revival – establishing of Ireland as a "culturally distinct and coherent nation"[164] – through the 'classical' methods they utilised to achieve that goal.

As was discussed in the introduction of this Chapter, Ireland's political reception of classical materials is directly related to its postcolonial condition and this section will examine what caused "the literature of antiquity to be a comfortable, natural ally of ideologically motivated post-colonial"[165] literature. The Irish were "the first modern people to decolonise in the twentieth century,"[166] helping to shape a wider cultural context in which

[158] Doody, 2018: 78.
[159] Baker, 2022: 47.
[160] Kiberd, 1995: 7. We can understand this hybridity as being akin to Homi Bhabha's 'theory of hybridity', or "third space", which speaks to the complex nature of the communication between the colonised and the coloniser that creates new cultural forms and identities (Bhaba, 1994: 36-39). Hibernian Philhellenism is a hybrid tradition that is fuelled by these same tensions of reception. Bhaba, like Kristeva, describes his theory as one of "ambivalence" (Ibid: 11). Like Ingold, he also describes it as "in-between" (Ibid: 14).
[161] Dineen, 2016: 10.
[162] Kapferer, 1997: 291.
[163] Heath, 2010: 7.
[164] Deane, 1986: 61.
[165] Perris, 2008: 55.
[166] Kiberd, 1995: 5.

other postcolonial societies "looked … to the Irish for guidance"[167] in the construction of their own traditions. This is an example of how:

> Although there are strands of anti- and post- colonial literature in which Greek and Roman classics are tarnished by association with modern empires and colonial structures of power, there are also many classical receptions in anti- and post-colonial literatures in English in which Greek and Roman classics are used to challenge the idea of a single 'great' or 'classical' tradition.[168]

In Hibernian Philhellenism, the opportunity for parallels were rife and the "nationalists could find a kindred spirit of freedom in ancient Athens, or compare Ireland to Greece under the Romans in suffering at the hands of stronger but culturally inferior neighbours."[169]

An exploration of the Gaelic Revival and its reliance on Oedipal narratives will further examine "who invented Ireland?"[170] Identity in post-colonial Ireland must be considered fluid, but attempts to conceive of a new independent identity in preparation for the formation of a Free State was driven by the "politicization of (classical) literature."[171] This remains a complicated matter as, even though members of cultural movements continuously turned to the classical again and again, "cultural nationalism of the Irish Renaissance could be hostile to the use of Greek and Roman material."[172] There is also the added complication wherein there was hostility towards the Anglo-Irish (Protestant) connotations and institutions that represented the tradition of Greek and Roman material. Scrutiny and criticism was directed towards those who were seen to control, and benefit from, the cultural capital that these materials represented. Mahaffy, as a figure of cultural contention during the Gaelic Revival, clearly represents this. Despite its divisiveness, "the classical tradition retained its relevance in this period."[173]

It is very easy to comment on Mahaffy's role in the political use of classical material in this period but it is not as easy "to place Oscar Wilde neatly in any one of the niches of the intellectual culture of the nineteenth century."[174] Unfortunately, Wilde died before he

[167] Ibid: 4.
[168] Greenwood, 2019: 577.
[169] Lloyd, 2011: 52.
[170] Kiberd, 1995: 1.
[171] Perris, 2008: 65.
[172] Arkins, 2005: 10. See also Fallis, 1977; and particularly Ní Mhurchú, 2020.
[173] Lloyd, 2011: 52.
[174] Alexander, 1984: 76.

could see the Gaelic Revival come to fruition. But we can get a glimpse of his feelings and positions on many of the same matters by looking at his interactions with, and rejections of, Mahaffy's writings which, in turn, firmly underline Mahaffy's personal views. By seeing the parts that Wilde rejects, we can get an image of Wilde's own views. Alexander remarks that "Wilde was undeniably in revolt against much that made up the social and intellectual milieus of his time."[175] Wilde would realise that Mahaffy came to represent much of what contributed to these milieus, and, in many ways, Mahaffy was the direction in which he channelled this revolt.

In their 2020 edited volume, *Classics and Irish Politics*, Torrance and O'Rourke explore how "with the exception of literature alluding to the Northern Irish Troubles … little attention has been paid to the political implications specific to Irish engagement with classical models."[176] This section will explore the conditions in Hibernian Philhellenism that led to the reliance on classical models in this period, before the next moves on to explore how Tóibín contributed to the more widely acknowledged trend of classicising the Troubles. This section works chronologically in terms of these political events in order to ensure the context is firmly established. It is not to say that we are reverting back to the idea of the 'stack' where "every generation has its own layer, furnishing its embers."[177] Instead, we are maintaining the idea of the rope where "each strand must find purchase in the world by binding with others."[178] In the case of the political and, oftentimes, Oedipal conditions and attitudes of society, this binding is not always harmonious but can instead be caused by opposing forces. This accounts for our conceptualisation of this domain as a 'knot', since "knotting is about how contrary forces of tension and frictions, as in pulling tight, are generative of new forms."[179] The 'new forms' are the works and contributions to the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism that engage with ancient Greek tragic materials against the critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence'.

Killing 'Father Colonialism': *Oedipus* in Artistic and Civic Action

Classical discourse was central to the main political and cultural movements that defined the formation of the Irish Free State, and characterised the Irish literary tradition as we

[175] Ibid: 75.
[176] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 2.
[177] Ingold, 2024: 95.
[178] Ibid: 96.
[179] Ingold, 2015: 18.

know it today. This began with the Gaelic Revival and its two main supporters: The Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Theatre. Colm Tóibín muses on this unusual situation wherein, "Irish nationalism was constructed by writers as much as by politicians or revolutionaries."[180] W. B. Yeats believed that Sophoclean tragedy would seem "at home"[181] in Ireland, and during this period we see a preference towards 'Oedipal' narratives. The conjunction and overlap between the political and literary revival meant that the Rising became repeatedly "recast as a … a poet's revolution."[182]

Despite its Celtic intentions, the Gaelic Revival incorporated what I see as ostensibly a latter-day Renaissance of the classical world (specifically, Classical Greece) in a singularly Irish context.[183] In keeping with the artistic and political tendency towards Hellenism in Ireland, the overall goal of the Gaelic Revival had specifications that are of the utmost importance when understanding this rich history of influence: it "was not so much to become like the Greeks as to reproduce the ways in which the Greeks once had the courage to become and assume their own deepest, destined selves."[184] The previously outlined historical and legendary 'Greek kinship' was the route that the leaders of the concurrent movements took to achieve this. Therefore, during the Gaelic Revival we see public figures capitalising on a perceived flexibility of classical materials and the potential relevance they had to Irish issues.

In his speech, *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland*, Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, points to the classical as an important part of Ireland's cultural history:

> If we take a bird's-eye view of our island to-day, and compare it with what it used to be, we must be struck by the extraordinary fact that the nation which was once as everyone admits, one of the most classical learned and cultured nations in Europe, is now one of the least so.[185]

Despite the fact that the promotion of all things Gaelic and Celtic was at the top of Hyde's agenda, an important part of reclaiming and revitalising the culture of Ireland is to do the

[180] Tóibín, 1995: 138.
[181] Yeats, 2000: 245.
[182] Moloney, 2020: 60.
[183] Ireland's literary history was rare in Europe in how it was "not so corrupted by the Renaissance" (Kiberd, 2020: 40).
[184] Ibid.
[185] Hyde, 1904.

same to classical learning.[186] It is very significant that the classics are fundamental to a perceived aspect of the Irish identity as being 'cultured'.

We have considered how Ireland, "unlike countries in Western Europe which had come under the direct influence of the Romans, imagined it shared a special relationship with Greece."[187] This was the case for many of the political leaders of the Easter Rising, who "dressed their revolution in Greek and Roman clothing."[188] Walter Starkie similarly describes the Easter Rising in such a way that bids Ireland's efforts towards Independence entry to the Greek mythic past:

> On that Easter Tuesday morning I knew for the first time that Ireland, my island home, was Mediterranean, but like the magic island of Delos it had escaped from the inland sea and gone wandering, towards the fabled west in the wake of the Hellenic wanderers.[189]

The colonial instability of Irish identity means that "the story of the revolutionary generation in Ireland remains complex and powerful and difficult to tell."[190] This is most apparent through the internal struggle between notions of the 'Celt' and 'Gael', exhibited by figures like Pádraig Pearse.

One of the most notable examples of the direct use of antiquity from this period is Pádraig Pearse's 'Graveside Oration at the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa'.[191] Largely modelled on 'Pericles' Funerary Oration' to citizens of Athens during the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides: 2.34-46),[192] it is both an apology for the deaths that are to come and an equal justification for them. In a discussion that relates to the "unacknowledged influence of classical oratory on Pearse's public speeches,"[193] Brian McGing remarks that it is striking that while the 'Graveside Oration' "contains no hint of a reference to Greek or Roman history or literature, it is stylistically so full of the figures and tropes of Greek and

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[186] Conflict also erupted between the political and literary leaders of these movements, some who were trying to promote purely Celtic materials (the Gaelic League) and some who were using classical materials for Celtic means (the Irish Literary Theatre). Despite this conflict and despite the original intention to revive the Gaelic past, alongside that we also had this re-birth of the Classics; and, as mentioned, we see original classical literature thriving at a time when original Irish and Celtic matters were supposed to be at the forefront.
[187] Macintosh, 1994: 1.
[188] McGing, 2020: 44.
[189] Starkie, 1953 (quoted in Currie 2020:175, with permissions from the Starkie family).
[190] Tóibín, 12th June 2003.
[191] McGing, 2019: 145; Pearse, 1915. Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831-1915) was an Irish Fenian leader and member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB).
[192] Thucydides, 2009: 90-96.
[193] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 12.

Roman rhetoric that it could also have been written by Gorgias, Demosthenes, or Cicero."[194] Through a reliance on ancient oratory, Pearse places the struggle for Irish Independence alongside the struggles of an Athens who, in popular memory, represents: power, democracy, freedom, and high literature. Pearse is also partaking in the all-important myth-making of this period, speaking into existence what we can consider in hindsight as a type of prophecy.[195] This complicates our reception of this mythologising since "if myth anchors the present in the past, then prophesising anchors it in the future."[196] We can consider this speech to be part-myth, part-prophecy, as determined by the historical context of the speech itself since:

> Prophecy … emerge[s] in those social conditions where the basis of traditional legitimation is weak and where there has been, in any case, a weakening of other bonds of traditional, multiplex structures of relationship.[197]

Pearse is speaking at the pinnacle of that 'weakening', finding the perfect conditions to both myth-make and prophesise.

This speech would go on to be considered a monumental turning-point in the lead up to the Easter Rising, so much so that public funerals were closely policed for fear of such further displays. Not only is the formula of the Oration decidedly classical, but so too is the combination of language surrounding dead men and dead fathers, and the need to reclaim sovereignty, in the rhetoric. Classics did not just feed and bolster what would eventually become the sentiment and literature surrounding Irish Independence, it had a dual effect. For, it was also identified with Unionists like J.P. Mahaffy and the Protestant, imperial stronghold in Dublin that was Trinity College,[198] and was naturally viewed as a "rival"[199] to indigenous culture. Fiona Macintosh has explored this paradoxical relationship between the Celtic and classical past:

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[194] McGing, 2020: 42. McGing highlights the standard elements of *epitaphioi* as "the difficulty of composing adequate praise for the fallen; praise of ancestors; episodes of Athens' mystic and historical past; Athens' cultural leadership and championing of Greek freedom; consolation and exhortation for the living" (Ibid: 57). These can be seen in a comparative discussion of Pericles' and Pearse's speeches.
[195] The tensions surrounding this type of myth-making would re-surface in the years immediately following the premiere of *The Playboy of the Western World* (Synge, 1998), through the martyrdom of the 1916 leaders.
[196] Cohen, 1969: 351.
[197] Ibid: 352.
[198] Lloyd, 2011: 52. Mahaffy completed two works on the history of Trinity College Dublin as an institution. In 1902, he published *The Library of Trinity College, Dublin: The Growth of a Legend*; and in 1903, he published *An Epoch in Irish History: Trinity College Dublin, Its Foundation and Early Fortunes, 1591-1660*.
[199] Lloyd, 2011: 52.

> The Unionist sympathies of the custodians of that tradition at Trinity College Dublin, together with a keen sense of Celtic cultural inferiority that had been fostered in large measure by classical scholarship itself, meant that the classical tradition did not appear, on the surface at least, to be a natural ally of cultural nationalism.[200]

In this domain of Hibernian Philhellenism, this will be particularly evident through how artists responded to Independence by way of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (which was, consequently, written after Pericles made his Funerary Oration); and through Mahaffy and Wilde's Oedipal relationship.

In the immediate years before he gave his monumental speech at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa, Pearse had already established himself as a leader in this movement. As will be touched on later in this section, Pearse spoke against figures like J. P. Mahaffy. We have to imagine that Mahaffy is one of the 'educated Irishmen' that Pearse mentions in one of his *Three Lectures on Gaelic Topics*.[201] Alongside his views on the value of Irish literature, Pearse had also constructed a very clear idea of what he believed 'the Gael' to be. In his re-classification of members of the Irish race, he shifts the focus from the term 'Celt' "which had been largely a linguistic term, towards the 'Gael' which becomes almost exclusively an ethnic/ racial one."[202]

Pearse begins his speech, *The Intellectual Future of the Gael*, by establishing the destiny of this 'Gael' to be "more glorious than that of Rome, more glorious than that of Britain."[203] This, however does not extend to the Greeks, "the pioneers of intellectual progress in Europe"[204] that are "still enlightening and elevating mankind.[205] Pearse does not attempt to "refuse his admiration"[206] of the Greeks as it is explicitly through them that he constructs this new idealised image of 'the Gael'. He affirms that "what the Greek was to the ancient world the Gael will be to the modern; and in no point will the parallel prove more true than in the fervent and noble love of learning which distinguished both races."[207]

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[200] Macintosh, 1994: 3.
[201] "Yet in the face of these facts, we frequently hear educated Irishmen assert that the Irish language has produced no literature. 'O tempora! O Mores!'" (Pearse, 1897a: 16).
[202] Macintosh, 1994: 16.
[203] Pearse, 1897b: 221.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid: 231.

Figures like Pearse and W. B. Yeats believed that poetry and drama modelled on the classics, composed in the name of nationhood, would inspire the "conception of the race as noble as Aeschylus and Sophocles had of Greece."[208] Due to the sensitive political climate, it is not surprising that Athenian tragedy, let alone *Oedipus*, was chosen as a model. Firstly, Thebes stands as a paradigm for changing political rule. Secondly, while "tragedy specialised … in familial violence,"[209] and there is an "extreme rarity of amicable father-son interactions on the tragic stage,"[210] it is fitting that *Oedipus* specifically would be relied on at a time when Ireland was trying to subvert a patriarchal colonial system. In this way, England's presence shaped Ireland's responses to the contemporary. The use of *Oedipus* and the resultant 'family language' confirm how "the anxieties of heredity mirror the fears and conflicts of society at any one time."[211]

The promotion of an ancient Irish identity in line with the ancient Greeks is in keeping with Said's estimation that "it is impossible to avoid the combative, assertive early stages in the nativist identity – they *always* occur"[212] in the literature of decolonisation. Wilde and Mahaffy were aware of this phenomenon of 'Greek kinship'. Iain Ross describes how Oscar would have learned from his father, William Wilde:

> To consider the country of his birth, with its Homeric bards and monuments, a second Greece, the Greeks literally his kin, and his encounter with them more an intuition of native affinity than a positivist examination of a culture radically separate in time and place.[213]

This is a similar sentiment to Mahaffy's initial thoughts on Greece's natural similarities to Ireland (as seen in the previous Chapter), except that Mahaffy did not assign "to Irish mythology the grandeur of the Greek legend"[214] in the way that the Wildes did.

Despite their Anglo-Irish heritage, the Wildes were very interested in Ireland's ancient past. On top of that, Lady Jane 'Speranza' Wilde, Oscar's mother, encouraged him "to identify strongly with [his] Irish national identity."[215] This is true for many of the leaders

[208] Yeats, 1972: 184.
[209] Griffith, 1998: 33.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Gagné, 2013: 1.
[212] Said, 1994: 229. Italics original.
[213] Ross, 2014: 18. Yeats also claims that Wilde would make "him tell him long Irish stories and compared [his] art of storytelling to Homer" (Yeats, 1922: 25).
[214] Doody, 2018: 82.
[215] Ibid: 41.

of the Irish Renaissance and Gaelic Revival who leaned more towards the 'Irish' of their 'Anglo-Irish' ancestry. Doody, in her exploration of the influence of Wilde on Yeats, comments specifically on their "shared personal background' and their "deep and strong understanding of their complex cultural and political heritage."[216] Both Wilde and Yeats "negotiated their national identity at a young age through the literary heritage and landscape of the country and their individual family."[217] These shared experiences created an affinity between the two men, aspects of which I see reflected between Wilde and Tóibín.

Wilde's identification with 'Irishness' also included an interest in Catholicism that was once again encouraged by his mother.[218] Speranza "taught her children to admire the Catholic Church, which was the major patron of the arts in Victorian Ireland,"[219] alongside fostering an appreciation for nationalist sentiment. In Ireland, it is often hard to divorce the 'nationalist' from the 'Catholic'. Throughout his life, Wilde held a special appreciation for the spirit and aesthetic of Catholicism, no doubt aided by the fact that his mother brought him to the Catholic church in Glencree, County Wicklow for a second baptism as a four year old boy.[220]

Religion is a relevant factor in the Irish Renaissance. Ireland, "with its long monastic tradition, and Trinity College in particular were places distinguished for their classical education."[221] These two institutions, despite jointly strengthening Ireland's tradition of classicism, were constantly at odds with each other. Wilde and Mahaffy's contentious relationship and differing views on religion, social class, access, and education will attest to that. Wilde attended Trinity College and was a student under Mahaffy from 1871-1874, "a period which coincided with what has been described as a 'renaissance in classical scholarship.'"[222] At this time in the nineteenth century (and for part of the twentieth century, discussed in Chapter 1), students at Trinity would have all been Protestant.[223] We consider Wilde to exist 'in between' the Catholic church and Trinity College Dublin, classics remaining a common link between them. This irony is brought into sharp relief by Mahaffy who at once preserved, even strengthened, "the notion that Greeks and Irish sprang from common stock"[224] yet still held that "the pure Celt, who is

[216] Ibid: 42.
[217] Ibid.
[218] See Killeen, 2005.
[219] Kiberd, 2000: 331.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Robson, 2004: 301.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Vance, 2004: 287.
[224] Ross, 2014: 25.

always a Catholic, has less regard for truth than the Protestant, with his touch of Saxon breeding."[225]

Mahaffy's unambiguous disdain for the Irish language was fuelled by his politics which were "staunchly Protestant and Southern unionist."[226] 'Southern unionist' speaks to how "although a unionist and, through his family connections to counties Monaghan and Donegal, an Ulsterman, he never became and Ulster unionist, but remained an Irish unionist in the anti-partition tradition."[227] It is well documented that he "vehemently opposed these linguistic and literary movements"[228] and "frequently denigrated the Irish language and the Gaelic Revival in print."[229] Boyle, in his biography of Mahaffy similarly contends that he had no "time for Gaelic language and culture."[230] To Mahaffy, the 'Celtic' "had no educational value and was a mischievous waste of time for schoolchildren."[231] Thus, "the support of some Irish Protestants for the Gaelic League was especially upsetting to him,"[232] and he considered it to be "an act of betrayal."[233] We must imagine that Mahaffy considered the Wildes with their strong Celtic and nationalist predilections among these "traitorous"[234] Protestants.

Two separate but related incidents bring this difference between Mahaffy and the Wildes into sharp contrast. The first is the fact that Countess Constance Markievicz, one of the only female leaders of the Easter Rising, was known to have stayed in Dublin in the Wilde's home.[235] The second being that Mahaffy was the Provost of Trinity, and was in the Provost's House on College Green, at the time of the Easter Rising, when Trinity was acting as a garrison for the British army.[236] It is ironic that the former was supporting revolutionaries and the latter found himself in the midst of the action despite being openly hostile to movements of Irish political and cultural nationalism.

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[225] Mahaffy, 1894: 99.
[226] Boyle, 2015: 433.
[227] Mairs, 2010: 54.
[228] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 104.
[229] Mairs, 2010: 55.
[230] Boyle, 2015: 433.
[231] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 104.
[232] Mairs, 2010: 55.
[233] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 109. Mahaffy considered that "the long oppression of the Roman Catholics, and their enforced separation from Protestant society, has created a clan feeling, which in times of what one side translates as faith towards country and religion, the other calls traitorous betrayal of friends and relations" (Mahaffy, 1894: 99).
[234] Ibid.
[235] Doody, 2018: 33.
[236] See Sweetman, 2019. See also the diary kept by Mahaffy's daughter, Elsie, during this time (*Mahaffy Family Collection*, TCD MS 2074).

Mahaffy openly believed that there was "an Irish race and an Anglo-Irish race."[237] His view and hatred of the 'Celt' seem "informed by his classical education: the Celts were inferior and disruptive to Roman civilisation."[238] When he speaks of the connection between the Irish and the Greeks, he was no doubt equating the 'Anglo-Irish' with the Greek, and the 'Irish' with the Celt. It is also important to clarify that when Mahaffy speaks of the 'Greeks' in a favourable way, he is unequivocally referring to the 'ancient Greeks'. In similarly disparaging ways to how he spoke about the native Irish, he referred to the modern Greeks as "mongrel villains."[239] It is from these statements that we can better understand the derogatory nature in which the Irish were referred to as 'Grecian', alongside Mahaffy's use of 'firbolg' as an insult.

As we will see throughout this thesis, Mahaffy's works "reveal much about the author's own political and cultural prejudices."[240] Due to Mahaffy's high ranking position in Trinity, these prejudices had a public impact. At this time, it was Trinity College Professors who "control[led] the national board [of education]."[241] The "broad influence of Trinity College in Ireland was a … troublesome problem"[242] for members of the Gaelic League and cultural movement. Even though I do not believe the evidence supports claims that the Gaelic Revival and the nationalist movement were "wary of the classical tradition,"[243] these circumstances can certainly account for their origin.

In the centre of Dublin sat Trinity College "which was seen as a remote bastion of Hellenism – [that] was not merely contemptuous of the nationalist cause but openly hostile to it and to any attempts to foster a national literature."[244] Fiona Macintosh names the "the two most representative figures of this hostility"[245] as being Edward Dowden, Professor of English, and John Pentland Mahaffy, Professor of Ancient History. Mahaffy, as well as becoming Provost of Trinity, was a Commissioner for National Education and opposed the introduction of the Irish language and Celtic history and literature into school and university programmes.[246] His influence was, for a long-time, successful, and caused Hyde, an open critic of Mahaffy, to profess:

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[237] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 123.
[238] Mairs, 2010: 58.
[239] Mahaffy, 1887: 22.
[240] Mairs, 2010: 51.
[241] Sharpe, 2017: 99.
[242] Baker, 2022: 24.
[243] Macintosh, 1994: 4.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Denvir, 1997: 50.

> How delighted … Mahaffy, and the rest of the anti-Irish-men will be when they read it. For it is their teaching that has prevailed and not ours. It is not we. It is Trinity College that has conquered and not the Gaelic League.[247]

Many of the artistic choices that were made in this period can be explained by the presence of figures like Dowden and Mahaffy. Firstly, a Professor of *English* would remind the cultural movement of Ireland's lack of cultural independence and, due to the Penal Laws, of the feeling of being "a sort of stranger *within* his own language."[248] Secondly, the type of classics that Mahaffy represented were seen as "a potential rival to the indigenous culture promoted by the Gaelic Revival."[249]

Despite the fact that, during the Irish Renaissance, the classical was adopted by nationalistic movements (and the 'certain Greek kinship' was enforced), Mahaffy "lay claim to being responsible for making Hellenism synonymous with unionism."[250] This attachment is something that still lingers to the label of 'classics' in Ireland, and it accounts for why we must move away from terms like the 'Irish Classical Tradition' which are rooted in the efforts of classicists like Mahaffy who "sought to justify British imperialism Ireland through his work as a classical scholar."[251] Mahaffy's views on Irish politics strongly support this assertion when he offers that "as for Ireland's right to political freedom, the world was, always had been, and always would be, better off without small, independent, nationalistic states."[252] I posit that it is as a direct result to attitudes such as these that Ireland

[247] 'Letter from Douglas Hyde to the Editor of the *Freeman's Journal'*, 5th September 1900 (reproduced in full in Sharpe, 2017: 98).
[248] Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 26. This is a direct example of how our 'minor literature' manifests in Ireland. During their colonial conquest of Ireland, "England had enacted throughout the centuries many unjust laws in an attempt to re-make Ireland in its own image; in the process existing traditions and culture were entirely disregarded" (Doody, 2018: 70). Yeats is noted to have expressed feeling conflicted towards the results of English colonialism, one of which being the English language, his vehicle to appreciating and contributing to the tradition of literature written in English: "no people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive; there are moments when hatred poisons my life … [but] I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate" (Yeats, 1994: 211). See also O'Higgins, 2017: 100-106.
[249] Lloyd, 2011: 52.
[250] Macintosh, 1994: 5. See O'Higgins for an exploration as to why "interest in Greece and Rome might signal republican ideology" (O'Higgins, 2017: 8).
[251] Ibid.
[252] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 123.

continuously reminds us of "the prominence of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in postcolonial theatre."[253]

Yeats and Synge

In December 1906, Yeats considered staging a production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* at the Abbey. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* would be premiering a month later. At the time, *Oedipus* was banned in the UK under censorship laws but there had been no similar censor put in place in Ireland.[254] Capitalising on this, Yeats tried to find a "strategic way … to denounce the one form of censorship that no Irish nationalist could support: English censorship"[255] by using Classical Greek tragedy to construct an Irish cultural identity, that was distinctly, even legally in this particular case, separate from that of Britain.[256] This "fracturing of the cultural-moral boundaries through which empires are constructed and maintained"[257] not only proves how artistic action (as much as civic action) worked to undermine the rule of the British Empire in Ireland. It also continues the trend previously acknowledged where "for centuries, Ireland's relationship with the classics had been one of rebellion."[258]

Anthony Roche suggests that "while *Oedipus* may be for all time it is also a peculiarly Irish affair."[259] On paper, there is nothing distinctly Irish about Sophocles' play – not in its origins, its subject, its author, its performative context, nor its mythology. Yeats states that he wishes to have performed, no longer just 'peasant plays', but rather to create space for 'foreign masterpieces' in order to "widen [the Abbey's] capacity of performance, appeal to different temperaments and multiply its chances of creating writers."[260] This spurs a disagreement with John Millington Synge, who sees the purpose of the current literary movement as espousing new work, rather than making perfect interpretations of works that

[253] Lloyd, 2011: 65. I draw attention to Marina Carr's *The Boy: A Two-Play Theatrical Event* premiering for the first time at the Abbey Theatre from 15th September – 1st November 2025. These two plays, directed by Caitríona McLaughlin bring "a contemporary Irish lens to the pain and beauty of Sophocles' Theban trilogy of *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*" ('The Boy: A Two-Play Theatrical Event', *The Abbey Theatre*; Sophocles, 2008; see Carr, 2025a and 2025b).
[254] Baker, 2022: 131, 133. In 1904, Lord Chamberlain had blocked a production of the play taking place in London (Lloyd, 2011: 55). See also Arkins, 2005: 156.
[255] Morash, 2020: 221.
[256] Yeats' *Oedipus* would not actually grace the Abbey stage until 1926
[257] Heath, 2010: 7.
[258] Currie, 2017.
[259] Roche, 2001: 110.
[260] Ibid.

can already be considered as masterpieces.[261] What is most interesting from this anecdote is how, despite their disagreements, Yeats and Synge can agree on one thing: *Oedipus* was to be exempt from this "barring order"[262] on 'foreign masterpieces'. This is extremely curious – Sophocles' *Oedipus*, on top of being generally considered a Western 'masterpiece', is 'foreign' in an Irish context. However, two central figures of the cultural movement in Ireland did not class it as such. In fact, as Yeats saw it, "the kinship of the Irish and the ancient Greek ran deeper even than the bond of Latin and Greek."[263] Throughout his life, he maintained this association: "men have trembled on dark roads in Ireland and in Greece."[264]

Fiona Macintosh suggests we can "assimilate Yeats to Aeschylus (the 'father' of Irish drama), and Synge, in turn, to Sophocles."[265] Synge, in his own words, believed *Oedipus* would only serve to "illuminate"[266] the work of the cultural revival. This speaks to a unique feature of Irish classicism where writers "imagine past heroes in our space, rather than us in theirs."[267] *Oedipus* proves how classical material was neither 'foreign' nor an "alien adversary to Ireland but a kindred spirit that could act as a useful guide to the founders of the new state."[268]. Here, this kinship between the Irish and the Greeks is most clearly apparent through "*the degree to which one group grants validity to the myths of another group.*"[269] In addition to this, Yeats' eagerness to "distance himself as a playwright from the overbearing influence of 'foreign masterpieces' highlights the Oedipal dimension of his appropriation of Greek texts."[270]

What is it about Greek tragedy that creates this link between Ireland and Greek antiquity, to the extent that it is considered to be within the same realm of Ireland's own literary productions? In 1926, Yeats finally did stage his own controversial production of *Oedipus* at the Abbey after "centuries of Irish-classical crossovers lying behind him."[271] It is very interesting to note that it was only once society became 'post-colonial' that *Oedipus* in its official guise was performed. However, Yeats' version was not the only time that we

[261] 'Letter from J. M. Synge to Lady Gregory', 13th December 1906, (in Saddlemyer, 1971: 41-3).
[262] Roche, 2001: 103.
[263] Baker, 2022: 132.
[264] As Yeats told his BBC listeners in 1931. See Yeats, 2000: 221-2; Gould, 1987.
[265] Macintosh, 1994: xix.
[266] 'Letter from J. M. Synge to Lady Gregory', 13th December 1906 (in Saddlemyer, 1971: 43).
[267] Kiberd, 2020: 34.
[268] Macintosh, 1994: 3.
[269] Signorile, 1973: 121. Italics original.
[270] Lloyd, 2011: 65.
[271] Currie, 2017.

saw *Oedipus* grace the Abbey Stage. He had been there previously in another guise: as Christy Mahon, the anti-hero of J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. We can consider this production firmly as a proto-postcolonial work and as Synge's "idiosyncratic response to the possibility of an Oedipus at the Abbey."[272]

The Playboy was first performed in the Abbey in 1907 and caused the first set of riots the theatre was to see in its history.[273] Due to his education and background (Anglo-Irish and Protestant), Synge "was very much part of the western cultural tradition of which classics was and is a central part."[274] Not only does *The Playboy* observe some of the "formal features of Greek theatre,"[275] in that it has a single location in which offstage action is described and that it takes place in a 24-hour period, its plot is also distinctly related to *Oedipus*. It is about a man who claims (or, rather, brags) he has killed his father. By the end of the play, we know that Christy Mahon has not actually killed his father, so it ultimately deviates from the original Oedipus myth. The reasons for this may have to do with the climate at the time.

There is no real doubt that Synge was thinking of *Oedipus* when constructing the framework of the *Playboy*. It had a "high profile"[276] around this time. Furthermore, Yeats' preoccupation with it and his aforementioned disagreement with Yeats would have placed it forefront in his mind. It is unclear whether Synge had read Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* published in German 7 years earlier.[277] He was certainly familiar with the subject of parricide and the theories surrounding it after attending a lecture given by Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville in Paris that was in keeping with the material published in his 1899 work *La Civilisation des Celtes et Celle de l'Epopee Homerique*.[278] If, as explored, Oedipal narratives were applicable to the political context in Ireland at the time and the repeated desire and failure to overcome the colonial patriarchal authority, *The Playboy* can be seen as a rather negative exploration. In the play, the romanticised Irish peasantry (portrayed almost to a level of fetishisation by the leaders of the Gaelic Revival) begin to believe they have triumphed over this paternal authority, only to be brought back down to reality at the end. Pegeen Mike's final words decry this disappointment where the fantasy she thought

[272] Lloyd, 2011: 55.
[273] See 'History', *The Abbey Theatre*.
[274] Lloyd, 2011: 65. The same could be said more broadly for the majority of the central figures of the Irish Literary Theatre (most of whom were Anglo-Irish and Protestant) and their contributions to the Gaelic Revival.
[275] Ibid: 54.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Brill's English translation was not published until 1913.
[278] Lloyd, 2011: 62; d'Arbois de Jubainville, 1899.

to be true is taken from her and her world remains the same: "I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World."[279] Whilst Christy Mahon represents the revolutionary dream of the son who wishes to overthrow his father, he simultaneously stands to remind the 1907 audience that this dream has repeatedly been a failure. Alongside that, Synge's *Playboy* demonstrates that "*Oedipus Tyrannus* is the basis of an influential model of cultural transmission which involved both rejection and appropriation of what is transmitted."[280]

Although the endings of the plays differ in term of plot, Mary Rose Sullivan does not think they are too far removed from each other:

> Both plays deal with a man who enters a society as a stranger to everyone – even to himself – to be hailed as a saviour by that society because of some distant epic deed that has renewed the barren land; however, in the course of attempting to learn the facts about his own identity and the mysterious deed, the hero uncovers a truth which proves too harsh for the society to accept – with the result that he is forced to leave it as he came, a stranger and alone.[281]

There is no apparent resonance between *The Playboy* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* when it comes to the incest theme. This could be because, as purported by Michael Lloyd, the incest theme is "less explicit than the parricide theme"[282] in the play.[283] Nonetheless, it is still hinted at in *The Playboy* through the Widow Quinn's seduction of Christy, which mirrors Christy's recounting of his father's attempt to make him marry his old wet-nurse, Widow Casey.[284] The incest theme, like the parricide theme, becomes relevant again in Ireland's colonial context. If we consider British Rule in Ireland to be the Laius, or father, figure, we can then transform Ireland into that of Jocasta, the mother figure.[285] This feeds into an established trend of Ireland, as a personified figure, being romanticised and rejuvenated by the sacrifices of men. Yeats and Lady Gregory portray the transformation of their

[279] Synge, 1998: 146.
[280] Lloyd, 2011: 65.
[281] Sullivan, 1969: 243.
[282] Lloyd, 2011: 59.
[283] In *Oedipus*, the two are interlinked as demonstrated on Oedipus' despairing moment of realisation: "I who am proved accursed in my conception, and in my marriage, and in him I slew (1184-1185)" [Sophocles, 2008a: 89 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto)].
[284] Lloyd, 2011: 59.
[285] See Heath (2010) for discussions on the idea of the 'mother country' who 'nurtured' a race. This is also in keeping with Greek mythological themes more generally. For example, in the Greek creation myth, we see Rhea (the mother) conspiring with Zeus (the son) to overthrow Kronos (the father) [Hesiod, 2018: 31-96 (lines 104-206; 453-491)].

personification of Ireland, the titular character, from an old woman to a "young woman with the walk of a Queen"[286] in their play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Similarly, in Yeats' poem *September 1913*, he describes how "some woman's yellow hair has maddened every mother's son."[287] Here, in an attempt to 'kill' Father Colonialism, the Oedipal revolutionary figures can be seen to undertake a metaphorically incestual relationship with Ireland, their motherland.[288]

Greek tragedy is so strongly related to the origins of the National Theatre that its centenary was marked in 2004 with a new Irish adaptation of *Antigone* by Seamus Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*.[289] National theatres are generally thought of as "a place for asserting images of national identity,"[290] but this is more complicated in Ireland as the National Theatre (the Abbey Theatre) actually "predates the nation-state."[291] Thus, the images of national identity created are further promoted to the realm of the symbolic. As we have seen, "what was written, again and again through the Irish Revival, was an *Anti-Oedipus*, which saw the ancient tale not as awful tragedy but as happy comedy."[292] It appears this way because the 'killing of the father' was not accidental but intentional. It is a freeing action, further justifying the tendency of postcolonial societies towards Greek tragedy. In this regard, *Oedipus* is continuously relevant since "whenever a social order starts to crumble, these dramas are enacted in a reversal of the relations between fathers and sons."[293] The difference between the ancient Greek Oedipus and Oedipus in an Irish context is that here:

> The repudiation of the biological parent in a colonial situation takes on a revolutionary character, since it involves not just a rejection of authority but of all official versions of the past; and it proclaims a determination to reinvent not only the self but the very conditions which help to shape it.[294]

These conditions include the classics of colonialism coming in contact with the classics of Ireland's 'Greek kinship' so that the figures during this period are "eccentrically

[286] Yeats, 1911: 15.
[287] Yeats, 2010: 159-60.
[288] See Heath, 2010.
[289] Torrance, 2022: 19; Heaney, 2004a. See also Heaney, 2005; Heaney, 2009.
[290] Wilmer, 2005: 145.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Kiberd, 1995: 388.
[293] Ibid: 383.
[294] Ibid: 385.

overwriting competing visions of the classical past in the contemporary moment,"[295] through the medium of Greek tragedy.

Liam Harte has wondered whether we see "discrepancies between the textual and the actual version of Ireland."[296] In the contextual cases discussed above, we can see how these discrepancies simultaneously do and do not exist. For example, Synge's use of Hiberno-English in his *Playboy* was considered derogatory at the time, yet can now be seen as "the palimpsestisation … of the Irish language as a … language of intellectual or creative enquiry."[297] In hindsight, it seems clear that Hiberno-English indeed functions as a "language of liberation,"[298] another crucial factor of Ireland's role as a 'minor literature'.[299] Really, we can consider Synge's *Playboy* as marking the moment when the "new Ireland emerg[ed] out of the wreckage of the old,"[300] through an Oedipal gateway. In previous considerations of 'minor literatures', the focus has been on works produced in English. The concept of 'Hiberno-English' here though strengthens the position of Ireland's 'minor literature' through its introduction of 'language' into the discussion. During British occupation of Ireland, there was "no consensus on a vernacular."[301] The use of English and Irish were highly culturally, politically, and religiously charged. In fact, a point in favour of the importance of the Latin and Roman tradition in Ireland (that exists outside the bounds of this study) is how O'Higgins proffers that at a time when English placed "Irish language and culture in the role of the subaltern,"[302] the study and use of Latin offered a "link to Europe"[303] that "served a new function in asserting cultural identity."[304] Nevertheless, Synge's proto-postcolonial use of language is an example of a wider existing movement, under this Greek lens, "to lay claim to a broad definition of culture."[305]

The fact that people were offended by Synge's portrayal of the people of the West of Ireland, and their vernacular, speaks to a form of inverse colonialism on their part. It was not considered so at the time, but "English had never been so effectively de-anglicised."[306]

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[295] Baker, 2022: 12.
[296] Harte, 2008: 63.
[297] Denvir, 1997: 51. 'Hiberno-English' refers to the specific use of vocabulary, grammar and turn-of-phrase characteristic to Ireland that has rich connections with the country's history and identities (see Filppula, 1993).
[298] Gömceli and James, 2015: 105.
[299] Oscar Wilde's *Critic as Artist* "sheds much light on his predicament as a colonial subject operating within the discourses of his imperial masters" (Sammells, 1994: 366).
[300] Fleischmann, 1989: 65.
[301] O'Higgins, 2017: 9.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid: 202.
[306] Deane, 1986: 151.

Nationalists were suspicious of anything that may have appeared as colonial-fuelled ridicule of the Irish people, especially from a movement that was primarily led by Protestant members of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. In their 'Manifesto for the Irish Literary Theatre', Yeats and Lady Gregory empathise with this attitude:

> We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentations, in carrying out a work this is outside all the political questions that divide us.[307]

I believe that Synge created his *Playboy* as a form of subversion. Greek tragedy deals primarily with transgressions, and Synge's use of Oedipal plots speaks to that through his "parodies of tragic themes and material."[308] It is understandable that the Irish audience did not initially view this as a celebration or empowerment of an often silenced community. Instead, they saw this play as presenting "some disconcerting political propositions,"[309] and remained paranoid of furthering colonial stereotyping. However, the *Playboy* was written by a man who was "hailed by Yeats as in the direct line of Greek tragedy,"[310] and he chose to set his play in the West of Ireland: the home of the *Fir Bolg* and an 'ancient idealism', a place where Greek materials were not 'foreign'.

Synge's "Irish version of Oedipus,"[311] is "less a tale of unconscious desires than a treatise on knowledge and how it functions within different regimes of truth."[312] It is far more in line with Foucault's understanding of *Oedipus* than Freud's. Freud claimed that *Oedipus* continues to resonate with us centuries later because "the desires it articulates – parricide and incest – are both universal (or at least widely shared) and unavowable,"[313] and it speaks to "the social necessity of shaping and hence limiting our desires … and the simultaneous drive to transgress these limitations (in fantasy, dreams, and works of art)."[314] Synge's approach to the myth is much more in keeping with this thesis' understanding of the uses of myth as being non-reductive and non-universalising, and with Foucault's

[307] Yeats, Gregory and Martyn, 1898 (reproduced in Hunt, 1979: 19). Yeats' and Gregory's claim that this movement was 'outside the political questions' that divided society was categorically impossible when it was taking place in the *National* Theatre.
[308] Revermann, 2008: 104.
[309] Fleischmann, 1989: 72.
[310] Roche, 2009: 247.
[311] Roche, 2001: 102.
[312] Miller, 2021: 27.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid.

reading of *Oedipus* "not as an allegory for the ways in which social and family structures constrain our desires but as the dramatization of a particular relation 'between political power and factual knowledge'."[315] Part of the importance of this period is the repeated choice to use classics in a proto-postcolonial way as it highlights how "it was the tension between knowledge and ignorance, between the apparent loss of classics and the cultural significance still attached to its traceable presence, that proved powerful."[316]

Throughout the Gaelic Revival, figures like Yeats were "attempting to find some way of reconciling the Irish Catholic and Protestant traditions in a manner which would preserve the primacy of an elite leadership while abolishing the sectarian basis upon which it had hitherto been justified."[317] To Yeats, classics was the answer for this unification and he "frequently aligned nationalist Ireland with Classical Greece."[318] Through this mythologising, it seems that the 'textual version' of Ireland is promoted as the 'actual version'. This is evident by the extent to which so much of the national identity was built against the 'textual versions'; and how as a result of the "vertical and horizontal divisions of creed, class, political affiliation and language, the idea of national character had to be … very flexible"[319] in Ireland. At the same time, these versions were "assuring Ireland a place not only in her own artistic history but that of the world at large."[320]

Part of this nationalist movement "evoked an idea of homecoming"[321] that was manifested by the Gaelic Revival's push towards the West of Ireland and the Aran Islands. This is directly related to Yeats and Synge's own works but we can also tie in the idea of *nostos* that is directly related to the *Odyssey*. *Nostos* was an important concept that is "as much about possibility as it is about the past; it is a vision of utopia or a haunting, a focus of aspiration, a repository of memory."[322] In this period, the burgeoning national identity involved an "imaginative literary relationship"[323] or sensibility between the Irish and the Greeks. One of the ways in which this was conceptualised was through the connection between the Greek concept of *nostos* and the Irish concept of *dúchas*.[324] Seamus Heaney, one of the figures who demonstrates the overlap between the Greek and Roman traditions

[315] Ibid.
[316] Baker, 2022: 11.
[317] Deane, 1989: 50.
[318] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 7. For more on this, see Morris, 2020: 393-406.
[319] Deane, 1989: 41.
[320] Henigan, 2002: 109.
[321] Kiberd, 1995: 3.
[322] Riley, 2018: 7.
[323] Doody, 2018: 89.
[324] Heaney, 2004b: 413.

and someone for whom "the magnetism of classical antiquity prevailed over him as over other writers of the literary revival,"[325] speaks of *dúchas* as an "untranslatable"[326] term that speaks to a shared connection, attachment or affinity to a native place or land that involves a form of inherited instinct or national tendency.[327] In this period, the alignment of *dúchas* and *nostos* contributed to the Utopia-isation of Ireland that will be continuously challenged by this tradition. Therefore, classics was a way to take "Utopia for theme, knowing that this would provide not only an image of revolutionary possibility for Ireland but also a rebuke to contemporary Britain."[328]

Next, we will see a similar tension being created between textual versions of identity versus actual lived personalities, through Wilde and Mahaffy's ideological and stylistic struggles in both realms. It is myth and myth-making that seems to link these textual and actual versions of Ireland and *Oedipus* is a useful example of this when it comes to Irish identity as this particular myth "sets up the contradiction and then, by an intellectual trick, mediates them."[329] In the Oedipal relationship between members of the tradition, and in the tradition itself, the Oedipal framework is set up on the surface but then taken apart within it. This conciliation is particularly complicated as we examine Ireland's continued postcolonial relationship with Britain throughout the Chapter. Declan Kiberd discovers, through Nietzsche, that "those who haven't had a good father are compelled to go out and invent one … this generation of Irishmen and Irishwomen fathered and mothered themselves, reinventing parents in much the same way as they were reinventing the Irish past."[330] This recurring idealisation of the Irish past without British interference, and the ensuing problematic and reductive view of Ireland as a 'Utopia', is also reflected in Wilde's rejection of Mahaffy in the following section. Griffith describes this dynamic in the context of Classical Athens as:

> The pressures on sons to prove themselves against, and separate themselves from, their fathers, and to find an authoritative place for themselves within both their own household and the larger political community, even as they strove to remain loyal to

[325] Baker, 2022: 32.
[326] Heaney, 2004b: 413.
[327] Ibid. Heaney had training in the Latin language but he admits in this lecture that he has "never studied ancient Greek" (Ibid: 422).
[328] Kiberd, 1995: 50.
[329] Cohen, 1969: 346.
[330] Kiberd, 1995: 6. See also Nietzsche, 1986.

> kin and to preserve and augment the family fortune, were compounded in the highly agonistic environment of Greek aristocratic culture.[331]

This speaks to the contradictory tension between taking influence and inspiration from your predecessor, and needing to preserve the richness of the tradition's legacy of which they were a part, but wanting to create your own name and style in contrast to them. Next, we will see Wilde (the successor) actively and publicly distancing himself from Mahaffy (the predecessor), while also fashioning himself and his position in Hibernian Philhellenism in relation to Mahaffy.

Mahaffy and Wilde: Oedipal Relationships

The context of this period is one in which "the revolt of an artistic son against an unsatisfactory father was, of course, a leitmotif."[332] We see this now reflected in the direct relationship between Wilde, the 'artistic son', and Mahaffy, the unsatisfactory 'cultural father'. This section will examine the Oedipal dimension of their relationship that involves, in conjunction with Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence,* a type of misreading on Wilde's part. Wilde went to drastic measures to distinguish himself from Mahaffy. It is in his public negative reviews of Mahaffy's work that we will most clearly see a "*a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation"*[333] By examining Wilde's public rejections of Mahaffy's influence, we will better understand the discussion in the next Chapter surrounding, what became known as, 'homosexuality' that demonstrates how the type of 'Victorian anglicised classicism' exhibited by Mahaffy created an "oppositional understanding of [the classical] material."[334] It also proves how as central figures, Wilde and Mahaffy's relationship "helps to make conscious those aspects of the text which would otherwise remain concealed in the subconscious,"[335] while also directly demonstrating that "to unname the precursor while earning one's own name is the quest of strong or severe poets"[336]

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[331] Griffith, 1998: 31.
[332] Kiberd, 1995: 383.
[333] Bloom, 1997: 30. Italics original.
[334] McDonald, 1995: 187.
[335] Iser, 1972: 295.
[336] Bloom, 2011: 10. Italics original.

Richard Ellmann describes Wilde and Mahaffy's relationship as one of mutual importance,[337] Alistair Blanshard as one of mutual admiration.[338] However in the build-up to the culmination of the 'killing of Father Colonialism' in the early twentieth century in Irish politics, Oscar Wilde and J. P. Mahaffy were struggling with their own fraught relations. We will observe in the next section how: "the past always seems to catch up with the Irish writer and; [and] for Tóibín it has been there from the beginning."[339] Yet, here I would include Mahaffy and Wilde among Tóibín's number. This section will focus on the elements of Mahaffy's influence that Wilde chose to reject – often quite publicly. In this way, we are examining how a trend or pattern within a tradition similarly affects the members of that tradition. This Oedipal rejection is the beginning of the downfall of their relationship, and it takes the form of Mahaffy and Wilde's differences of opinion towards Irish Independence and the Catholic religion. Unusually in terms of canon, this is not done through fictional works of literature or theatre, but through public and personal reviews, showcasing how "the dynamics of power tends towards or discovers its medium of cultural expression"[340]

The ways in which Wilde chose to reject Mahaffy's influence, be it socially or stylistically, will show how and why "it is always necessary to kill your father."[341] We remind ourselves that in the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism this does not mean to replace your predecessor – although, on the surface, the evidence provided in this section may appear to suggest this. Instead, this 'killing' is the overlapping and knotting of figures that leads to a form of influence that both extends and shapes the conditions of the tradition itself.

In a throwaway remark, Kathleen Riley describes the "troubled, somewhat Oedipal relationship"[342] between Wilde and Mahaffy. As stated by Robson, the significance of this remark is "generally unexamined."[343] This 'Oedipal' relationship can be marked by four important stages of their relationship: its beginning at Trinity, their travels to Greece, Wilde's negative reviews of Mahaffy's work, their differences on the matter of Irish Independence, nationalism and Catholicism; and Mahaffy's rejection of Wilde following his scandal (to be looked at in next Chapter). For the purposes of the critical theme of

[337] Ellmann, 1987: 26.
[338] Blanshard, 2018: 20.
[339] Foster, 2008: 39.
[340] Kapferer, 1997: 297.
[341] Rothenstein, 1935: 184.
[342] Riley, 2018: 5.
[343] Robson, 2004: 299.

'cultural paternal influence' in this thesis, a mythic Oedipal model is being transposed onto the relationship between these men.

Alistair Blanshard, in the first dedicated study on the influence of Mahaffy on Wilde, states that "any discussion of Wilde and the Greeks must begin with John Pentland Mahaffy, Wilde's tutor at Trinity College Dublin."[344] Despite the fact that Wilde began his classical education in earnest at Portora, by his own admission he awards the credit to his "first and best teacher, the scholar who taught me how to love Greek things."[345] In 1939, Oscar Wilde remarked to David Hunter Blaire, when asked about his postgraduate plans: "I won't be a dried-up Oxford don, anyhow. I'll be a poet, a writer, a dramatist. Somehow or other, I'll be famous, and if not famous, I'll be notorious."[346] Aside from the latter part of that statement which was to realise itself, the construction of his future self was immediately in contradiction to that of the cultural figures in his life. J. P. Mahaffy *was* a classical don 'in the Oxford sense' at Trinity College Dublin, and would go on to become Provost of Trinity.

In Mahaffy's academic works, he underlined the importance of what he called the 'pedagogical moment'.[347] Although he was agnostic when it came to matters of Greek pederasty, he put great weight onto the historical relationship between an older and a younger man. Despite there being only 15 years between them, Mahaffy had already established himself as a figure of cultural and academic authority in Trinity College by the time Wilde arrived. Richard Ellmann describes how "Wilde and Mahaffy were of the same height, six feet three inches, but Mahaffy was both an authority figure, and at thirty-two was already known as 'the General', while Oscar Wilde at sixteen was a delicate and modulated non-combatant."[348] Despite Mahaffy's authority, we can still imagine that there was an element of *agon* present in his relationship with Wilde. Perhaps there is something to be said for Wilde's move to Oxford from Trinity as also being a move away from "the father's ever-vigilant eye … [whose] overshadowing, often jealous presence poses a challenge to his ambitious son."[349] In Trinity, there may have been a limit as to the extent to which Wilde could compete with Mahaffy's advantageous standing and influence. If he had stayed, how much of his proposed academic or artistic career would be spent in

[344] Blanshard, 2018: 19.
[345] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Mahaffy', April 1893 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 562).
[346] Blaire, 1939: 122.
[347] Robson, 2004: 299.
[348] Ellman, 1987: 26.
[349] Griffith, 1998: 34.

Mahaffy's shadow? These are the conditions under which we can understand the beginning of this relationship and this exploration will show the shift that occurred, due to various differences of opinion, to an Oedipal one.

As a result of Mahaffy's role as tutor and advisor to Wilde, they established an intense friendship. Wilde spoke often and fondly of Mahaffy, attributing Mahaffy with stimulating his famed "artistic standpoint toward everything."[350] Wilde was impressed too by R. Y. Tyrrell, but even Tyrrell could admit that it was Mahaffy's "humanistic and artistic, rather than scientific and scholastic, approach to the classics"[351] that influenced Wilde greater than Tyrrell's traditional (if more consistent) approach. Tyrrell even affords Wilde's "superciliousness from trying to imitate Mahaffy."[352] Wilde was always complimentary about Mahaffy's oratorical prowess. Even when writing negative reviews of Mahaffy's works, he laments that "if Mr Mahaffy would only write as he talks his book would be much pleasanter reading."[353]

The disparity between their opinions on religion comes to the forefront in the accounts from their travels around Greece. To Blanshard, this "was more than just a trip around archaeological sites [,] for Mahaffy, this trip represented an intervention into Wilde's spiritual life."[354] Mahaffy was opposed to anything Roman – be that in antiquity, or contemporarily with regard to the Roman Catholic church. The trip to Greece had two purposes: to further cement the Hellenistic into Wilde's psyche, and to prevent Wilde from reaching Rome. A trip to Rome to meet the Pope had been organised for Wilde and funded by David Hunter Blair. He did eventually make it to Rome (and meet the Pope), but he had been sufficiently derailed and distracted by Mahaffy on the way that it did not have the transformative, or corruptive, effect that Wilde and Mahaffy (respectively) thought it would have. Instead, Wilde was so preoccupied with the wonders he had seen in Greece, that he saw Rome through a Hellenic lens. At the Vatican, he was most impressed by seeing Greek statues there, and at Mass, he would recognise the "Greek chorus … in the servitor answering the priest."[355]

Mahaffy was explicit in his intentions. In a letter to his wife, he states:

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[350] Harris, 1938: 29.
[351] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 39.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Wilde, 16th December 1887: 3. Of Mahaffy he also remarked that "he was a delightful talker, too, a really great talker in a certain way – an artist in vivid words and eloquent pauses" (Harris, 1939: 29).
[354] Blanshard, 2018: 28.
[355] Wilde, 2013: 117.

> We have taken Oscar Wilde with us who has of course come round under the influence of the moment from popery to paganism, but what his Jesuit friends will say, who supplied the money to land him at Rome, it is not hard to guess. I think it is a fair case of cheating the devil.[356]

One of Mahaffy and Wilde's travelling companions, George Macmillan, echoes this in a letter written to his father while on their travels. Of Wilde, he says:

> Being very impressionable he is just rather fascinated by Roman Catholicism, and is indeed on his way to Rome, in order to see all the glories of the religion which seems to him the highest and most sentimental. Mahaffy is quite determined to prevent this if possible … he tried hard to persuade him to come to Greece with us, pointing out to him by the way all the worst faults of Popery.[357]

Macmillan's opinions on Wilde, as quoted above and expressed previously in the same letter as being "aesthetic to the last degree,"[358] echo Ellmann's summation that Wilde really had "a delight in the *forms* of Catholicism, rather than its content"[359] The close relationship that Mahaffy and Wilde had forged meant that it was of personal importance to Mahaffy that Wilde was considering converting to Catholicism. It was something they would never agree on and that ultimately fed into their differences on Irish politics and Irish Independence. Trying "to reconcile the pagan and the Christian, the Catholic and the Greek"[360] remained a problem for Wilde throughout the rest of his life.

It is not just on religion that Mahaffy and Wilde differed, Blanshard lists the main areas of contention between the men as being "nationalism, faith, love and sexuality, and the progress of history … [and] social class."[361] For all of these areas, their use of classics and their views on the values of the classics can encapsulate their personal views. Throughout this thesis we will question "in what ways Wilde's classicism is typical, in what ways heterodox or distinctive, and where it is situated in relation to Victorian social and intellectual frameworks."[362] In turn, the answers we will get from this will help us understand why Tóibín has received the classicism he has through Hibernian Philhellenism.

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[356] 'Letter from J. P. Mahaffy to Wife', 2nd April 1877 (in Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 41). Note: Stanford and McDowell do not provide a reference for this letter.
[357] 'Letter from George Macmillan to his father', 28th March 1877 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 44).
[358] Ibid: 43.
[359] Ellmann, 1987: 32.
[360] Blanshard, 2018: 28.
[361] Ibid: 31.
[362] Riley, 2018: 9.

One of the major ways in which Wilde and Mahaffy's opinions diverged – which speaks to earlier conversations about classics as a label, and about the particular brand of cultural capital that 'classics' as a discipline had in Ireland – can be seen through their views on access. They held different positions as to whether "the classics [would] remain the preserve of the elite or should … be open to all."[363] The inequity of Mahaffy's educational policies speak clearly for the former, whereas Wilde's approach is much more in keeping with the latter. The trip to Greece represents much of the early influence that Mahaffy had on Wilde.[364] Wilde's friend, David Hunter Blaire, noted its seminal impact:

> When Oscar and I met at Oxford in the ensuing summer term I realised that he was changed. He had become Hellenised, somewhat paganised, perhaps, but the appeal of Greece to his sensitive nature; and Rome had retired into the background.[365]

Mahaffy was one of the first Victorian scholars to acknowledge the practice of pederasty in antiquity, even if he did so in an apologetic, uncomfortable, and moralistic manner. It was not an unbiased, scholarly account of an ancient custom, but rather a Victorian Reverend's personal opinions on what he saw to be "the principal blot"[366] on ancient Greek civilisation. In this controversial volume, *Social Life in Greece From Homer to Menander*, Mahaffy pays compliment to his "old pupils, Mr H. B. Leech, of Caius College, Cambridge, and Mr Oscar Wilde, of Magdalen College, Oxford, who have made improvements and corrections all through the book."[367] The significance of these 'improvements and corrections' will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3, where further Oedipal tension will arise between Wilde and Mahaffy from a discussion on Greek homoeroticism. But for the purposes of this discussion, it is interesting to track the shift from a 'first and best teacher', to a more evolved relationship of mutual respect and collaboration, to the rejection and negative criticisms that will be discussed next. Wilde's public engagement with Mahaffy's work also shows Wilde's "certain unwillingness to abandon the domain of 'dried up old dons.'"[368]

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[363] Blanshard, 2018: 31.
[364] In 1876, a year before he went, Wilde wrote to his friend William Ward: "I am with that dear Mahaffy every day … Mahaffy's book of Travels in Greece will be soon out. I have been correcting his proofs and like it immensely" ['Letter from Oscar Wilde to William Ward', 6th August 1876 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 28)].
[365] Blaire, 1939: 136.
[366] Mahaffy, 1874: 311.
[367] Ibid: viii.
[368] Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010.

The critics of Mahaffy's work were not few and far between. He was often criticised for his inaccuracy, imperialism, provincialism, and tendency towards casual analogy.[369] However, Wilde's criticism must have hit harder, or appeared as more of a personal attack, because of their previously close relationship. Perhaps it is for this reason that the first of the negative reviews of Mahaffy's works by Wilde was published anonymously. There had been previous occasions where Wilde has directly expressed his disagreement with Mahaffy, albeit in a more jovial form:

> Dear Mahaffy, Your letter in the Pall Mall is delightful. Though I should fight with you over some of the matter of it, the manner of it is most brilliant.[370]

'Fighting over the matter of it' was becoming more and more of a summation of their declining relationship.

The first of his negative reviews was published (as mentioned, anonymously) in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on the 9th November 1887. In this review of Mahaffy's *Greek Life and Thought: From the Age of Alexander to the Roman Conquest,* Wilde admonishes him for his "attempts to treat the Hellenic world as 'Tipperary writ large'"[371] In this review, Wilde provides an depiction of Mahaffy as an academic that matches other criticism of his scholarship, which tended towards "inaccuracy (and above this, cheerful disregard for the importance of accuracy) and a tendency to introduce modern historical parallels which were too casual to be compelling, and too rooted in his personal political views."[372] As seen, Wilde explicitly describes Mahaffy as "not so good a scholar as Tyrrell."[373] Nevertheless, his strengths (or weaknesses) still lay in the fact that "he had been in Greece, had lived there and saturated himself with Greek thought and Greek feeling … [and] he took deliberately the artistic standpoint."[374] In this remark to Frank Harris, Wilde's attitude seems sentimental and fond, but the same things he appears to admire about Mahaffy's perspective are what he will come to publicly denounce in his two reviews.

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[369] Mairs, 2010: 63-64.
[370] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to J. P. Mahaffy', February 1886 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 279). The letter spoken about was discovered not to have been written by Mahaffy, but to have been submitted under his name to the magazine as a prank by Undergraduates in Trinity College Dublin.
[371] Wilde, 9th November 1887: 3.
[372] Mairs, 2010: 53.
[373] Harris, 1938: 29.
[374] Ibid.

With regards to Mahaffy's *Greek Life*, the first review, Wilde (anonymously) begins by stating that "Mr Mahaffy's new book will be a great disappointment to everybody except the Paper-Unionists and the members of the Primrose League."[375] The review gets increasingly negative. Wilde describes the work as "quite unworthy of a scholar"[376] – a far cry from his frequent referral to him as 'dear Mahaffy'. It is not just in his style that he rejects Mahaffy's work, but also its substance, stating: "Mr Mahaffy shows an amount of political bias and literary blindness that is quite extraordinary."[377] Wilde acknowledges that Mahaffy is drawing attention and interest towards a period that, at this time, was overlooked. Yet, he believes that there cannot be "anything more depressing that Mr Mahaffy's continual efforts to degrade history to the level of the ordinary political pamphlet of contemporary party welfare."[378] Near the end of the review, he echoes his previous fondness for Mahaffy as being "clever, and at times even brilliant"[379] but he cannot but conclude that "he lacks reasonableness, moderation, style, and charm."[380] Not only that, and more harmful to the scholar, his work is considered to "miss the spirit of the true historian, but he often seems entirely devoid of the temper of the true man of letters."[381]

A month later, Wilde published another review, this time under his own name, of Mahaffy's *The Principles of the Art of Conversation*. Wilde headed his cutting critique of it: 'Aristotle at Afternoon Tea'. Again, Wilde is openly critical and negative, but perhaps using his own name tempered his criticism more than in the first review. Nonetheless, he is not afraid to sum up the book by saying "it fascinates in spite of its form, and pleases in spite of its pedantry, and is the nearest approach that we know of in modern literature, to meeting Aristotle at afternoon tea."[382] It is not immediately as harsh or disparaging as the first review, yet Wilde's opinions about the merits of his old tutor's works and perspectives are still referred to with adverbs like "pathetically"[383] and "inaccurately."[384]

These reviews were published 10 years after they went to Greece, 10 years after Mahaffy was considered by Wilde as being "such a clever man that it is quite as good as

[375] Wilde, 9th November 1887: 3. The Primrose League was a Conservative organisation in Great Britain, founded in 1883.
[376] Ibid: 3.
[377] Ibid.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid.
[382] Wilde, 16th December 1887: 3.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.

going to lectures to be in his society."[385] Stanford and McDowell refer to these reviews as Wilde's "Declaration of Independence,"[386] and, "taken together, the two reviews look like Wilde's final rejection of Mahaffy's authority and influence – Mahaffy's conservatism in politics and morality, Mahaffy's Victorianism, Mahaffy's emphasis on wholesomeness and earnestness."[387] More specifically, I see these reviews as the shift in their relationship from 'paternal' through a stratified one-to-one transaction, to agonistic and Oedipal. This adds to the complex mosaic of this tradition that compliments how "Irish engagement with classics has always looked outwards as well as in, forwards as well as back."[388] In our terms, this once again highlights how one can travel in either direction along the rope.

As alluded to earlier in this section, another major bone of contention between Mahaffy and Wilde were their politics: "the tutor Tory and Unionist, his pupil anti-Tory and nationalist."[389] Wilde's nationalism resulted in him having a complicated relationship with Catholicism, of which Mahaffy was staunchly opposed – his home being described as a "a stronghold of evangelical Protestantism."[390] David Hunter Blaire, also qualifies that Mahaffy was "not one to encourage anyone's predilection for the Roman church."[391]Alistair Blanshard sees "the disagreement between Wilde and Mahaffy on Irish politics as a symptom of a much larger difference between the two."[392]

In a previously quoted letter from George Macmillan to his father, Macmillan states that "both these fellows are very fond of Mahaffy, though they tell me his unpopularity in Ireland and in Trinity College Dublin especially, is something remarkable."[393] This unpopularity is largely to do with the harsh and unyielding line he took when it came to the cultural and linguistic movements in Ireland, and how that related to the talk of Irish Independence, on top of the fact that "that Mahaffy was a snob was generally recognised."[394] In the conclusion of his biographical entry on Mahaffy, Peter Boyle states that "Mahaffy is usually remembered as a brilliant wit and conversationalist, an outstanding classical scholar, the tutor of Oscar Wilde, and an arrogant snob."[395] Similarly, Stanford

[385] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Rev. H. R. Bramley', 2nd April 1877 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 45).
[386] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 80.
[387] Ibid: 83. Stanford and McDowell view Wilde's *Decay of Lying* (2020) as a direct parody of Mahaffy's work (Ibid).
[388] Currie, 2017.
[389] Ellmann, 1987: 26.
[390] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 2.
[391] Blaire, 1939: 135.
[392] Blanshard, 2018: 21.
[393] 'Letter from George Macmillan to his father', 28th March 1877 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 44).
[394] Ellmann, 1987: 27.
[395] Boyle, 2015: 448. This entry features as part of a compendium of Trinity College Dublin Provosts.

and McDowell describe public sentiments where Mahaffy was seen as an "enemy of the Irish nation"[396] and also as "the Alcibiades of Irish politics."[397] This was due to his briefly discussed vehement opposition to the formation of the Gaelic League and the rise of the Irish Literary Revival. He disagreed with these on two counts. He saw the Gaelic League's efforts towards reviving the Irish language as wasted, and he saw Yeats and Lady Gregory's endeavours as unnecessary. About the Irish language, he is known for a variety of strongly-worded and harshly delivered opinions on its value: "we are to be much congratulated that in Ireland the national system [of primary education] ignored Celtic, and this tended strongly to the destruction of that equally out-of-the-way and troublesome language."[398] Mahaffy saw the revival of Irish as a language through the cultural and linguistic movements as a "retrograde step, a return to the dark ages, to the Tower of Babel"[399] and resolved to "discourage the teaching of Gaelic wherever I can."[400]

Mahaffy, like many of the Anglo-Irish population in Ireland at that time, were easily accused of being inconsistent and hypocritical in their beliefs. Yeats and Lady Gregory were no more immune to this.[401] Mahaffy was proud of his Irishness; but it was a very

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[396] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: xii.
[397] Ibid: xiii.
[398] Mahaffy, 1882: 464.
[399] Mahaffy, 1896: 783.
[400] Quoted in Stanford and Mahaffy, 1971: 105. They do not provide a primary reference for this quote, but rather they quote George Russell (1901), *Ideals in Ireland* (ed. Lady Gregory).
[401] As Colm Tóibín notes, despite their work to create a literary tradition that was "directly opposed to the non-literary, commercial, London theatre" (Hunt, 1979: 19) both Yeats and Gregory managed to maintain "their relationship to a peasant culture they had dreamed into being and at the same time made no effort to repudiate their own Anglo-Irish heritage" (Tóibín, 2002). This speaks to their privilege that put them at a distinct advantage "in both Ireland and London: they were members of a ruling class who lost none of their edge … while espousing new politics and new art in Ireland" (Ibid: 58). It is clear that 'a paradox' has always been the answer to the question of 'what is an Irishman?' George Bernard Shaw, in the Preface to his 1904 play, *John Bull's Other Island*, attempts to provide a definition in answer to this question that, in turn, alludes definition: "when I say I am an Irishman I mean that I was born in Ireland, and that my native language is the English of Swift and not the unspeakable jargon of the mid-nineteenth century London newspapers … I am a typical Irishman of the Danish, Norman and Cromwellian, and (of course) Scotch invasions. I am violently and arrogantly Protestant by family tradition; but let no English government therefore count on my allegiance; I am English enough to be an inveterate republican and Home Ruler. It is true that one of my ancestors was an Orangeman; but then his sister was an abbess; and his uncle, I am proud to say, was hanged as a rebel" (Shaw, 1984:9). In an 1895 review of Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, Shaw also declared "Ireland is of all countries the most foreign to England" (the full review is reproduced in Beckson, 1997: 199-200). Shaw clearly consistently uses England as the way in which to differentiate Ireland's identity, proven again by the title of his play, *John Bull's Other Island* (John Bull being a personification of England, and thus the 'other island' being Ireland). This paradox also ties in the contradictory way in which the Irish language was treated by members of the Gaelic Revival and by its romanticisation in works of the same. It is promoted because of its ancient connotations but only used so long as it does not create a barrier between Ireland and the global canon they were trying to join. This speaks to Wilde, Yeats and Lady Gregory's 'best of both worlds' as "the Irish language is reduced to something in the background, either cultural or physical, in order to render the Irish slightly different from the normalizing and powerful centre, but not too different so as to be totally incomprehensible to those at that centre, and, therefore, dangerous or outside the 'civilised' Pale" (Denvir, 1998: 51).

distinct Irishness, divorced from that of the heavily promoted 'Celt'. In his writings, Mahaffy compared the Acropolis to the Rock of Cashel, and compares the Tomb of Atreus to Newgrange, "in these comparisons he treated the Greek and the Irish artistic achievements as equals in excellence."[402] He was proud of these Irish achievements. As mentioned in Chapter 1, he also saw no difference in the teaching one would receive in Trinity versus Oxford or Cambridge. Yet, Mahaffy refused to partake in the foundation and running of the Classical Association of Ireland, instead preferring to remain as a member of the Classical Association of Great Britain.[403] The difference came down to his views on social class, wherein the Anglo-Irish sat at the top of the pyramid. He saw the 'native' Irish as being a separate breed to the Anglo-Irish, and he spoke of them as being different ethnographic races. He was able to overlook these inconsistencies by "flatly denying that there was, or ever had been, any such things as a genuine Irish nation."[404]

Mahaffy, using his power as Vice-Provost banned "a man called Pearse"[405] from addressing the College Gaelic Society. The meeting was instead held off-campus where Yeats publicly addressed Mahaffy's absence:

> I am very sorry Professor Mahaffy is not here tonight. I am not more vehemently opposed to the Unionism of Prof Mahaffy than I am to the Pro-Germanism of Mr Pearse, but we are here to talk about literature and history. In Ireland above all nations, where we have so many bitter divisions, it is necessary to keep always unbroken the truce of the muses. I am sorry the Vice-Provost of Trinity should have broken that ancient truce. It would have been a great pleasure to have stood on the same platform with Dr Mahaffy, who has done such good service for English literature, and with Mr Pearse who has done such good service to Irish literature.[406]

Mahaffy publicly expressed that nationalism and the Irish language were "not only useless, but a mischievous obstacle to civilisation."[407] This led to him being ridiculed and caricatured by leaders of the opposing movements, primarily Douglas Hyde. In December 1899, in *A University Scandal*, Hyde writes of "a man whom everyone knows to be utterly, absolutely, and grotesquely ignorant of the very subject group upon which he gave his

[402] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 116.
[403] Seaver, 2019: 129.
[404] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 123.
[405] Yeats, 1965.
[406] Ibid. It is significant that Mahaffy is seen to contribute to an English canon and not to an Irish one. It seems here that beliefs, personal philosophies and a 'certain Greek kinship' trumps geography when it comes to tradition formation.
[407] Mahaffy, 1899: 221.

evidence, and who, to do him justice, does not now pretend for one moment to have ever been anything else."[408] Hyde, in his *The Bursting of the Bubble*, places a terrible curse on the Professors of Trinity, including a 'MacEathfaidh' (Mahaffy) who is said to speak with a strong lisp – it is well recorded that Mahaffy had a speech impediment.[409]

Mahaffy's anti-nationalism and allegiance to colonial rule was not lost on Wilde. In his first review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on Mahaffy's *Greek Life*, Wilde states:

> With all his passion for imperialism, there is something about Mr Mahaffy, that, if not parochial, at least provincial, and we cannot say that this last book of his will do anything to his reputation either as a historian, a critic, or a man of taste[410]

Wilde died in 1900, two decades before Mahaffy, and over a decade before the Easter Rising and other keystone events in the creation of the identity of the Free State (such as the founding of the National Theatre).[411] Nonetheless, we can get an understanding of Wilde's stance towards imperialism in Ireland through a brief look at his Fairytale, *The Selfish Giant*.

An analysis of a selection of the Fairytales and how they relate to Wilde's conceptions of Platonic sexuality will be seen in the next Chapter. Here, *The Selfish Giant* is relevant as the story tapped into:

> Issues that were central to Irish politics in the late nineteenth century, when the Land League, founded in 1879 and disbanded in 1882, campaigned against unjust rents and evictions, and agitated for the right of Irish tenant farmers to own the land on which they worked.[412]

This Fairytale speaks to Wilde's views on the Protestant Ascendancy and Protestant land-ownership, as well as social class. We can cast the 'Selfish Giant' as the owner of the 'Big House' (and, by extension, the Wildes themselves, seeing as the Giant's House and private garden is meant to reflect the Wilde's house on Merrion Square in Dublin with its large

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[408] Hyde, 1899: 196.
[409] Hyde, 1903. Biographer Peter Boyle also notes that Mahaffy "had difficulty pronouncing his 'r's" (Boyle, 2015: 414).
[410] Wilde, 9th November 1887: 3.
[411] Despite this, Noreen Doody notes an instance as early as May 1877 where Wilde's name is listed among the Catholic students and Jesuit staff in attendance at the Catholic University's literary and historical society student meeting on the "formation of an Irish national literature" (Doody, 2018: 34).
[412] Markey, 2011: 118.

private garden that was only available to residents of the Square). This story can be "read as an indictment of the author's own complicity with the unjust political system that upheld the rights of Irish landlords and discriminated against their tenants."[413] Wilde's political views are thus much more aligned with those of the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Literary Revival movements, to which Mahaffy was firmly opposed. That is not even to touch on the religious aspect of the story in which the young boy who befriends the Giant is found dead, and with stigmata, before being resurrected. "The not-very hidden Catholicism of Wilde's Fairytales"[414] would have no doubt been a contentious issue to Mahaffy and will be further discussed in the next Chapter.

Although Wilde died before the Rising, the *Ballad and Reading Gaol* and *De Profundis* still afford him a place in the long tradition of Irish Prison literature.[415] While he was alive, he very much subscribed to nationalist politics, particularly that of Charles Stewart Parnell and Home Rule, meaning that "the caustic dismissals of the liberal, the innocent, and the ignorant, which were Mahaffy's flourishes, were at variance with Wilde's republican ideals."[416] Wilde was a "committed Home Rule supporter"[417] and even attended meetings of the Royal Commission when they were investigating allegations against Parnell.[418] Although, at times, Mahaffy appeared to sway towards opposing partition, he wrote an article in 1912 entitled 'Will Home Rule be Rome Rule'.[419] Mahaffy believed that the Anglo-Irish were a superior 'breed' of people in Ireland but could recognise that they were at a numerical disadvantage. The thought of an Irish government divorced from that of Britain led him to possess an "ingrained fear of finding himself in a minority in an autonomous Ireland."[420] We can clearly identify Wilde and Mahaffy as "belonging within a distinct, Irish cultural context seeing their relation to the English in terms of 'them' and 'us'."[421] One hundred years later, Tóibín's generation can still view Irish identity in similar terms. Once again, we can consider the relation between my central figures in terms of: Mahaffy as 'them', Tóibín' as 'us', and Wilde as somewhere 'in between'.

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[413] Ibid. Wilde's family would have had a key to this garden to which access for the poorer, and most likely Catholic, children of Dublin city was prohibited.
[414] Kiberd, 2000: 332.
[415] Ibid: 335.
[416] Ellmann, 1987: 26.
[417] Doody, 2018: 35.
[418] Blanshard, 2018: 20.
[419] Mahaffy, 1912.
[420] Mairs, 2010: 55.
[421] Doody, 2018: 69. This is clear even from Yeat's discussed remark that Mahaffy has only contributed to a tradition of 'English' literature and not 'Irish' literature, despite living, working, and writing in Ireland.

The next Chapter will examine the domain of sexuality and the Platonic manifestations of it in Irish literature. But it will also offer a further exploration as to "what extent Wilde would use ideas he was exposed to during his formative years as Mahaffy's student – ideas that he absorbed and integrated in his own writings as he matured."[422] It is clear from this discussion that "he did not always come to the same conclusion as his Trinity tutor"[423] and that will be most clearly shown through their disagreements on practices of 'Greek love'.

Conclusion

This Chapter is primarily examining the context of the 'knot' that conceptualises the politics, religion, and Greek tragic frameworks of this period. This section is most concerned with the "the political-cultural dimension of filiation."[424]Although their relationship appeared 'Oedipal' and the instances of Wilde publicly rejecting Mahaffy seemed to be a case of him putting his own philosophy ('in literature, it is always necessary to kill your father') into action, we can case this relationship in a new light in the context of Hibernian Philhellenism. If we think back to the wider 'rope' of Hibernian Philhellenism, what we are seeing is the repudiation of influence between Mahaffy and Wilde despite the fact that "Mahaffy must have introduced many of the subjects and issues which Wilde takes up."[425] Through their relationship and the 'pedagogical moment', we see that, despite these instances of rejection, the opposite effect of Wilde's 'killing' is happening: Ingold's 'clinging'. Thus, a new process is introduced in how they have become knotted with each other. It is ironic that in 'knotting', and to remain part of the tradition, "they must bind in some such way that the tension that would tear them apart actually holds them fast."[426] Despite their efforts, our awareness of their relationship in the context of Hibernian Philhellenism means they cannot be divorced from each other.

The engagement with politics in this section shows how "classical models have been remarkably flexible and inclusive media for the expression of Ireland's social and political complexities over the course of the past century."[427] Brian McGing comments on

[422] Robson, 2004: 299.
[423] Coakley, 1995: 128.
[424] Greensmith, 2020: 228.
[425] Smith and Helfand, 1989: 7.
[426] Ingold, 2015: 3.
[427] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 4.

a widely held assumption that "the general disappearance from popular discourse of classical literature and history was, no doubt, due to the Gaelic Revival."[428] Firstly, I do not believe the Irish literary canon from this period supports this claim. Rather, the 'classical' has always existed as both an anchor and a crutch for Irish culture, particularly in the Revival. Secondly, the works produced during the Revival actually reinforced "the identification of the Irish position with the ancient world, and indeed of the Irish language with that of the ancient Greeks."[429] This alignment resulted in a "will to homecoming, to the fusion of past and present, [that] has been vivid in the representations of the tragic politics of [this] age."[430] We saw this most clearly through the equation of *dúchas* and *nostos*, and the overt reliance on Greek tragic models, most specifically Oedipal dynamics. This "constant preoccupation with father-figures in Revival texts is the tell-tale sign of a society which is unsure of itself and of its ultimate destiny."[431] I also think it is a sign of Ireland's colonial and postcolonial condition. In a time of unrest and upheaval it is normal to "cling to things that offer some semblance of stability."[432] What better 'thing' to cling to than a corner-stone of Western culture that provides entry into a lofty classical tradition that had been used in the past to signify social class and colonial power.

As was clarified in the opening section of this Chapter, we are more concerned with the idea of a fluid collective memory that can be transformed and actively constructed, than ideas of a collective unconscious. The idea of 'consciousness' is still important, particularly when it comes to recognising a national identity. We can no longer rely on the reductive theories of the 'universal'. Instead, this consciousness is tied in with active processes of belonging and the use of classics provides this consciousness with "co-ordinates … [,] ways of locating ourselves in cultural as well as geographical space."[433] As clarified in Chapter 1, the very model of the rope underlines the importance of memory.

The next section in this Chapter will continue to show, following the context of this section, that "collective and cultural memories go far in determining our sense of cultural identity."[434] Kiberd claims that "common to many great authors of the Irish *risorgimentio* is the notion of self-begetting."[435] This extends beyond the period of the Gaelic Revival as

[428] McGing, 2019: 144.
[429] McDonald, 1995: 186.
[430] Steiner, 1984: 285.
[431] Kiberd, 1995: 389.
[432] Ingold, 2015: 3.
[433] Heaney, 2004b: 419.
[434] Frawley, 2008: 70.
[435] Kiberd, 1995: 384.

the idea of begetting is relevant to the construction of the entirety of the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism. Tóibín sustains this through his own engagement with Irish history and the Irish contemporary. In it, he successfully achieves something that speaks to the framework of this tradition: "as we remember, we shape a sense of ourselves which is based on a past that we participate in imaginatively – a past that we actively create through acts of remembrance."[436] In essence, Tóibín's contribution to the classicising of civic violence in Northern Ireland supports the mantra of "*remember the future, imagine the past.*"[437] Notions of 'classicism' and the 'classical' are "mediated – namely, produced – by identificatory experiences."[438] In the case of Ireland and my central figures, these identificatory experiences include colonialism, father-figures, tragic models, civic violence, and political unrest.

[436] Frawley, 2008: 70.
[437] Kiberd, 1995: 292. Italics original.
[438] Porter, 2005: 54.

2.4. Bridging the Hellenised Divide: Tóibín and the Troubles

Following on from the trend established in this Chapter, the Northern Irish Troubles have repeatedly offered themselves as a paradigm for Greek myth – particularly those myths favoured by Greek tragedy. Since the Troubles began in 1968, writers North and South of the Border have continuously shown "the contribution to issues of the modern world that the ancient world can still make."[439] Despite differences of opinion regarding the Northern Irish conflict, something that unites these works is their reliance on stories and formulas that involve the absence or denial of male figures of paternal and political authority. The authors that comment on the Troubles seem to adhere to a convention of Greek tragedy that considers "the best, if not the only, way to avoid confrontation and friction between father and son was to keep them apart."[440] George Steiner has stated that "the twentieth century has been one of the most 'neo-classical'."[441] Brian Arkins affirms that Ireland has majorly contributed to this trend "as three periods in the late nineteenth and twentieth century show: those of the Irish renaissance, the 1920s, and the period after 1975."[442] The previous section focused on the former two periods. This section will now progress to look at the latter, both expanding and focusing on the tensions discussed in the above.

This discussion shows classics being used once again to understand and articulate matters of civic and political violence. It places the violence within the family dynamic, "framing the political struggle as the conflict of public versus private interests."[443] An aim of this section then is "to suggest ways in which links, rather than differences, can be drawn across 'generations',"[444] as is the case throughout this study. Unlike during the Gaelic Revival, where we previously saw *Oedipus* being used as a paradigm for the removal of 'Father Colonialism', Troubles narratives find themselves more inclined towards the *Antigone* (the progression of the Oedipus myth) and the *Oresteia*. This section will primarily focus on Colm Tóibín's 2017 novel, *House of Names*, a retelling of the *Oresteia*; and his 2019 play *Pale Sister*, a reimagining of Sophocles' *Antigone*.[445] We have established that "myths are open to innumerable interpretations,"[446] so this section will

[439] McGing, 2019: 155. The Troubles officially ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement.
[440] Griffith, 1998: 33.
[441] Arkins, 2005: 10 (Arkins does not provide a reference for this).
[442] Ibid.
[443] Cowell-Meyers, 2006: 348.
[444] Gamble, 2008: 114.
[445] Sophocles, 2008b.
[446] Kapferer, 1997: 62.

explore the manifestation of these interpretations in the case of Tóibín's adaptations of Greek myth and how they show how "warfare decimates both societies and families, regardless of wealth or of social class."[447]

Ultimately, the section will demonstrate that "the violence of the past thirty years has also come back to haunt Irish fiction,"[448] and one way at attempting to expel this particular ghost is by articulating this violence through a classical medium. As with the previous Oedipal examples, when translated into an Irish context the use of the ancient Greek material "takes on the burden of an involved history,"[449] causing individuals or groups in society to be cast as the characters of Greek tragedy. The Greek material may be "uncomplicatedly *there*,"[450] but the reception is complicated as "popular or mass cultural forms may be manipulative rather than enabling."[451] It is because of how Tóibín approached this material in a different way, that is still firmly "rooted in specific histories and traditions,"[452] to those who preceded him in the 'Irish Classical Tradition' that that we need terms like Hibernian Philhellenism to fully encompass this dynamic.

In a pamphlet written in 1987 entitled, *Martyrs and Metaphors*, Colm Tóibín explores the relationship between literature and public life in Ireland. In it, he claims that writers taking up the subject of disputes that centre "over ground, over history, over the future"[453] have an "extra burden upon them in the countries where this dispute has taken place."[454] This is a burden that Tóibín accepts in the case of Northern Ireland. Seamus Heaney also made the claim that Greek tragedy works best when it is dealing with something 'deeply at stake' for all in society.[455] The Troubles certainly meet this criteria. We have already discussed the relevance of the figure of the 'Tragic Father' earlier in this Chapter, but there is something significant about the adoption of specific Athenian tragedies, such as those by Aeschylus and Sophocles, that still needs to be explored. One of the major points to be examined is the idea of 'domestic tragedy' and its impact on the public and private spheres.[456] Both the *Oresteia* and *Antigone* fit into this same

[447] Torrance, 2021.
[448] Tóibín, 2001: xxxii.
[449] McDonald, 1995: 187.
[450] Ibid. Italics original.
[451] Hardwick and Harrison, 2013: xxiii.
[452] Ibid: xxiv.
[453] Tóibín, 1987: 5.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Heaney, 10th April 2006.
[456] Cleary, 1999: 502.

classification. They both focus on domestic troubles that also have far-reaching impacts on their respective city-states of Mycenae and Thebes.

Tóibín's generation is unique in that it stands between two pivotal periods in Irish politics: the decade that incorporated the Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War; and the Troubles. Tóibín exists in a space between Irish Independence as recent memory (and an imposed, or invented, personal memory), and his first-hand experience of the Troubles. It is the phenomenon that Conor Cruise O'Brien described in 1963 of how "our elders have talked their memories into our memories until we come to possess some sense of continuity exceeding and traversing our own individual being."[457] This speaks to the feature of Ireland's past seen in the previous Chapter that relates to the "oral tradition, as an alternative process of human memory."[458] Collective memory is immeasurably influential in Ireland. The historical, political, and postcolonial context creates further complications, inventing a space of "post-memory,"[459] where memories are inherited through families and communities. Tóibín's work is extremely helpful in this regard as it amounts to a "not inconsiderable mapping of collective and cultural memory which is alert to the strange resonances that result when we force ourselves to reconsider the pasts that are inherited through memory and history"[460] Ultimately, Tóibín's work examines the "way in which cultural memory functions on a day-to-day basis in Ireland."[461]

While Mahaffy and Wilde were important in determining where Irish identity stood then, Paul Delaney states that Tóibín's work is "vital for an understanding of where we are, now, in Ireland."[462] Tóibín, unlike Mahaffy or Wilde, is able to write about Irishness at a time when it has its own document to define and rule it, *Bunreacht na hEireann* ('The Irish Constitution').[463] Mahaffy and Wilde were able to construct their own ideas of (Anglo) Irishness without political confinements. However, identity is not something that becomes static just because it is included in a legal text. There is no "fixed inscription of a collective identity,"[464] and Tóibín's constant questioning and reworking of Irish identity proves that it is a fluid construct. Irish identity has been and still is a contentious and multi-layered idea, but Tóibín offers a solution to this through his understanding of history as "our

[457] O'Brien, 1963: 87. This is reminiscent of the earlier quote from Wilde that the Irish are the "greatest talkers since the Greeks" (Yeats, 1922: 25).
[458] Thuente, 1979: 103.
[459] Frawley, 2008: 70.
[460] Ibid, 82.
[461] Ibid.
[462] Delaney, 2008: 20.
[463] 'Bunreacht na hEireann', 2019.
[464] Harte, 2008: 60.

mythology."[465] Tóibín wants to "demystify Irishness,"[466] and he critiques the postcolonial idea that Ireland is a romanticised 'Utopia', as will be further seen in the next Chapter. He declares that "books are written, as in Ireland in the old days, to replace a country."[467] They are a space where history becomes literature, historical figures become actors in the plot, and truth is no longer discernible from the prose or poetry that takes its place. Instead, his writing reflects on the "radically different versions of Irishness that emerged in that period, particularly when defining sexual and moral questions,"[468] in respective contrast and comparison to Mahaffy and Wilde. It is intriguing that the way he challenges this mythologising is by further interacting with mythology to "reflects the ways in which Ireland has been refashioned in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries."[469]

In the same essay, Tóibín claims he wants to be "through with history."[470] Yet he repeatedly contradicts himself, and *House of Names* is a prime example of this. In an interview with Joseph Wisenfarth, Tóibín exclaims: "you know, this godforsaken, wet little place on the edge of things and its level of obsession about itself!"[471] Judging by the work of Tóibín, Mahaffy, Wilde, and their contemporaries, this 'obsession' is fairly named. In *Martyrs and Metaphors*, Tóibín ends his treatise by calling Ireland "a strange and insistent protagonist."[472] Despite his efforts, he never seems to be 'through' with his recurring character, even though Tóibín's works repeatedly offer "a determined critique of grand narratives of history that present a consolidated and simplified view of the past."[473] The next Chapter will look at Tóibín's understandings of homosexuality and Plato through his interaction with Wilde and, by proxy, the tradition of classicism in Ireland. This Chapter too will focus on the indirect relationship that Tóibín has with the figures who came before him, by examining his 'study of interest' in Hibernian Philhellenism through his use of Greek tragic narratives to speak of recent Irish history.[474] Alongside that, this analysis of 'cultural paternal influence' in Tóibín's work will further verify that "history is correspondence."[475]

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[465] Tóibín, 1987: 5.
[466] Foster, 1989: 92.
[467] Tóibín, 2001: xxxii.
[468] Walshe, 2013: 2.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Tóibín, 1987: 11.
[471] Wisenfarth, 2009: 18.
[472] Tóibín, 1987: 20.
[473] Frawley, 2008: 71.
[474] In an interview with Joseph Wisenfarth, Tóibín expresses that: "I don't even have an M. A., let alone a Ph.D." (Wisenfarth, 2009: 4).
[475] Ingold, 2015: 157.

Having an elite university education, but not one in specifically classical material, means he has had to work harder to mine "the ways in which the past is spoken about and remembered, […] to unearth the strategies which are used, and the syntax and the vocabulary which is deployed, in any engagement with or construction of the past."[476] To him, classical antiquity has come to him "already received, filtered, coloured, and stained,"[477] and he must as "the interpreter and the responder be able to develop multiple consciousness"[478] that constitutes as an "awareness of the complexities of the ancient and also of the modern."[479] Later in this section, we will see the strength of Tóibín's classicism being criticised by professional classicists. I do not believe we should think of his work as belonging to the 'classical tradition' in the prescriptive sense. Rather, his work belongs to Hibernian Philhellenism.

Tragic Violence

When thinking about notable civic conflicts of the modern era, "Ireland equals Troubles"[480] on the global scale. Few writing within or about a Northern Irish context have avoided the widely recognised trend of classicising civil and domestic violence. These writers appear to "to appropriate Greek originals against the grain of some contemporary ideology, in an attempt to redefine the Irish 'problem' of inherited identity and thus to exorcise the toxins of the past."[481] Two of the most preeminent examples, aside from Colm Tóibín, are Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley. Both of whom "like the poets of Greek antiquity"[482] adopted the framework of Greek myth to verbalise a specific situation. For them, "Greek tragedy was a useful tool to discuss violence."[483] Not only does the use of classical allusion locate these writers in "canonical English-language poetic traditions,"[484] but the idea of making original and reframing classical works in undeniably Irish contexts also places them within the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism. Inevitably, this process involves "misreading previous writing."[485] This 'misreading' can explain why the use of Greek tragedy and its

[476] Delaney, 2008: 6.
[477] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 6.
[478] Hardwick, 2013: 30.
[479] Ibid.
[480] Dawe, 2008: 45.
[481] Walshe, 2013: 35.
[482] Diaz, 2021: 48.
[483] Impens, 14th April 2018.
[484] O'Rourke, 2020: 307.
[485] Bloom, 1997: xix.

mythology has come under fire as a clunky way to express the violence in Northern Ireland.[486] Instead, it should be considered as a further way to strengthen the idea of a 'certain Greek kinship' in Hibernian Philhellenism.

To briefly elucidate the examples mentioned above, and to also clarify that tragedy was not the only vehicle chosen for the Troubles, we will turn to Michael Longley's *Ceasefire*.[487] In *Ceasefire*, Longley, who has been "Homer-haunted for fifty years,"[488] describes the scene from Book 24 of the *Iliad* that involves Priam's embassy to Achilles following the death of Hektor (24. 365-680).[489] In the poem, Longley 'lyricises' Homeric epic in what he calls his "freeze-frame technique."[490] This enables him to "broach nightmarish aspects of the Troubles."[491] While he "felt very close to Homer"[492] when writing this poem, Longley makes clear that he "Hibernicised [his] version."[493] By transforming the conflict over which Priam visits Achilles from Troy to Northern Ireland, he highlights universal human conditions:

> Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears
> Achilles took him by the hand …
> …
> I get down on my knees and do what must be done
> And Kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son.[494]

Yet Longley states that: "it was Homer who spoke to us across the millennia [,] I was only his mouthpiece."[495] *Ceasefire* is one of a number of poems by Longley inspired by epic that engage with the violence of the Troubles.[496] Longley is also not alone in this equation as so too does Heaney approach the violence through the epic model, albeit Latin and not Greek, of Virgil's *Aeneid*.[497] Heaney is also renowned for his use of Roman pastoral poetry

[486] Members of the tradition see what they want to see in something, and create classical analogies and parallels to their current situation that at once gives it more global credence, and re-writes the narrative so to disregard English colonialism.
[487] Longley, 2005: 225.
[488] Longley 2009: 97. He is not alone in this, seeing as "Homer haunted antiquity as no other poet or historical figure ever did" (Porter, 2021: 82). See also Alden, 2020; Taplin, 2009.
[489] Homer, 2011: 389-409 (trans. Anthony Verity).
[490] Harrison, 2009: 8.
[491] Ibid.
[492] Longley, 2009: 101.
[493] Ibid.
[494] Longley, 2005: 225.
[495] Longley, 2009: 105.
[496] See particularly *Phemios and Medon* (Longley, 2005: 229) and *The Butchers* (Ibid: 194).
[497] Heaney, 2016; Virgil, 2005.

to address issues of sectarian violence, proving once again that this is just one example of one version of a tradition that can be plotted with its many entwining strands.[498]

I look to Longley, not to equate the use of Homer with Greek tragedy but rather, to show how Greek myths (whether used in epic or drama):

> Utilise the family and the distinction between public and private spheres as well as, more generally, suggesting some of the ways in which different types of tragic narrative structure our broad perceptions of class and sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland.[499]

Michael Longley's *Ceasefire* shows how the text is "a dynamic site in which relational processes and practices are the focus of analysis instead of static structures and products."[500] The same will be true of the works that rely on Greek tragedy. Longley is still classicizing violence even if he is just a step outside of the trend that we are primarily concerned with that sees "a handful of Greek myths, that of Antigone among them, recur in the art and thought of the twentieth century to an almost obsessive degree"[501] in Ireland. Another example that exists outside the focus of this thesis that speaks to the work of Tóibín is that of Carlo Gébler's *I, Antigone*.[502] This 2021 novel is a reimagining of the story of Antigone, in which we see her return to write a biography of her father, that is "set precisely on the fault-lines running between the political and domestic."[503]

This begs the question as to why Greek tragedy and Greek myth has been so heavily adopted in writing about Northern Ireland? Immediately, the answer seems obvious: "'tragedy' is a term frequently used to describe the contemporary Northern Irish situation."[504] One of the major criticisms of the use of Greek tragedy and Northern Ireland paradigms is the simultaneous simplification and romanticisation of the violence. By memorialising and mythologising history, it is transformed into a "fixed narrative of cultural meaning,"[505] which strays dangerously close to justifications of 'universality'. By attaching mythic paradigms to civic and political unrest, especially the House of Atreus and

[498] See Heaney's collection, *Electric Light* (2001), for explicit engagement with Roman pastoral poetry particularly Virgil's *Georgics* (2009) and *Eclogues* (2009).
[499] Cleary, 1999: 502.
[500] Alfaro, 1996: 268.
[501] Steiner, 1984: 300.
[502] Gébler, 2021.
[503] Butler, 6th September 2021.
[504] Richards, 1995: 191.
[505] Harte, 2008: 56.

the Theban Cycle, there is an implied application of the 'divine fate' model. For example, in *Antigone*, the Chorus observe "how ancient sorrows rise again; disaster is linked with disaster. Woe again must each generation inherit (594-596)."[506] Instead of the tragic paradigms offering solutions or commenting critically on the violence and conflict, they often work to excuse it as preordained, or as fulfilling a tragic destiny. Consistently applying this term 'tragedy' to the Northern Ireland as "both a descriptive term and a theatrical form, conveys an image of the North as the House of Atreus."[507]

The paradigms used often place the real-life violence on the lofty level of fictionalised violence. The problem is "not that they use such material but that they impose models on their fate that refuse the subtleties of that material, subtleties that might enable other interpretations and understandings of the dynamics of human actions."[508] Once again, unlike Jung and Freud, Kapferer succeeds in acknowledging how mythic models can be forced. Examining the specific context of a 30-year conflict can offer another understanding for the reliance on Greek tragedy. Unthinkable violence and division became an every-day occurrence. Many people born during the Troubles had never known a different reality, and this produced a level of fatigue, hopelessness, and despondency in people's responses to the conflict. The projection of these daily occurrences onto the stage of a Greek tragedy gave them "a quality which transcends the mundane."[509]

Another reason why Greek tragedy has been repeatedly adopted in the case of Northern Ireland and other contexts of political turmoil is because myth can symbolise the dynamics of power. This is explicit in the cases of *Antigone* and the *Oresteia*, through how they offer "a link between the theory of Western canon and the praxis of political leadership."[510] This Chapter has demonstrated that nationalism and myth allows authors the opportunity to appropriate "in their own language and with their own means of artistic expression a cultural commodity previously closely associated with the colonial ruling-class"[511] in an attempt to define post-colonial identity. We saw this occur during the Gaelic Revival, but it is brought into sharper relief in Northern Ireland – a place that is still attached to the colonial body and where division remains active.

[506] Sophocles, 2008b: 22 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto).
[507] Richards, 1995: 192.
[508] Kapferer, 1997: 219.
[509] Cohen, 1969: 344.
[510] Cowell-Meyers, 2006: 347.
[511] Revermann, 2008: 110.

In Northern Ireland "the symbolism of a dynamics of power through contemporary nationalism was reissued"[512] to challenge modern politics, religion and identity. Greek tragedy is the form this symbolism took. The connections across the twentieth century between Greek tragedy and Irish political and religious struggles are not a coincidence, nor is the medium. This chapter and the next speaks in some way to a fundamental legacy of the classical world: tragedy (here) and philosophy (Chapter 3). They act as our strands, our knots, our meshes of Hibernian Philhellenism. Hibernian Philhellenism has embraced these canonical facets of ancient literature, but within these embraces, its members place themselves in direct descendance from the major players themselves: Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Plato, respectively. My use of the word 'legacy' here is with an understanding that it was often a way to understand the intention of taking influence in a context of the 'classical tradition' that "implied that ancient culture was dead but might be retrieved and reapplied."[513] Instead of considering this as a linear genealogy, my analysis is looking to participate in dialogues that also consider influence as lateral and active, spanning "various 'presents' … [and] construct[ing] a 'past' that generates its own traditions."[514] Therefore, this section and its exploration of Tóibín's work hopes to make "new observations on the well-known tendency of Northern Irish authors to adapt classical literature for reflection on political violence,"[515] and to show "the diverse ways in which Greek and domestic tragedy work to structure our perception of that conflict."[516]

Antigone's 'Pale Sister'

The political and interpersonal paradigms discussed in this Chapter have seen the repeated use of Greek myth – specifically those myths that involve the absence or removal of patriarchal figures. As Kapferer stated, "this analysis of the connection between different kinds of myths should not ignore actual historical processes affecting their relation and significance."[517] In the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism, this draw towards these myths does not equate to literal rejection but rather, to a form of *agon* and influence that leads to its very construction.

[512] Kapferer, 1997: 291.
[513] Hardwick, 2003: 2.
[514] Hardwick and Harrison, 2013: xxii.
[515] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 4.
[516] Cleary, 1999: 507.
[517] Kapferer, 1997: 66.

Though Seamus Heaney is not the focus of this brief discussion on *Antigone*, he underlines how "*Antigone* is a play that has had a deep and abiding purchase on [him] and [his] generation in Ireland."[518] Alluding to the sheer number of ways *Antigone* has been employed in this context, he has also wondered: "how many Antigones could Irish theatre put up with?"[519] Tóibín, through his interest in the "clash between law and natural justice,"[520] adds another Antigone to the list in his play, *Pale Sister*. However, he approached this familiar Greek tragedy in a different way to some of the other Northern Irish versions through his primary focus on Ismene, Antigone's sister. [521] In other words, his focus is more on the survivors of conflict, something that is extremely relevant to the Northern Irish context, especially with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 being less than 30 years ago.

Pale Sister is just one example of how Tóibín straddles the space between 'tradition' and 'reception' models in classical allusion. His very use of Antigone as a paradigm speaks to the well-established tradition, so too does the fact that it comments on Irish issues although it is set in Thebes. However, he enacts a joint approach of 'tradition' and 'reception' with his Antigone through his coupling of a conventional perspective with more globalising appeal. The former is in contrast to Stacey Gregg's contemporary *Ismene,* which is a clearer example of 'classical reception' in practice through how she sets the play in Northern Ireland itself. The latter point links Tóibín with Gregg through their joint effort to shine light on the survivors.

During the Troubles, Antigone was a "contested allegorical figure in Northern Irish discourse."[522] She at once symbolised "an icon of resistance,"[523] and a model which attracts further conflict and violence. Depending on how the story is framed, there is the added polarisation of the narrative whereas one side can be cast as 'the good', and the other as 'the bad'. In Greek myth or epic, characters are rarely shown as completely infallible. The overly-used simplification of the *lex talionis* is relied upon for mythic paradigms with regards to Northern Ireland. But again, it presents parallels but not solutions, and is one of the reasons why *Antigone*, despite appearing to offer non-violent forms of civil

[518] Heaney, 2004b: 420.
[519] Ibid: 170.
[520] Lloyd, 2019: 105.
[521] See also Stacey Gregg's *Ismene* (2007) for a similar, but more contemporary, version of this approach. Gregg's *Ismene*, in duality with Tóibín's *House of Names*, was written in response to particular sectarian crime in Northen Ireland, the murder of Robert McCartney allegedly carried out by the Provisional IRA (Remoundou-Howley, 2011: 53).
[522] Torrance, 2020a: 326.
[523] Revermann, 2008: 112.

disobedience, has been heavily criticised. In his 1974 work, Conor Cruise O'Brien concludes that, despite her intentions, Antigone's actions are indefensible since "the consequences of her non-violent action merge in acts of violence."[524] As true as this may be, it is an interesting critique from O'Brien, considering he was the first to use *Antigone* as an analogy for the Troubles in a lecture given in Queens University Belfast in 1968.[525] *Antigone* in a Northern Irish contest truly demonstrates the "true force of literary and cultural memory: it stains as it burnishes, and it incites debate about its values."[526]

Alongside the public importance that funerals and burials hold in Irish culture,[527] Anthony Roche sums up why *Antigone* repeatedly finds relevance in a Northern Irish context, even after all of the criticisms against it as a model. In short, it is a play "where some inequity or variance is widely perceived to exist in the man-made laws, where a portion of its people suffer under such inequities."[528] Tóibín's interest in these types of social disparities is carried over in his writing before and after the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland. This will be seen in the next Chapter but it is classical material again that is used to bridge the gaps between these inequalities. His classical responses to issues in society maintain "the difficult balance between the claims of the status quo and the urge to revolution, between the need to build stable political structures and maintain tribal loyalties."[529]

Despite the fact that *Antigone* has regularly been purpose-fit to the Northern Irish conflict, George Steiner, in his 1984 work, *Antigones*, sees Sophocles' play as a perfect example of "a poetics of reading, of a study of the interactions between a major text and its interpretations across time."[530] Colm Tóibín can now be seen to have contributed to this study with his 2019 production of an original retelling of *Antigone*, *Pale Sister*. Neither in the text nor in interviews does Tóibín make specific claims that he had the Troubles in mind

[524] O'Brien, 1974: 156.
[525] O'Brien, 1974: 159; Harkin, 2008: 294.
[526] Porter, 2021: 130.
[527] Torrance, 2020: 326. Antigone speaks to their importance: "yet what could I have done to win renown more glorious than giving burial to my own brother? (502-504" [Antigone, 2008b: 18 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto)]. They have particular relevance in Northern Ireland too due to the high number of 'disappeared' people, by both the IRA and the British military powers, that were never afforded proper burial. Similarly, Seamus Heaney highlights the significance of the burial of the Hunger Strikers during the Troubles (Heaney, 2009: 125).
[528] Roche, 1988: 226. Antigone confronts Creon about this power imbalance: "these men would say it, except that terror cows them into silence. A king has many a privilege: the greatest, that he can say and do all that he will (504-507)" [Antigone, 2008b: 18 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto)]. This also directly relates to the system of gerrymandering that was in operation in Northen Ireland prior to and at the beginning of the Troubles (see Kane, 1971; Munck, 1992).
[529] Ibid: 249.
[530] Steiner, 1984: ix.

when he was writing *Pale Sister* (unlike with *House of Names*). What he did plan on was giving voice to those left behind in conflict, to those who have to stand powerless and voiceless and watch as violence unfolds. In Ireland, it is impossible to think of civic violence without imagining the early twentieth century fight for Independence, or the Troubles, as integral ways to understand it.

Pale Sister was first performed in the Gate Theatre in Dublin on 31st October 2019. Written by Colm Tóibín and starring Lisa Dwan as Ismene, it is a one-woman show in which Tóibín gives voice to Antigone's sister, "the pale sister [,] the witness"[531] during the events of Sophocles' original tragedy. In the 'Author's Note', Tóibín recounts how his first experience of the figure of Antigone in an Irish context was through Conor Cruise O'Brien's *States of Ireland* (1972).[532] In this work, as briefly mentioned, O'Brien uses the parallel as an example of the futility of violence: "a stiff price for that handful of dust on Polyneices."[533] Although Tóibín himself does not make explicit allusions between his play and the Troubles, the first time he "came across the story of Antigone and Ismene when [he] was in [his] teens"[534] was against the backdrop of a Troubles metaphor.

Colm Tóibín, when approaching *Antigone*, was interested to explore "the areas in public life and private conscience that remain indistinct,"[535] or, more specifically, how civil disagreements affect those not central to the drama. Tóibín wrote the play after co-teaching a class at Colombia University in 2018 with actor Lisa Dwan. In examining the peripheries of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Tóibín discovered his 'witness', Ismene, whose position in the story of Antigone's conflict with Creon emerged as shadowy and ambiguous. In Sophocles play, Ismene describes herself as "too weak (79)"[536] to act with her sister. When he started to write the play, Tóibín admits that:

> I did not know what Ismene would do. I merely knew she would speak. In the other versions she has been mainly silent. Once she broke that silence some power would have to be released. That was all I knew.[537]

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[531] Tóibín, 2019: 12.
[532] Ibid: 44; O'Brien, 1974: 156-159. This followed on from his lecture in Queen's University Belfast in which the Antigone paradigm was first discussed.
[533] O'Brien, 1974: 157; "Then at once brought handfuls of dry dust, and raised aloft a shapely vase of bronze, and three times poured the funeral libation of the dead (428-431)", [Antigone, 2008b: 16 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto)].
[534] Tóibín, 2019: 44.
[535] Ibid: 46.
[536] Sophocles, 2008b: 5 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto).
[537] Tóibín, 2019: 46.

In a powerful moment at the end of the play, she does just that: "what I whisper does not come from me although it is mine, yes it is fully mine, as my voice gains in strength. 'I am not afraid of you!'"[538]

In giving voice to the 'witness' of such a distinct domestic conflict, Tóibín affords a space for the everyday person who is unavoidably and indirectly involved in conflict in the tradition of classicised Troubles narratives. It should also be "kept in mind that most of the surviving tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides were originally written and performed against the background of the Peloponnesian War,"[539] and thus their performative and historical contexts are inseparable from those of domestic conflict. Tóibín's version of *Antigone* is thereby in keeping with Conor Cruise O'Brien's rejection of his own Antigone model, and by extension the 'traditional' approach to the tragedy, proving how *agon* with the tradition, and your own self-fashioned relation to it, is central to Hibernian Philhellenism:

> Reading that essay no, three years afterwards, I find myself no longer in sympathy with the conclusion. Antigone is very fine on the stage, or in retrospect or a long way off, or even in real life for a single, splendid epiphany. But after four years of Antigone and her under-studies and all those funerals – more than a hundred dead at the time of writing – you begin to feel that Ismene's commonsense and feeling for the living may make the more needful, if less spectacular element in 'human dignity'. In any case the play has been moving away from the ceremonial act of non-violent disobedience, and into the fratricidal war, which precedes the action of the play.[540]

Alongside this, Tóibín gives voice not only to a 'witness' of the conflict, but to someone watching the progression of a patriarchal tyrant. Creon is shown as stubborn, merciless, and irrationally callous: "I saw a cloud pass over Creon's face. It was hard, cruel, but flushed as well, almost delighted."[541] Creon, following the death of Oedipus, has become the surrogate father to Antigone and Ismene, as well as the ruler of Thebes. He is the ultimate authority figure in their life, overlapping both the private and public spheres. In Sophocles'

[538] Ibid: 38 (Ismene speaking to Creon).
[539] Leezenberg, 2010: 266.
[540] O'Brien, 1972: 159.
[541] Tóibín, 2019: 18.

play, his son Haemon charts this change, declaring that Creon's rule "is not government, but tyranny (737)."[542]

Arguably, one could say that Antigone is even more stubborn and irrationally callous, especially since her "civil disobedience is non-violent, but everywhere attracts violence."[543] For his style and audience, Tóibín is approaching his interpretation in a simplistic way. As I see it, Creon stands for the ruler (the patriarch) who is impeding religious convention and freedom, which has a direct parallel to sectarian rule in Northern Ireland. Creon in Sophocles' play even asks: "am I to rule for them, not for myself?"[544] The principle of this type of engagement is not dissimilar to that seen during the Gaelic Revival. The difference here is in Tóibín's approach, which is manifested through his focus on Ismene. Ismene, alone, as the 'witness', sees:

> Something that no one else saw. I saw Creon in all his weakness. I saw that what had entered his spirit was not strength. The gods had not come to give him wisdom, merely the empty sound that hollow wisdom makes.[545]

In this use of Greek tragedy, the "theme of *recognition* (what Aristotle called *anagnorisis*)"[546] has specific resonance in "semi-colonial Northern Ireland."[547] Every other member of the *polis* of Thebes seems afraid to counter Creon's violent rule, yet Ismene, by removing herself from the action, can see the fragility of Creon and he loses his power as a patriarch. Thus, Tóibín's Antigone is trying to resist (and figuratively 'kill') Creon (the patriarchal and colonial figure), and dying/killing herself in the process. *Pale Sister* is then a good example of Hibernian Philhellenism at play in how it represents "a form of the concept of intertextuality that emphasises the production of ideology."[548]

The 'Killed' Father in the *Oresteia*

Tóibín's primary attempt at classicizing the Troubles of Northern Ireland is through his 2017 novel, *House of Names*, a re-telling of the *Oresteia*. In 1986, whilst writing a

[542] Sophocles, 2008b: 26 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto).
[543] O'Brien, 1972: 157.
[544] Sophocles, 2008b: 26 (trans. H. D. F. Kitto). This directly reflects the colonial power that rules for the settler colonial population and not the native, or indigenous one.
[545] Tóibín, 2019: 23.
[546] Arkins, 2005: 147.
[547] Ibid.
[548] Alfaro, 1996: 282.

travelogue about his journey on foot along the border of Northern Ireland, *Bad Blood: A Walk Along the Border*, he visited two survivors of the Kingsmill Massacre of 1976.[549] His journey and narrative ends with this account, and he would re-visit this tragedy whilst he was writing *House of Names*. The Kingsmill Massacre happened in County Armagh on the 5th January 1976 when a bus carrying twelve men home from work, eleven Protestants and one Catholic, was stopped by gunmen. The Catholic man was identified and allowed to escape and the gunmen opened fire on the remaining eleven men. There was one survivor among the Protestant men. Tóibín has stated that "of all the killings in those years, Kingsmill stood out"[550] and that "that image of a single figure still alive in a heap of dead bodies would haunt me for thirty years and eventually make its way in a scene towards the end of the novel *House of Names*."[551] All of this begs the question (or, perhaps, answers it): is Tóibín's *House of Names* just "another domestic tragedy about the Troubles masquerading in Attic attire?"[552]

In Tóibín's two choices of Greek tragedies, the action of both is driven by the death of the father or patriarch. It is interesting to note that even when female perspectives or characters appear to be the driving force of his narratives they are actually a "consequent rewriting of the Oedipal plot."[553] We will see this again in the next Chapter when looking at the absent male body in his fictions. Tóibín's own father died when he was 12 years old.[554] The relation between that event and his narrative draw towards dead, missing or absent fathers, alongside his pursuit of historical and cultural male figures must be acknowledged. In explorations of 'cultural paternal influence', it is impossible to separate a figure from their own personal context and how it affects how they relate to the past and the contemporary. Tóibín does not write about the past with a detached objectiveness. There is always some form of the immediate present superimposed onto his own subjective understanding of the past (for example, the Troubles and the *Oresteia*; or, in the next Chapter, his own sexuality with Wilde and Plato). We can consider the effect of his personal past and context as a sort of "infectiousness"[555] in his writing. Tóibín has admitted that "I

[549] Tóibín, 2001: 187-193.
[550] Ibid: 188.
[551] Tóibín, 20th May 2017.
[552] Cleary, 1999: 526.
[553] Walshe, 2013: 159. Tóibín seems repeatedly interested in this dynamic. *The Blackwater Lightship* (Tóibín, 1999), is a focus of the next Chapter. In it, one of his focal characters, Declan, flippantly remarks that "boys wanted to sleep with their mother and kill their father" (Ibid: 9).
[554] Wisenfarth, 2009: 1.
[555] Dimock, 2013: 740.

thought I could not delve any further into the experience of my father's death."[556] We will see in this discussion how he does so by "writing about like disasters"[557] in Greek tragedy and by seeing how "the early and sudden death of his father and the consequences of this for his relationship with his mother are all crucial in his representations"[558] of the family dynamic. The focus on the mother (Clytemnestra) that we see in *House of Names* is actually completely framed in the absence of the father figure (Agamemnon).

For Tóibín, and many others who have re-written Greek tragedy in Ireland, stories like the *Oresteia* and *Antigone* resonate with the events of the Troubles. Despite the over-simplification, they are at their essence, and by Tóibín's own admission, stories about how "violence begets further acts of violence."[559] A solution is repeatedly apparent to these writers: classicise the violence as a way to understand it. This illustrates the enduring power of classical texts as ways to approach the Irish contemporary. In the case of the myths surrounding the House of Atreus, the violence of the sacrifice of Iphigenia is caused by the impending violence at Troy, which prompts Clytemnestra to commit her act of violence, which provoked Orestes to his. The reciprocal violence between both paramilitary and official sides of the Troubles is a familiar, yet often critiqued, analogy to this. Tóibín sees it differently. He sees it as a way to "dramatise the idea of violence as a spiral and something lodged in secret places in the soul."[560] It is important to remember though, that "the myths are not causes of political violence,"[561] instead they "provide metaphors for those engaged in political violence to understand."[562]

In an interview from 2009, Tóibín states that while his non-fiction is usually quite political, his novels have "dealt with the politics of Ireland, but obliquely."[563] This may have been the case in terms of other more nuanced socio-political narratives.[564] But as gathered from his testimony, *How I Re-Wrote a Greek Tragedy*,[565] the politics of Northern Ireland were at the forefront of his mind when approaching the works of Aeschylus, alongside the constant contemporary coverage of "human suffering and destruction from

[556] Tóibín, 1995: 111. In *The Sign of the Cross* Tóibín's feelings towards his father's death and how he associates it with Catholic practice are peppered throughout (Ibid).
[557] Wisenfarth, 2009: 1.
[558] Walshe, 2013: 4.
[559] Tóibín, 20th May 2017.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Kapferer, 1997: 215.
[562] Ibid.
[563] Wisenfarth, 2009: 5.
[564] For example, see Tóibín's novel, *The Heather Blazing*, that is set against the backdrop of twentieth century Fianna Fáil politics (Tóibín, 1992).
[565] Tóibín, 20th May 2017.

the war zones"[566] of Syria and Iraq. Unlike Tóibín's previous calls for a refusal to see the Irish in everything, in this text he sees it as "a reimagining of the original myth, but also the many literary and historical precedents it interweaves; its use of specifically Irish cultural and literary references; and its place in his wider canon."[567] As with *Pale Sister*, the novel's global appeal results from it casting the original "war tragedy"[568] into a "much broader complex of social and political intrigues, demonstrating how numerous different individuals and groups become drawn into the web of conflict."[569] Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* similarly reflects the globalisation of Tóibín's respective retellings of Greek tragedy. *The Burial at Thebes* is a version of *Antigone* in which Heaney indicates that, like Tóibín, broader geopolitical events and dynamics informed his approach to tragedy alongside homegrown and lived experiences of the Troubles:

> George Bush and his war on terror provided an immediate justification of staging *Antigone*, but that the British treatment of Irish people in Ireland over the centuries helped him find a voice for Antigone as well as a moral context for her stance.[570]

This is extremely relevant as the power of these 'literary and historical precedents' cannot be isolated from the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism.

House of Names works as an analogy for the Troubles, but also as a way to explore the performative nature of conflict and drama, and the way in which a classical tradition can produce material for a general audience. It also speaks to a framework that underwrites this thesis and that:

> The meaning of a work of literature is realised at least partly at the point of reception: such reception can be simply reading the original text in a modern context, or reading it into a modern context through literary refashioning.[571]

These myths and Greek tragedies have generally been received on the Irish stage. Tóibín's reception of Greek tragedy is two-fold: culturally, from ancient Greece to contemporary Ireland; stylistically, from drama to novel-form. This also affects his translation of the

[566] Torrance, 2021.
[567] Costello-Sullivan, 2019: 3.
[568] Torrance, 2021.
[569] Ibid.
[570] Wilmer, 2010: 230; Heaney, 2004a.
[571] Harrison, 2009: 15. See also Martindale, 1993: 3.

myth, since he is writing for a general, contemporary readership, who would not share the same familiarity with the original myths as an ancient audience. Certain provisions are made that involve him introducing "necessary piece[s] of signposting to prepare the audience to deal with cultural alien objects."[572] He does this initially by context. Tóibín allows us to experience Clytemnestra's grief over watching Iphigeneia's sacrifice, instead of having a watchman proclaiming Agamemnon's imminent return (*Agamemnon*: 1-39).[573] The events of the novel in relation to Aeschylus' work push the boundaries between the public and the private. The story of the House of Atreus is a tale of suffering but is also primarily a domestic tragedy that has high civic impact. This results in Tóibín making his work a domestic space, "rather than the stage of a Greek theatre, or a page of translated Greek text."[574] Colm Tóibín also locates his retelling of Aeschylus in antiquity, unlike some of his contemporary Irish 're-tellers', who Hibernicise their texts not just in meaning but in setting: for example, Marina Carr's 2004 retelling of *Medea*, *By the Bog of Cats*, that is set in the midlands of Ireland.[575]

Tóibín's narrative follows the overall shape of Aeschylus' and features versions of all the main events that occur in the first two plays of the trilogy.[576] *House of Names* begins with violent imagery and with Clytemnestra fantasizing about the death of Agamemnon: "a knife piercing the soft flesh under the ear, with intimacy and precision, and then moving across the throat as soundlessly as the sun moves across the sky."[577] Eibhear Walshe's chapter 'New Ways of Writing the Mother' explores "absent, isolated or emotionally distant mothers"[578] that "occupy a central place within"[579] the works of Tóibín. We can see Clytemnestra as being one of these mothers. The same calculating, ruthless woman as shown by Aeschylus, "who has an impious spirit towards her children that belies the name of mother (*Libation Bearers*: 191),"[580] is not lost in cultural translation. Although, Tóibín affords her more justification for her rage through the detailed account of Iphigenia's sacrifice and Clytemnestra's imprisonment during it.[581] This could have much to do with

[572] Wiles, 2007: 364.
[573] Aeschylus, 2009a: 5-7.
[574] Tóibín, 20th May 2017.
[575] Carr, 2004.
[576] The three plays that make up the trilogy of the *Oresteia* are: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *Eumenides* (Aeschylus, 2009a).
[577] Tóibín, 2017a: 3.
[578] Walshe, 2013: 157.
[579] Ibid.
[580] Aeschylus, 2009a: 237 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).
[581] Tóibín, 2017a: 12-36. See Torrance 2021.

how "the hostile treatment of women and children in times of war is also a significant theme"[582] in this novel; one which speaks directly to a social dynamic in the Troubles, and in contemporary conflicts, where (primarily) men fought, died, disappeared, or went into hiding, and the women are left behind to care for the children.[583]

Tóibín and Aeschylus' texts share the generational echo that pervades the myth. The theme of ancestral fault, as carried through the male line, is prevalent in both stories.[584] Cassandra, particularly, can feel the curse that has been passed down through "a house that hates the gods, one that has knowledge of many crimes in which kin has been slain and heads severed (*Agamemnon*: 1090-1)."[585] This mythic (and biblical) trope that 'the sins of the father will be revisited on the son' is upheld.[586] Since antiquity, this idea has permeated literature, rooting itself in other genres such as the Gothic, but also was taken up by Catholicism which latched onto this idea through Christianity, and in Ireland perhaps through 'Greek kinship', to create the idea of 'Catholic Guilt'.[587] Tóibín's understanding of colloquial and cultural attitudes like that of 'Catholic guilt' show his "imaginative attachment to the local."[588] The idea of ancestral fault also plays an important part in certain psychological theories and societal considerations, specifically that "behaviour … is often linked in part to heredity in the social imagination, especially criminal behaviour."[589] This perception of 'bad-blood' (a phrase used in the title of Tóibín's aforementioned travelogue) often leads to further crimes or acts of violence as the perpetrator has been indoctrinated by society to fit a certain mould. This was also a common opinion held in the Troubles – lineage, religion, and a father's paramilitary history instantly marked the son for a similar fate in society.[590]

Orestes is of particular interest to Tóibín in *House of Names*. Similar to Ismene in *Pale Sister,* when approaching the character of Orestes, he saw him as the "quiet one"[591]

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[582] Torrance, 2022: 200.
[583] See Keefe, 2018.
[584] Gagné calls "ancient Greek perspective 'ancestral fault', and the modern perspective 'inherited guilt'" (Gagné, 2013: 220).
[585] Aeschylus, 2009a: 129 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).
[586] Gagné, 2013: 2.
[587] The more "highly charged Christian term 'inherited guilt'" (Gagné, 2013: 3) is more commonly used in scholarship but 'Catholic guilt' is more relevant in a cultural Irish context.
[588] Impens, 2019: 526.
[589] Gagné, 2013: 2. This is constant in Greek tragedy too which is "filled with the idea that the crimes committed in the present are grounded in the crimes committed in the past" (Ibid: 244). We see this in all of the tragedies discussed in this Chapter.
[590] Similarly in antiquity, "the notion that individuals and communities could be punished for the crimes of their forebears occupied a central place in Greek assessments of divine action" (Ibid: 3).
[591] Tóibín, 20th May 2017.

and "the one watching."[592] Despite the fact that Orestes is the one who kills Clytemnestra, and we see him have very open agonistic exchanges with her, Tóibín views him as having been radicalised and as a victim of extremism: a direct product of warfare and its impact. He writes:

> As Agamemnon and his wife Clytemnestra and their daughter Electra made all the noise in *House of Names,* the most dangerous one, Orestes, was in the shadows all the time, unable to articulate what he felt, unable to be sure what his own rage meant.[593]

The inspiration behind the character of Orestes came from news stories – the Boston Marathon Bombings and the rise of Isis – a time when "the craving for cruelty was part of each day's news, much as it had been in Northern Ireland during the Troubles."[594] In *House of Names*, Tóibín tries to "see the world from [the] haunted eyes"' of the person (Orestes) capable of committing acts of violence. In this case, against his own mother. Tóibín sees the absence of Agamemnon, or of any solid patriarchal structure, as being a key reason behind the destructive influence Orestes takes from his sister. The Troubles and the parallels shown through the *Oresteia* highlighted the uncomfortable fact of "how otherwise ordinary people become agents of atrocity"[595] creating an "apparently endless cycle of violence."[596]

While both Tóibín's novel and the ancient Greek originals are fundamentally rooted in the theme of ancestry, Aeschylus' focus lies much more on the influence of the divine on this matter, and the tendency of the gods to punish transgressive behaviour (especially the shedding of kindred blood). Divine punishment is not something that interests Tóibín in his narrative: a choice that will come to effect the resolution of his story, but one that also separates him from the critique of 'Hellenised' Troubles narratives where the link is created between violence, and divine justice, and predetermination.

In Hibernian Philhellenism, can Tóibín's cultural translations be considered as 'disruptive' or 'curative'?[597] Both, *House of Names* and *Pale Sister*, appear to me as curative forms of translation. This directly conflicts with the belief that Greek tragedy is at

[592] Ibid.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Ibid.
[595] Mendelsohn, 24th July 2017.
[596] Torrance, 2021.
[597] McDonald, 1995: 197.

its heart "disruptive and subversive rather than normative."[598] Greek tragedy is transgressive and the myths within it contain a "transcendental process"[599] in how they cross and negate boundaries.[600] This idea of 'boundaries' is interesting in a literal and figurative way with regards to Tóibín's use of Greek tragedy in his work. Firstly, he uses ancient Greek myth as a way to deal with the physical boundaries that existed with regards to the Border, and the partitioned sectarian neighbourhoods of Northern Ireland. On a less literal level, he challenges the psychological boundaries that were formed according to belief systems, assumptions, preconceptions, and national identity. He also used the socially and psychologically transgressive and taboo acts in myth alongside the boundary-breaking transcendental aspects of it in the "production of violence"[601] in his own narrative. From his thoughtful reflection on the process of re-writing a Greek tragedy, Tóibín appears to make a curative choice. Like with *Pale Sister* which resolves a previously ambiguous situation, *House of Names* offers, at times, redemption and reason to often villainised characters, while still bookending the account with the regretful, and ultimately avoidable, reality of the violent acts. In essence, Tóibín ensures to demonstrate that "no event was isolated."[602] By creating 'calculated disruptions' to the plot of the narrative,[603] a new form of understanding and empathy creates a cure for the characters and the audience.

House of Names was criticised by some classicists. For example, Daniel Mendelsohn says that Tóibín 'jettisons"[604] the substance of ancient religion. However, the point of Tóibín's retelling of this tragedy is not to continue to excuse violence as some form of divine punishment. Instead, all of the horrors in both *Pale Sister* and *House of Names* are "simply war crimes decided by men."[605] This is what he is doing differently to the 'traditional' model that produced him, and how he moves towards the more democratic model of 'reception' that awaits him. In doing so, the works become more relevant to a modern audience.

In another review by Mary Beard, she treats it with something closer to indifference.[606] But historical accuracy is not so much the point of the book and "'faithfulness' to a unified interpretation of an ancient text is no longer a defining

[598] Perris, 2008: 56.
[599] Kapferer, 1997: 216.
[600] Ibid.
[601] Ibid: 215.
[602] Tóibín, 20th May 2017.
[603] McDonald, 1995: 198.
[604] Mendelsohn, 24th July 2017.
[605] Torrance, 2021.
[606] Beard, 11th May 2017.

criterion"[607] of 'successful' use of the ancient past. By Tóibín's own admittance, throughout his refashioning he continuously "moved [the story] closer and closer into Irish territory,"[608] while still maintaining appeal to wider global issues. Aeschylus' original simply allowed him the formula to do so. In 1987, 30 years before he wrote *House of Names*, Tóibín wrote in *Martyrs and Metaphors* that "no novel [about the Troubles in Northern Ireland] is possible."[609] He believed it a space which only drama and poetry could occupy and even still, "those who use what is happening in the North have done so either playfully or without precision."[610] Yet, 30 years later, Tóibín would be the one to write a novel about the Troubles with explicit classical parallelism.[611]

Tóibín's 'classicising' has been accused of being conducted without precision. Mendelsohn claims that *House of Nam*es "never quite comes to life"[612] because of its Irishness. In taking inspiration from the Northern Irish Troubles for a retelling of Greek myth, Tóibín has accidentally transposed too much of the former and not enough classical material. In the novel, the invented "juvie where young Orestes and Leander are incarcerated feels suspiciously like a Catholic reform school."[613] Mendelsohn claims that in Tóibín's Mycenae and ancient Greece:

> We are very far here from the firm grasp of atmosphere and setting and regional habits of mind that gives such immediacy and verisimilitude to Tóibín's novels of modern Ireland – for that matter, to novels where his project, as with *House of Names*, is to bring legends to life.[614]

In terms of literary execution, Mendelsohn offers a fair assessment of the novel. We need to re-frame *House of Names* as not just a simple retelling of Greek myth, but rather as a transposing of an Irish experience onto classical antiquity and vice-versa. Thus, Mendelsohn disregards the "adjustive and adaptive functions of myth."[615] He is treating *House of Names* too much like an actual translation when it is a cultural translation; when,

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[607] Hardwick, 2003.
[608] Costello-Sullivan, 2019: 5.
[609] Tóibín, 1987; 18.
[610] Ibid: 19.
[611] *House of Names* has since been adapted to theatre, directed by Agustí Villaronga for the Teatre Principal in Palma, Mallorca in their 2020/2021 Season (see Tóibín, 2025: 128; Villaronga and Tóibín, 2020/2021).
[612] Mendelsohn, 24th July 2017.
[613] Ibid.
[614] Ibid.
[615] Signorile, 1973: 120.

actually, "myth, unlike poetry, does not suffer in translation."[616] We can see that this novel directly feeds into the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism that we have seen so far: original, distinctly Irish-centred, and intended for a general readership. Really, and by Tóibín's own admissions in *How I Re-Wrote Greek Tragedy* as to where his inspiration came from, the novel is not trying to do anything else.[617]

In my approach to *House of Names*, I am more interested in understanding the "polyvalent legacy"[618] of the classics in Ireland through Tóibín's work. Rather than historical and dramaturgical inaccuracies present in the novel (like 'glass windows' in Bronze Age Mycenae and the tone of the dialogue), I am more interested in how Tóibín has ratified a 'universal' problem (civilian conflict and domestic tragedy) in an explicitly Irish context (Northern Ireland) as being related to the classical canon. It is 'translation as cure' when one expects disruption. Tóibín, in seeing history as a grounding of 'identity' has opted "(with all earnestness of intent) … to leave a great deal of ancient Greek material untranslated."[619] Instead of Bronze Age Mycenaean warriors, Tóibín has instead written a novel about "Grecian Gaels."[620] In Mary Beard's unenthusiastic review, she does grant that Tóibín's approach makes the Oresteia "strike a new chord, far more impressive than the pious respect or worthy aura of 'classicism' that often surrounds it."[621] *House of Names*, she sees, is something different than 'classicism'. This 'something different' is what I would call 'Hibernian Philhellenism'. This change in how we classify Tóibín's adaptation now places the onus on 'traditional' or purist classical traditions, and the discipline as a whole, to reflect and realise that there is "room … for more than just one story,"[622] and more than just one way in which a classical tradition can be conceptualised.

Conclusion

Tóibín's engagement with Greek tragedy in his works demonstrates a clear example of how to make the past interact with the present. His choice of plays, and the way he approaches

[616] Cohen, 1969: 347. This is why we need to move away from the type of thinking criticised by The Postclassicisms Collective: "how can you become a poet of global significance, the poem seems to ask, without a familiarity with the classics or with a familiarity that comes only through translation?" (The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 185).
[617] Tóibín, 20th May 2017.
[618] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 4.
[619] McDonald, 1995: 201.
[620] Stanford, 1970: 40.
[621] Beard, 11th May 2017.
[622] Signorile, 1973: 130.

them, seems to try "to make us understand the reasons behind the acts of violence that are committed in Greek tragedies,"[623] and, by proxy, the violence in the contemporary moment. The issues of ancestry, in terms of religion and address, in Northern Ireland speaks to the premise found in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Antigone* and the *Oresteia*, when "an ancient crime is linked to punishment taking place now within the kin group."[624] This remains a way to understand the reciprocal nature of the violence that took place over the 30 year period that constituted the Troubles, except now Tóibín explores the reasons behind the violence and shows empathy for both perspectives.

The next Chapter will continue to examine what Tóibín calls the "Irish argument,"[625] which relates to the "the debate about what constitutes versions of present-day Irish identities"[626] that are "central to Tóibín's own imaginative preoccupations, both creative and critical."[627] This is most apparent through his own approach to the material, and through the attitude of his characters towards the patriarchal figure. In both cases, we see Freud's wish to be the father of oneself.[628] This dynamic involves 'killing' yourself when you 'kill the father'. You are at the same time 'killing' a conception of yourself in relation to the predecessor, and self-fashioning a conception of yourself in relation to a future canonical legacy within a tradition. This behaviour very much resonates with Tóibín's claim that he is 'done with history'. It is important to clarify that 'history' is not the same as the 'past' and since the past "is not a stable object,"[629] it allows Tóibín the opportunity to "to deconstruct certainties of Irish cultural identity, to release his characters from the burden of an over-politicised over-determined past."[630] In this sense, we can conclude that "Tóibín's backward look is however also a recuperative one."[631]

In his review of *House of Names*, Mendelsohn does not seem to consider the context in which the work was written and thereby misses the recuperative nature of Tóibín's writing about civic violence. As a professional classicist, Mendelsohn was too focused on the actual classical material, instead of how it was being used. As Perris states, "disruptive translation is no better or worse than curative translation; just different."[632] Tóibín's

[623] Dedebas, 2013: 256.
[624] Gagné, 2013: 344.
[625] Tóibín, 2001: ix.
[626] Walshe, 2013: 1.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Bloom, 1997: 64.
[629] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 31.
[630] Walshe, 2013: 36.
[631] Ibid: 7.
[632] Perris, 2008: 75.

approach to the tradition reflects that of figures like Yeats during the Gaelic Revival who believed that classical material and mythology "were worthy only of emulation, not imitations, adaptation or direct translation."[633] *House of Nam*es, though it appears on the surface as an adaptation, can also be seen as an emulation in terms of what it hopes to comment on. In this way, his approach indicates how, as a writer, "Tóibín is interested in ambivalence and in questioning central facets of cultural and literary belief to create a different story."[634] Tóibín exhibits the type of classicism that will ensure its survival, the type we find in Hibernian Philhellenism, where the "appropriation of Greek and Roman material should not be seen as just copying past perfection, as servile glorification of the ancient world without regard for present or future."[635] With *Pale Sister* and *House of Names*, Tóibín joins the tradition of writers who "found in the classics ways of dealing with the Troubles,"[636] and in doing so, he also joined the wider tradition of Greek tragedy being used to articulate civic violence and colonial aggression. Tóibín contributes a worthy strand to this knot on the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism.

[633] Baker, 2022: 67.
[634] Walshe, 2013: 4.
[635] Arkins, 2005: 10.
[636] Randolph, 2012: 49.

2.5. Conclusion: The Knot Untangled

In this Chapter, the focus was on a particular cultural domain of Hibernian Philhellenism that we have conceptualised as a 'knot'. The content, case-studies, and social dynamics explored present the knot unwound. The knot in this case encapsulated the issues of politics and religion in Ireland and looked at how they were approached using Greek tragic narratives, or 'archetypal' interpersonal dynamics that parallel those from tragic myths. As seen through the interrogation and dismissal of simplified Jungian or Freudian approaches to myth in literature, and through real-life Oedipal relationships in the case of Wilde and Mahaffy, this Chapter is not offering evidence for Irish iterations of timeless classical psychological archetypes (or their symbols). Instead, this thesis is about the different relations, experiences, self-interrogations, and nascent mythologies that Irish post-colonial writers draw together through such thematic structures, and the implications of their doing so. In short, this Chapter explores how "the classics, then, can offer a unique commentary on fundamental and timeless questions about how we organise our world."[637]As revealed by the explorations of the next Chapter, this 'knot' of politics, religion and Greek tragedy is a case-study in one of several Irish classical traditions and its legacies.

Knots, though they can be undone, always leave behind a trace through the rope's ability to retain memory. The forming of a knot in a tradition is also unavoidable. They can appear because of a large variety of individual strands – be they cultural figures or cultural conditions – that entwine and tangle at a specific point along the rope. These microcosms or domains are created as such because knots are "never an abstract point"[638] but "a consequence of very precise actions carried out."[639] Italo Calvino's understanding of the knot is in harmony with Ingold's theoretical framework. As Ingold clarifies in his discussion of 'what the knot is not', "in the topology of the knot, however, it is impossible to say what is inside or outside [;] rather, knots have interstices [,] their surfaces do not enclose but lie 'between the lines' of the material that make them up."[640] In this case, this 'specific point along the rope' within this period of the late nineteenth century to the present, was the focus on how Greek tragic mythic frameworks are used to approach religion, politics, and patriarchal colonial structures at both a micro and macro level. The

[637] Harkin, 2008: 305.
[638] Calvino, 2013.
[639] Ibid.
[640] Ingold, 2015: 15.

knotted material then further points back to our critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence' since:

> The fact that several texts have been placed under the same name indicates that there has been established among them a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilisation.[641]

That we acknowledge how similarities and patterns from a tradition or 'kinship' form a knot, indicates that "the art of making knot … could be seen as the human characteristic par excellence, just as much and perhaps even more than language."[642] Knots are a fundamental part of a rope-like tradition.

What is clearly common among the examples from this Chapter is the enduring cultural and canonical 'paternal' influence which leads the figures to adopt familiar characters and plots from antiquity and apply them to unique Irish situations without losing any sense of global appeal. McDonald considers how, in some cases, "translation can exist as an offer of comfort and an act of cultural confirmation rather than a gesture of challenge or a disruption of the known by the unknown."[643] As discussed, when it comes to Greek tragedy as a form, it is historically considered to be a "vehicle for strife and disruption."[644] While it may has been used during times of strife and disruption, I do not think the case ideologically in the greater Irish context that we have seen. Instead, the cultural translation of Greek tragedy and Greek tragic models by Irish writers offers familiarity and understanding to the previously unarticulated.

In his travel writing, Mahaffy expresses that his "aim is to bring the living features of Greece home to the student, by connecting them, as far as possible, with the facts of older history, which are so familiar to most of us."[645] These features of Greece include the mythology, kinship, and history that was so heavily promoted during this period and that are immediately apparent in an examination of the history and identity of Ireland. They are not 'foreign masterpieces', as echoed by Yeats and Synge. Instead, they are ways in which

[641] Foucault, 1998: 211.
[642] Calvino, 2013.
[643] McDonald, 1995: 191.
[644] Ibid: 197.
[645] Mahaffy, 1887: 17.

power dynamics can be understood and dismantled. They are ways in which personal relationships and society by-and-large can be defined. Roland Bathes states that the:

> Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred?[646]

In Chapter 3, we will explore the indirect relationship between Wilde and Tóibín as we explored the direct relationship between Mahaffy and Wilde in this Chapter. We will see how Tóibín came to understand his sexuality through Wilde, demonstrating how the tradition acts on its members and how they simultaneously shape the tradition. Through misreadings, figurative killings, and intentional rewritings, both this Chapter and the next will speak to the tensions that arise through 'cultural paternal influence' and work "against those who would deprive us of the pleasures of the narrative[;] let us admit that our fate continues to be inscribed in that of Oedipus."[647]

Greek tragedy offers many paradigms, but the ones that come to the forefront in Ireland are as ways to assert an individual identity in opposition to the colonising or paternal force. These instances create a "constant redrawing between self and other, coloniser and colonised."[648] Myth-making is complex in Ireland as the particular tensions and conflicts present from the late nineteenth century to the present gave rise to "the kind of despair which produces a longing for an earlier condition or for a transcendence of present conditions."[649] In Hibernian Philhellenism, one can move away from the knot along the rope in either direction, meaning that both can be true at the same time. Although a discussion of the politics of sexuality and how it changed between the nineteenth century to the present, and how it was 'classically' navigated by Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín, is absent from this Chapter, it will be discussed in the next. Eibhear Walsh surmised that "Hellenism, homosexuality, and Irish politics have thus been inextricably linked in the long twentieth century,"[650] and I will explore how and why this is the case in Hibernian Philhellenism through a Platonic lens.

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[646] Barthes, 1975: 47.
[647] Rudnytsky, 1982: 469.
[648] Heath, 2010: 10.
[649] Cohen, 1969: 353.
[650] Walshe, 2020: 253.

CHAPTER 3

Ireland's 'Blots':

Plato and (Homo)Sexuality

"At once a celebration and a subversion, then, of classical associations?"[1]

~ Michael Squire

[1] Squire, 2017.

3.1. Introduction: The Mesh of (Homo)Sexuality

In the preceding Chapter, we saw the "tragic overliving"[2] of classical themes and how they were used to tackle issues of contemporary politics and religion in Irish literature. This period demonstrated how, as Baker describes, "a variety of popular nationalist receptions of antiquity were enmeshed with and radically overwritten by imaginative – often linguistically hybrid – reworkings of the Greek and the Roman."[3] Chapter 1 used an example of Irish engagement with epic to chart the development of Hibernian Philhellenism from the medieval period to the twenty-first century. Chapter 2 then stepped inside the tradition to examine Greek tragedy and its weaponisation against both colonial patriarchal rule and sectarian violence. This Chapter will progress to focus on sexuality and how ancient Greek philosophy, but more specifically Plato and Platonic conceptions of homosexuality, were used to navigate changing social attitudes in Ireland from the late nineteenth century to the present.[4]

Baker's use of the word 'enmeshed' is of particular relevance here. We will conceptualise the 'domain' of (homo)sexuality not just as intertwining strands, or as a knot – but rather as an area of 'mesh'. It is also necessary to clarify that this discussion refers to discourses of sexuality more generally, and practices of homosexuality more specifically. However, as will be discussed, the term 'homosexuality' did not apply in ancient or Victorian contexts and thus '(homo)sexuality' at once attempts to acknowledge the lack of a consistent nomenclature, and account for our contemporary understanding of its practice. In order to achieve this, we will analyse the scholarly works of Mahaffy that deal with ancient Greek homoeroticism, alongside Wilde's association with them. Wilde and Mahaffy's relationship will be discussed as an example of the lived experience of ancient pedagogical models within the discipline. We will see how Mahaffy and Wilde formed a pedagogical relationship that resembles, and can be seen against the backdrop of, classical pedagogical pederasty and the *erastes*/*eromenos* relation.[5] This Chapter will offer an explanation of this dynamic which, briefly, saw a homoerotic bond being formed between an older man and a young boy that was considered an integral part of the boy's education and socialisation. Nevertheless, for Mahaffy and Wilde, we can say that it follows this

[2] Wilson, 2004.
[3] Baker, 2022: xv.
[4] My focus here is reserved for Plato's *Symposium* specifically (Plato, 2001: 201-277).
[5] Pederasty describes the "social custom whereby adult male Greeks [*erastes*] courted citizen youths [*eromenos*], as sexual objects but also, at least notionally, as protégés" (Skinner, 2014: 14).

model but that their relationship was marked by "homosociality"[6] without the explicit homoerotic/pederastic element. This examination of 'cultural paternal influence' will show (in keeping with the previous elaboration of the 'Oedipal' element of their relationship) why Wilde would come to declare that "the 'influence of an elder man over a younger man' is an excellent theory till it comes to my ears."[7]

It would be impossible to discuss Platonic conceptions of homosexuality in Ireland without first understanding the social context which produced them and, especially, the shifting attitudes towards Church and State. Here, the work of Colm Tóibín who dually charts "gay cultural memory and Catholic cultural memory,"[8] will be particularly useful. This will become most apparent by looking primarily at Plato's *Symposium* and a subsequent Platonic reading of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which Tóibín believes "remains the greatest gay novel ever written."[9] In Wilde's novel, and in Tóibín's reading of this novel, we shall find a productive reflection of pedagogical relations and of Mahaffy's influence as an 'elder man' over the younger Wilde. Discussion will also extend to Wilde's Fairytales and *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* which will lead to an examination of the use of 'Platonic' male friendship ("devoted friendship"[10] in Victorian terms) and the desexualisation, or de-naming, of homosexuality in Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*.[11]

In 1874, the first edition of J. P. Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* was released. It was the first time that Greek pederasty had been "dealt with explicitly"[12] in a scholarly text. Up until that point and for many decades afterwards it was a subject "too hot to handle for classical scholars."[13] The practice of Greek homosexuality was discussed in a fittingly Victorian way by Mahaffy. He referred to it as "the principal blot in their civilisation."[14] Over 20 years later, Mahaffy would come to refer to his once prized student and close friend, Oscar Wilde, as the "one blot of my tutorship."[15] This Chapter is, therefore, a study of such 'blots' in Hibernian Philhellenism. These blots, like our strands, characterise intersections between Greek homosexuality and classical

[6] Dowling, 1994 : 35; Robson, 2004: 300.
[7] Wilde, 2013: 145.
[8] Frawley, 2008: 72.
[9] Tóibín, 2001: xxvii.
[10] Duffy, 2001: 329.
[11] See Price 2004; Pangle, 2003.
[12] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 156.
[13] Bremmer, 1990: 142.
[14] Mahaffy, 1874: 311.
[15] *Leslie Papers*, TCD MS 4735/44.

reception in Ireland. So, the image of individual blots bleeding into one another on a page acts in the same conceptual ways as our strands do in forming a mesh.

The 'mesh', in its place as part of the wider tradition of the 'rope', manifests in the same way as the 'knot': as a microcosm, or "bundle of lines,"[16] that is comprised of a range of figures and cultural contexts knitted together by the influences that formed them. The Irish context demands that the meshwork of sexuality is made up of the figures and conditions who created it through both engagement and denial. Once again, we are reminded that we can never really reject influence especially when it has, by nature, been formative. Staying with the family model of our critical theme, we can further think of this as a "mesh of kinship."[17] Through the mesh, we continue to "sidestep the idea that the only kind of succession is the replacement of one generational figure by the next."[18] Colm Tóibín, in his article, *New Ways of Killing Your Father*, recognised what he saw as this "most subversive idea, a new way of killing your father, starting from scratch, creating a new self."[19] In reality, we know that this 'new self' is a response to one's position within a 'bundle of lines': a bleeding of blots, a meshwork.

Mahaffy, Wilde and Tóibín all have something in common when it comes to talking about sexuality – the physical body is markedly absent and/or is treated metaphorically or symbolically in an elevated Platonic way.[20] Julia Kristeva noted how "history and morality are written and read within the infrastructure of texts"[21] and this Chapter will examine the truth of this statement with regards to homosexuality in Hibernian Philhellenism. For example, Oscar Wilde, as a figure, "has always represented a challenge, if not a difficulty within Irish cultural discourse."[22] Wilde famously used classical allusion and classical models to verbalise and imagine his sexuality in a Victorian context – we see it in his poetry especially, but also in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *De Profundis,* and in his 'Love that Dare not Speak its Name' speech from the dock. After his trials, he was reappropriated for

[16] Ingold, 2015: 3.
[17] Ibid: 20.
[18] Greensmith, 2020: 227.
[19] Tóibín, 18th November 1993.
[20] Before beginning this exploration, I want to flag that the body is absent in all the discussions that I mention but for different reasons. In Plato, it is a matter of ontological perspective and Platonic idealism – where any ethical resonance is an exponent of ontology and set against the accepted practice of pederasty in Classical Greece. For Wilde and Mahaffy, in Victorian and Catholic contexts and in nineteenth and early twentieth century Hibernian Philhellenism, the absence of the body is essentially about social control. In Tóibín's work in the twentieth and twenty-first century, it is about the lingering remnants of that control that may not legally stand, but has nonetheless left behind a tradition of silence and social taboo.
[21] Kristeva, 1980: 65.
[22] Walshe, 2010: 45.

the cause of nationalism, and became a symbol of Irish victimisation under British colonialism. He has continuously been taken and adapted to suit a specific purpose or cause and for most of the twentieth century, the Irish nationalist Wilde became the preferred or "dominant perception, often as a way of neutralising [his] decadence,"[23] and its ensuing implications.

This convenient appropriation highlights a pervasive feature of Hibernian Philhellenism (as previously alluded to), but also in Irish literature at large: the silence, absence and desexualisation of the male, or more broadly, the homoerotic body.[24] Ireland's (post)colonial context is a driving force behind the changing receptions of Wilde that are inseparable from the scandals surrounding his sexuality. We see the promotion of the image of Wilde as contributing to a political, anti-imperialist movement. We can read the focus on this version of Wilde as being part of the postcolonial condition where:

> Countries like Ireland have particular difficulty with the real presence of the homoerotic because colonialism itself has a gendered power relation and, inevitably, casts the colonising power as masculine and dominant and the colonised as feminine and passive.[25]

This is said with allusion to the overarching theme of cultural paternity (and by extension, masculinity), but also with a general awareness of one of the most historical and stereotypical attitudes of homosexuality as gay men being 'feminine', and thus, transgressing social norms.

As with politics, exploring classical receptions of sexuality allows us to draw the "connection between private and public morality."[26] It is here that we will see silence playing a large role, but we must also acknowledge that we are dealing with duelling perceptions of religion and Irish Catholicism in this period. Attitudes towards Catholicism have never been homogenous in Ireland. In the previous Chapter, it was clear that there

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[23] Ibid: 46.

[24] It is important to note that lesbianism is equally but separately marked by silence and absence. For much of the period that this thesis is concerned with, 'gayness' was seen only as a male condition and women were excluded from the definition of homosexuality beginning from the term's first use in the Victorian era.

[25] Walshe, 1996: 161. A similar scenario can be seen with the figure of Pádraig Pearse who is commonly believed to have been homosexual. Yet, that never features in the pervasive nationalistic and heroic discourse surrounding him as martyr and 'founding father' of an independent Ireland: "Pearse's Hellenism and his idealisation of male youth have arguably clear, if unacknowledged, similarities to Wilde," (Walshe, 2020: 243); "[Pearses's] silence on the issue of his own sexuality, is symptomatic of the cultural context in which he operated and of the Catholic faith to which he adhered" (Walshe, 2020: 244).

[26] Diaz, 2021: 51.

were certain contexts where Catholicism itself was seen as subversive. Declan Kiberd recognises this irony embedded in such subversiveness: "the word 'pervert' … has been used of converts to Catholicism long before it was applied to homosexual persons."[27] It is also important to recognise the reality of life for gay people in Ireland was completely at odds with the Gaelic Revival's promotion of Ireland as a 'Utopia'. It is not just the Catholic Church that was hostile to homosexuality, but society as a whole and examples of these attitudes could be seen clearly in Chapter 1 through the work of Stanford who was writing in a period when classics was being "blamed for moral depravity in Ireland."[28] 'Moral depravity' here refers directly to homosexuality, reminding us how classics has always been a "contested field of knowledge."[29]

All of this will be considered against the backdrop of the framework of Hibernian Philhellenism as previously outlined and its reliance on theories of influence. In this Chapter, it will also be necessary to engage with the work of Michel Foucault, specifically his *History of Sexuality.* Here, I want to clarify that this three-volume study has short-comings. The "so-called 'penetration model'"[30] that Foucault relies heavily on is today considered quite reductive and speaks to a "strong phallic bias."[31] His use of the model makes it appear as if he "reads and presents a selection of ancient evidence in a way that ensures the he 'finds' what he is looking for."[32] On top of that, his history of sexuality is truly only a history of male sexuality.[33] He is ultimately not interested in gender beyond viewing masculinity as the default, demonstrated by how "his reading of this history carries with it assumptions about the original, ubiquitous, and inevitable primacy of masculine subject-formation, of women's subjection and submission."[34] Despite the ground-breaking nature of the intention behind his study and how essential it is to the discourse, "his story perpetuates some of the worst features of the most traditional views of classical culture, namely, that it is an austere, philosophical, Apollonian, Platonic, pederastic *symposium*."[35] As stated by Marilyn B. Skinner, "employing Foucault's account of Greek sexuality for

[27] Kiberd, 2000: 332.
[28] Stanford, 1976: 235.
[29] Baker, 2022: 9.
[30] Skinner, 2014: 7.
[31] Miller, 2021: 12.
[32] Larmour, Miller and Platter, 1998: 25. In his 2021 work on Foucault's seminars on antiquity, Miller also asks with respect to the *History of Sexuality*, "why focus only on fourth-century BCE Greece and second-century CE Rome? Why focus only on philosophical and medical texts? Where are the poems, the plays, the novels? Where are the women, the slaves, Jews, the Egyptians?" (Miller, 2021: 12).
[33] See Richlin, 1998; Richlin, 1991; and Foxhall, 2003.
[34] duBois, 1998: 86.
[35] Ibid.

this purpose does not amount to a blanket endorsement of it."[36] Instead, I view Foucault's strength as lying in his role as a "catalyst."[37] Just as criticism of Jung and the developments/rejection of Jungian thought could not have been written without Jung, we must admit that progression of the history of sexuality in the last 50 years would be very different without Foucault.

Foucault will be employed here in two separate ways. The first will be in establishing the context of homosexuality in modern Ireland in order to "locat[e] a valid gay past."[38] More often than not, the gay past seems most comfortably explored through "refuge in the closet,"[39] and we see a trend in Irish writing where homosexuality can only be confronted through the use of the past. This phenomenon of "historical distance"[40] will be examined, firstly, through a discussion of 'paternal' influence that is in line with ideas of pedagogy. Next, the focus will shift to ideas of sublimated and idealised male friendship, something that not only served to exclude women from traditions in the academy, but that was also a particular result of the miasmic attitudes of the Catholic Church in Ireland. This then leads to an exploration of the absent body in classical allusion and how, like with politics, classics is a way to approach homosexuality while keeping it veiled and at a distance. The second will be as an overarching framework used to understand why Platonic conceptions of homoeroticism were adopted in the creation of these materials that were so heavily inflected by the former context. The latter relates to theories of biopower, absence, and silence – seen through the explorations of desexualisation in the works of Mahaffy, Wilde and Tóibín.

The topic of sexuality raises an interesting question that relates back to ideas of 'belonging' in a tradition; "do we choose a tradition or does it choose us?"[41] When it comes to homosexuality, we can say with certainty that belonging to a gay tradition does not

[36] Skinner, 2014: 15.
[37] Larmour, Miller and Platter, 1998: 4.
[38] Walshe, 2006: 123.
[39] Ibid: 128. This can be seen in the example discussed in the introduction of Tóibín's exploration of Henry James' sexuality through Wilde in *The Master* (2004). In this example, "the lesson of Wilde's disgrace decisively pushes James back into closeted self-denial" (Walshe, 2006: 135). This was true not just for James but for anyone in pre-decriminalised Ireland as Wilde simultaneously stood as the dual example of the articulation of sexuality, and its dangers. Similarly, Wilde was writing with homosexual themes before terms like 'homosexuality' or 'the closet' were widespread, and through the use of the ancient past: "it is at the beginning of the twentieth century that the closet comes into play in literary production (although it is not named as such for many decades," (Woods, 1998: 183).
[40] Halperin, 1989: 258.
[41] Bloom, 1975: 32.

necessarily constitute a 'choice'.[42] The matter becomes complicated when there are direct models being copied. Colm Tóibín straddles both answers to this question because by his own sexuality, he belongs in a tradition of gay writers in Ireland. He also modelled his contributions to this tradition in line with Wilde and, by extension, Wilde's Platonic conceptions of homosexuality. We can see a contemporary contribution to this tradition beginning "when a fresh author [Tóibín] is simultaneously cognisant not only of his own struggle against the forms and presence of a precursor, but is compelled also to a sense of the Precursor's place in regard to what came before *him*."[43]

In *Love in a Dark Time*, Tóibín used Wilde's sexuality as a way to approach his own, proving the actual process of tradition formation wherein members of the tradition work to create the tradition by responding to their own position within it. Tóibín sees himself following Wilde in a tradition of Irish literature and his engagement with the classics places him in our tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism. His sexuality also places him in a tradition that features as an element, or sub-strand, of the previous two. I propose that we must simultaneously consider our tradition's active members as also being readers of the same tradition, promoting "a rich, dynamic relationship between the reader and the book, the reader and the author."[44] Tóibín reading Wilde's work in the creation of his own shows the "active process of production-in-use."[45]

We have already briefly contextualised classical reception by giving due consideration to Jungian thought as a once relevant frame or model for cultural paternity. Through Tóibín's interactions with Wilde, it is interesting to consider Wilde as neither a universal archetype nor an example of Jung's "shadow archetype."[46] Rather, we can think of him as a "mirror in which he is made to reflect the identity, class, gender, and politics of each of his 'interpreters' in Ireland."[47] We see a fundamental principle of reader-response theory at play here in that "readers make meaning."[48] We must nevertheless clarify that such response and the principle it entails are "not in conditions of their choosing."[49] The

[42] Authors and figures are often considered as part of a queer canon because of their individual sexual orientation, despite whether the subject matter of the works they produce in the canon are or are not decidedly queer.
[43] Bloom, 1975: 32. Italics original.
[44] Tóibín, 2025: 269. It is significant to note that Colm Tóibín chose the 'Art of Reading' as the "governing motto" (Ibid) during his tenure as the Irish Laureate for Fiction (2022-2024). During this time, his aim was to place "the act of reading and the reader … at the centre" (Ibid).
[45] Harkin, 2005: 413.
[46] Jung, 1988: 62; Davis, 1985: 18; Meadow, 1992: 189.
[47] Walshe, 2011: 120.
[48] Harkin, 2005: 413.
[49] Ibid: 419.

conservative Catholic Ireland of the twentieth century created an oppressive silence surrounding homosexuality causing Tóibín to make meaning of Wilde and the past in order "to formulate the unformulated."[50]

In the previous Chapter, we also saw how complex political situations were approached at a remove to the contemporary by drawing from classical material. In doing so, the creation of an authoritative cultural identity was bolstered and legitimised by the use of the same material. Sexuality is dealt with in a similar manner here by my central figures, and the tradition at large. Both will show how "these ancient texts intervene into the present as actions rather than actors."[51] Here, Mahaffy, Wilde and Tóibín will act "not only as objects of historical forces but as subjects of our historical self-understanding."[52] Colm Tóibín has referred to the gay literary tradition as the "secret dotted line that runs right through Western literature."[53] We will consider this dotted line as a fundamental strand within our mesh.

[50] Iser, 1972: 299. See also Norris, 1981.
[51] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 39.
[52] Coetzee, 2001: 13.
[53] Tóibín, 2003c: 6.

3.2. Societies of Silence: The Desexualisation of (Homo)Sexuality from the Victorian to Catholic Context

Following our application of Tim Ingold's notion of the 'rope' to the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism, and of the 'knot' to issues of politics and religion, this Chapter will act as a demonstration of "how to translate from domain to domain."[54] In our context of "hetero-patriarchal Ireland,"[55] this section will discuss "the nation's architecture of silence"[56] and its contribution to the formation of the 'mesh' of sexuality in the State. It is necessary to foreground our discussion with an exploration of the societal context spanning from the Victorian era to modern Catholic Ireland that was shaped, defined, and commented on by Mahaffy, Wilde and Tóibín. This will underline how "sexuality is not a somatic fact; it is a cultural effect."[57]

I will analyse the specific terminology, and lack thereof, that affected much of Wilde's work and life, and which created a culture of silence that particularly shaped the way in which both Wilde and Tóibín approached unarticulated matters to do with sexuality. Tóibín exists firmly within "the cradle of Catholicism which has formed him."[58] In stark contrast, Wilde, and indeed Mahaffy, were raised Protestant, in an environment that preceded Éamon de Valera's leadership and the rise of a strictly conservative Free State.[59]

In the introduction to this Chapter, we spoke of how Ireland in the twentieth-century was at a "crucial moment of postcolonial refashioning."[60] It comprised "numerous competing categories of disparate identities working to influence literary production, among them cultural nationalism, Anglo-Ireland, Irish Catholicism, and Irish Protestantism."[61] In the previous Chapter, we discussed how the "conflict in Northern Ireland added a further level of complexity"[62] to the context, and we saw this elucidated by the discussion of Tóibín's *House of Names*, so civic conflict of a political kind does not necessarily relate to the dealings with homosexuality in this section. An aspect of politics that does is the fact that Ireland "maintained powerful state censorship from 1926 until

[54] Ingold, 2015: 18.
[55] Carregal, 2021: 7.
[56] Ibid: 3.
[57] Halperin, 1989: 157.
[58] Patten, 2008: 93.
[59] See McCullagh, 2017; McCullagh, 2018.
[60] Walshe, 2006: 125.
[61] Ibid: 126.
[62] Ibid: 125.

1989 that enacted prohibitive laws around the erotic,"[63] leading to the "importance assumed by sex as a political issue."[64] In this case more than anywhere, "the author function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain societies."[65] In the case of my central figures, their adaption to Foucault's author function result in them being "transdiscursive authors,"[66] meaning that as readers and witnesses of tradition formation, "we must entirely reverse the traditional idea of the author."[67]

If canonical texts "are the repositories of cultural values,"[68] then we could go further to say that the reactions to and receptions of these canonical texts *reveal* these cultural values. This relates specifically to Mahaffy's academic writings on the ancient Greek practise of pederasty, but also to the general context in Ireland where books seen to challenge the Catholic ethos were banned during the time of Censorship.[69] The now-growing awareness and inclusion of queer texts in the Irish literary canon during this period of study reflects the changing cultural values of the contemporary, as well as the history of an "entire micro-power concerned with the body."[70]

To add another contrasting element, Tóibín is writing in a time of the "the death of authority, not only the church's authority, but say, the family's authority."[71] This is specifically charged in an Irish context.[72] Tóibín lives with the memory of the interconnection between Church and State and with the reality of the scars it has left behind on contemporary society; a context that has led Tóibín to exclaim: "imagine if Irish history were pure fiction, how free and happy we could be!"[73] As stated, religion, like politics, does not play a main role in this Chapter. It would be impossible to examine how homosexuality was understood without considering the religious framework of an Irish society where "it was not merely that homosexual acts between men were illegal; they were

[63] Ibid.
[64] Foucault, 2020b: 145.
[65] Foucault, 1998: 211. Foucault summarises four more characteristic traits of the author function as follows: "(1) the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses; (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilisation; (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer but, rather, by a series of specific and complex operations; (4) it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects, positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals" (Foucault, 1998: 216). As has been seen and will continue to be shown, the author function meets these same characteristics in Hibernian Philhellenism.
[66] Ibid: 217.
[67] Ibid: 221.
[68] Guillory, 1993: 22.
[69] See Carlson, 1990.
[70] Foucault, 2020b: 145.
[71] Wisenfarth, 2009: 19.
[72] See Inglis, 2017.
[73] Tóibín, 18th November 1993.

unmentionable."[74] Another way in which it is relevant, as demonstrated by Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín separately, and which counters the religious divides we saw in the previous Chapter, is how "since the Renaissance, [homosexuality] has laid down, in Catholicism and Protestantism alike, relatively similar dividing lines."[75] It is one of few instances in an Irish context, particularly in the period spanning the late nineteenth century to the present, where one can make such a statement. Instances of conservatism regarding sexuality are a constant in religious communities, it is just in their manifestation that they differ.

Melissa Sihra has remarked that "legitimacy is the crucial determining factor of both classical and Irish society."[76] This section will examine the conditions in modern Ireland that resulted in this assertion. In classical society, 'legitimacy' was more closely understood in the sense of parentage and the defining social dynamic of kinship. We want to expand our understanding of the 'legitimate' in modern and contemporary Ireland to think of how it applies to silences surrounding sexuality and gender identity. This is of the utmost relevance as "considerations on 'cultures of silence' continue to impact Irish society as it comes to terms with a history of cruelty against its most vulnerable citizens."[77] In a broader study, this would extend to cover women's mistreatment in the same society, of which anxieties about legitimacy and unbridled female sexuality was a central concern. It is the work of Foucault that will aid us in establishing the power dynamic behind this context – one which speaks to French anthropologist Maurice Godelier's observation that "it is not sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts the body's sexuality."[78] Foucault's establishment of how "the legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law"[79] acts as a baseline for his theories on silence and biopower which then progress to show the "cultural shift from silence to recognition."[80]

In the previous Chapter, we saw Irish literature's frequent preoccupation with the absence of male paternal figures. This Chapter will extend that absence within a culture of silence to include the absent male body.[81] Paul Delaney recognises silence as "the essential element in Tóibín's aesthetic practice [which] complicates, and enriches, each of the works of fiction and nonfiction he has written to date."[82] In the case of Wilde and Tóibín, the

[74] Tóibín, 2025: 107.
[75] Foucault, 2020d: 236.
[76] Sihra, 2005: 122.
[77] Carregal, 2021: 3.
[78] Godelier, 1981: 17.
[79] Foucault, 2020b: 3.
[80] Carregal, 2021: 162.
[81] See Jeffers, 2002.
[82] Delaney, 2008: 18.

silence in their works is multivalent in that, like the very tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism, they are "always open to interpretations, insinuations and reading practices."[83] We can confidently say that two of these valencies will always be filled by classical allusion and the literary influence of a predecessor, whether directly or indirectly. This section will work to explore what Eibhear Walshe recognised as the phenomenon where "Hellenism has been used in the past by Irish writers to locate strategies of concealment or justification."[84]

Terminology and Form

Richard Hornby has asked: "Is Ireland a real place, or is it a literary construct?"[85] I would argue that an Ireland written about through the lens of homosexuality, and the subsequent insights achieved, is a real place. It is perhaps one of the truest representations of 'Ireland' we actually get in Irish literature. '(Homo)Sexuality' is one of few domains where we do not see Ireland being sublimated and romanticised into a literary construct in keeping with the Gaelic Revival movement. Instead, we get a more subversive and marginalised view – one that enriches and reinforces the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism.

It can be difficult to fit Wilde, as a figure, neatly into the conventional frames of Irish cultural discourses due to his tendency to subvert tradition. One form of Wilde's subversion is his cultural Catholicism which he couples with gay themes, and this is most clearly manifested in his Fairytales.[86] This connection leads to a recurring emphasis on "devoted male friendship"[87] in his works. This will feature in our later discussion about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship* but it is also necessary here to think about how this trend came to be produced by societal expectations. I want to briefly focus now on how idealised male friendship is a prominent feature in most of his Fairytales, in order to further demonstrate the social context – one of Wilde's Fairytales is even called *The Devoted Friend*.[88] The purpose of this discussion is not to provide a deep analysis of gay or Catholic themes in Wilde's fairytales, as such works have already been

[83] Ibid: 19.
[84] Walshe, 2020: 237.
[85] Hornby, 1998: 561.
[86] Kiberd, 2000: 332.
[87] Duffy, 2001: 331.
[88] Wilde, 2022: 31-47.

completed.[89] Rather, it is to further link our discussion to the importance of terminology and legitimacy through language.

The form of the 'fairytale' is also relevant when it comes to articulation as Wilde, like Plato, "found it necessary to create myths when rational language failed him."[90] The 'fairy-tale', as a way of fantasising, myth-making, and fictionalising, made it possible for Wilde to begin to articulate matters of sexuality. Early on in *The Devoted Friend* we are told that: "love is all very well in its way, but friendship is much higher. Indeed I know nothing in the world that is either nobler or rarer than devoted friendship."[91] Compare this use of language to Wilde's famous 'the love that dare not speak its name' speech:

> 'The love that dare not speak its name' in this country is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michealangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'Love that dares not speak its name', and on account of it I am placed as I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual and it repeatedly exists between an older man and younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That is should be so the world does not understand. The world mocks it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.[92]

Now consider further a passage from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

> The love that he bore him – for it was really love – had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michelangelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winkelmann, and Shakespeare himself.[93]

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[89] See Killeen, 2007; Duffy, 2001; Markey, 2011.
[90] Philips, 1978-9: 156.
[91] Wilde, 2022: 32. This is in keeping with how friendship was conceptualised by Plato and Aristotle who saw in it "the germ of whatever is divine in the heart of man, the spark that, if fostered and fed, transfigures his whole being" (Shairp, 1884: 457).
[92] 'Testimony of Oscar Wilde', 1895.
[93] Wilde, 2017: 152.

A link can be drawn between these works through the use of language, reference and allusion that at once "name homosexuality and, at the same time, desexualised it."[94]

According to Foucault, the fact that the term 'homosexuality' was not in mainstream use until the beginning of the nineteenth century "should be neither underestimated nor overinterpreted."[95] This lack of proper terminology and the focus on hidden meaning is another consequence of the closedness of society and the silence it demanded. Wilde, by elevating homosexuality to this loftier, canonical realm, also hoped to safeguard it from attack – making the unfamiliar familiar while simultaneously expressing the inexpressible. We examine the paradoxical nature of this where the context of the situation actually results in "the efficacy of a literary text [being] brought about by the apparent evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar"[96]

Reflected in Wilde's 'the love that dare not speak its name' speech is an aspect of classical Greek homoeroticism, clearly defined for us, that can be found if we briefly turn back to the Fairytales. This model will be revisited in the next section when looking at how it applies to Wilde and Mahaffy, albeit 'homosocially'. In the speech, Wilde refers to that 'affection' which exists between an older and a younger man and the most obvious case of this in the Fairytales is the love that exists between the Selfish Giant and the little boy:

> Here we have a lover and beloved (both male) who are exaggeratedly separated by size and age … [and] as in other tales, heterosexual love is notably absent from this story, replaced by a form of male love, in this case, man/boy love.[97]

Again, the focus here is not on the fairytale itself but rather how Duffy recognises in this story that the 'Love' they share is capitalised, linking it back to the two comparable instances from Wilde's fiction and real life and their original source: the exalted, divine and noble love of Plato.[98]

Any discussion of Plato and Wilde must include Walter Pater's instruction at Oxford, which will be further discussed in comparison to Mahaffy in the next section. But relevant here is the fact that "the author most often mentioned throughout Pater's writing is Plato, also the author he taught most consistently throughout his career."[99] In the 'love

[94] Walshe, 2020: 239.
[95] Foucault, 2020c: 3.
[96] Iser, 1972: 295.
[97] Duffy, 2001: 339. In the story, *The Selfish Giant* (Wilde, 2022: 30).
[98] Ibid: 339.
[99] Prettejohn, 2019: 81.

that dares not speak its name' speech, we see the intricacies and apparent rules of the Victorian discourse where some references/allusions are acceptable and some are not: "the sculptor and the playwright, whatever the actual facts of their erotic biographies made perfect alibis, as Plato did not."[100] This idea is further supported by Foucault's recognition of the "close connection between the Greek love of boys and Greek educational practice and philosophical instruction."[101]

The classics being used to combat silence is reflected in Wilde's "willingness to evoke Greek models of love between men when exploring his own experience of love."[102] This was not uncommon as:

> Allusions to antiquity in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras served as a code for same-sex love, and brief references to 'Plato' or the 'British Museum' or the 'Dorians' communicated to knowing readers of Pater, Symonds, Wilde, and Forster a fiction of participation and sexual autochthony.[103]

In a similar vein, it is very interesting to analyse Wilde's very use of the "paradoxically pagan"[104] name 'Dorian' in his only novel. Paul Cartledge ascertains that Dorian had never been used as a Christian name until its appearance in Wilde's novel.[105] The Dorians were one of the major ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups of people in ancient Greece and "the most widely accepted generalisation about Greek homosexuality … is that it originated in the military organisation of Dorian states."[106] It is for this reason that 'Dorian' resulted in becoming a "coded reference to (the equally euphemistic) 'Greek love',"[107] and thereby, all the intricacies that that term also represented.

Cartledge calls as "principle witness for the defence of [his] interpretation of the associations and innuendos of the name 'Dorian' … the author himself"[108]: in a letter from Oscar Wilde to Ralph Payne, Wilde writes:

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[100] Ross, 2014: 162.
[101] Foucault, 2020b: 195.
[102] Ivory, 2007: 518.
[103] Haynes, 2019: 4.
[104] Manny, 2014: 275.
[105] Cartledge, 2001: 191. See also Ross, 2014: 170.
[106] Dover, 1978: 185. Iain Ross consolidates this: "the erroneous notion that they introduced the institution of *paiderastia* into Greece led to 'Doria' becoming a code word for Greek love in Uranian circles" (Ross, 2014: 170). This association stretches back to antiquity where the 'average Athenian' "would have associated [the practice of pederasty] with Dorians, thus confirming the often suspected philo-Laconian leanings of its upper-class practitioners" (Hubbard, 1998: 50).
[107] Manny, 2018: 276.
[108] Cartledge, 2001: 190-191.

> I am so glad you like that strange coloured book of mine: it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps.[109]

The reference to each of his primary characters and the significance they would come to have in the course of his life can be regarded separately. However, most interesting to us in this case is the reference to Dorian which can be understood, not just on the surface level as Wilde liking and wanting to emulate a character he created, but rather to live 'as a 'Dorian' in ancient Greece.[110] The name 'Dorian' is just one example, alongside his frequent use of 'Narcissus' – which functioned as a "code word for attractive young men in gay circles during the 1890s"[111] – of the functioning of these types of allusions and references that were used similarly in Wilde's speech. Wilde's very link with the aesthetic movement was also "bound up with Victorian homosexuality."[112] In Wilde's speech we see the "bringing onstage what is customarily kept offstage."[113] Later in this Chapter, we will see Colm Tóibín doing something similar with his treatment of the long-considered taboo subject of AIDS in *The Blackwater Lightship*. This is just an example of yet another way in which Wilde as a model became a "profound emblematic shadow"[114] that is cast forwards on the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism.

In his exploration of gay lives from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, *Love in a Dark Time*, Tóibín draws heavily on Gregory Woods' seminal work, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition.* The work primarily demonstrates how a homosexual subculture succeeded in justifying 'the unjustifiable' through literature and art.[115] His study spans the length of human literary history, beginning with the 'Greek Classics' and ending after a discussion on the 'AIDS Epidemic'. It is significant that Tóibín chose Woods' work to rely on in his survey as it offers a comprehensive overview, but as can be seen in many general discussions of ancient homosexuality, he treats antiquity as a monolith. Woods is too general in his exploration of the intricacies of the *poleis* and time periods that make up Greek antiquity. In this way, he falls into the convenient trap of mistaking that "pederastic or heterosexual relations were themselves of a uniform character."[116] In this way he is

[109] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Ralph Payne', 12th February 1894 (eds Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 585).
[110] Ross, 2014: 170.
[111] Markey, 2011: 151.
[112] Duffy, 2001: 335.
[113] Michelson, 1993: xi.
[114] Walshe, 2010: 50.
[115] Woods, 1998: 6.
[116] Hubbard, 1998: 71.

similar to Tóibín; he is not an academic of the classical world. Even though his work has historical and nuanced shortcomings, I will still give it due consideration as it is explicitly chosen by Tóibín as being one of his sources, and because commentary expresses general classical awareness of the greater Western canon.

Woods explores the creation of 'homosexuality' as a late nineteenth and twentieth century construct and as a movement that can be characterised as belonging to modernism.[117] Before there was an existence of a concept like 'the closet', literature was employed by many as a way to contextualise homosexual feeling and express homoerotic desires. Woods' focus on Wilde's early poetry, describing it as a starting point for how he began to express his interest in homosexual relations, leads us to question what it was about the poems that deemed them less suitable (or scandalous) than *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to be used as evidence in Wilde's trial. Through this, we are reminded that "the relationship between poetry and homosexual advocacy has a long history."[118] This statement is true in many senses pertaining to the Classical world: Greek erotic poetry for the context of the *symposium* is rife with pederastic experience. The *symposium* itself was the "stage for didactic poetry addressed to boys."[119] This performative context is significant when we consider the "silence of epic."[120] Unlike lyric poetry written for and performed at the *symposium*, epic poetry "because its purpose was communally oriented … instead concentrated upon relationships that reproduce social institutions and ensure family survival."[121] It is surprising to realise that the study of the homoerotic impact of Wilde's poetry has been largely disregarded before Woods' discussion, especially in Wilde's Victorian context where "love and poetry were thought to coexist,"[122] and the sentiment expressed in such poetry was rather vaguely classed as "Greek Love."[123]

Although Wilde's poetry is not generally attributed much poetic merit (the majority of it was written very early in his career), it does serve to underline the literary influences that characterised Wilde's life and engagement with the classical world. Many of the poems have been classed as 'Greek poems' and shows his preoccupation with certain (predominantly homoerotic) figures from Greek myth, such as Hylas, Hyacinth, and Narcissus. It is important to note Wilde's use of Greek figures who were young, homoerotic

[117] Woods, 1998: 5.
[118] Ibid: 1.
[119] Bremmer, 1990: 137.
[120] Skinner, 2014: 82.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Woods, 1998: 17.
[123] Ibid.

objects of desire, but who also died young following this attraction. Peter Fiennes explains how "there was a time when a conviction for homosexuality could carry the death penalty, and [Lord] Byron and his friends agreed a code for describing their casual meetings and deeper affairs, which included the word 'hyacinths' for young male lovers, after the man who was loved and then accidentally killed by the god Apollo."[124] Establishing this trend thus helps to show Wilde as belonging to a wider gay tradition, as well as to the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism. Despite this, these poems were never considered as unacceptable or corruptive works like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. His poetry, including *Charmides,* are much more overt in homoerotic allusion and language than *Dorian Gray* ever was:

> Nor deemed him born of mortals, and one said,
> 'It is young Hylas, that false runaway
> Who with a Naiad now would make his bed
> Forgetting Herakles,' but others, 'Nay,
> It is Narcissus, his own paramour,
> Those are the fond and crimson lips no woman can allure.'[125]

Overall, "we need to try to determine what it is about the poems that make them less suitable to be raised in evidence against Wilde at the trials than *Salomé* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*."[126] Perhaps it was the form of the novel itself that was the cause of trouble for Wilde. This literary type could not be as easily excused as belonging to a certain lofty Western canonical style, or as harking back to a romanticised arcadian utopia, as the poetry could – despite the allusions in his poetry being much more explicit than in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. There is a speech given by Wilde in Act 2 of Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love* that can answer many of our questions about Wilde's feelings towards the relationship he had with Bosie. The language in this passage reads very closely to Wilde's poems and letters about Bosie. In Stoppard's play, Wilde says:

> The truth is he was Hyacinth when Apollo loved him, he is ivory and gold, from his red rose-leaf lips comes music that fills me with joy … but before Plato could

[124] Fiennes, 2021: 17.
[125] Wilde, 1997: 58.
[126] Woods, 1998: 174.

> describe love, the loved one had to be invented. We would never love anybody if we could see past our invention. Bosie is my creation, my *poem*.[127]

In his poetry and in his fictional and non-fictional writing with Platonic and homoerotic allusion, these are the words, references, and images he continuously relies upon. Here, Stoppard explicitly mentions Plato in Wilde's understanding of love and describes Bosie as his 'poem', again making the link between poetry and homoeroticism.

Silence

A discussion on terminology and form then brings us back to thinking about the power of silence in literary and academic works. As we know Greek homosexuality was something that was largely disregarded by the academy until the twentieth century. Michel Foucault defines silence, the "thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name,"[128] as a tool, of which there is "not one but many."[129] Silence can be used as a form of biopower which is itself "a modern form of power that, according to Michel Foucault, works on transforming the lives of individuals rather than operating in relation to a series of acts."[130] In this context, silence is used "to gain mastery over [homosexuality] in reality."[131] To do this, "it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present."[132] Foucault, in recoiling from this, put words to the previously philosophised 'Greek Love' and linked it back to the physical body in the first major way.[133] As a result, the physicality of Greek homosexuality was officially acknowledged in an

[127] Stoppard, 2013: 39. Italics mine.
[128] Foucault, 2020d: 27.
[129] Ibid. His full description of silence reads: "silence itself – the thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, that an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within all-over strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorised, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourse" (Ibid).
[130] Heath, 2010: 2.
[131] Foucault, 2020c: 17.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Davidson 2001: 5.

updated entry in the Oxford Classical Dictionary in 1996.[134] Foucault did this despite not being a professional classicist in a formal classical tradition.[135]

Classics has always existed as a "natural conduit for modern liberal thought;"[136] however, this depends on a society's ability to recognise it as so. Even within one society, it can be employed depending on sensibility and purpose. The clear example is from Wilde's trials where both defence and prosecution "portrayed his Hellenism as, respectively, an ennobling and corruptive force."[137] Part of the silencing is through the lack of discourse, and Foucault finds new ways to engage in this discourse. The problem itself also has to do with 'labelling'.[138] Therefore, we must return to examine terminology and a phrase supplied by Foucault, that is particularly relevant to Wilde's biography, is "the art of existence."[139]

As mentioned, homosexuality as a term was not widespread at the time of the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, nor did it have the same meaning as it does today. The word is thought to have been used for the first time in the late nineteenth century by early human rights campaigner and journalist, Karl Maria-Kertbeny.[140] The term was adopted into the twentieth century (referred to by David Halperin as "one hundred years of homosexuality"[141] and by Alan Sinfield as the 'Wilde century').[142] Then, 'homosexuality' was mainly used as a clinical term to classify same-sex attractions as a mental disorder.[143] It was instead terms like "posing somdomite [sic]"[144] that Wilde and others were subjected to. Mahaffy referred to Wilde "indirectly as a criminal,"[145] or as a 'blot'. The very language of Wilde's sentencing is telling. He did not go to prison for 'homosexuality', but for 'gross

[134] Halperin, 1996 (Oxford Classical Dictionary, 3rd ed.); Davidson, 2001: 4-5.
[135] Foucault even includes a footnote in Volume 2 of the *History of Sexuality* in which he self-identifies as a non-professional classicist: "I am neither a Hellenist or a Latinist. But it seemed to me that if I gave enough care, patience, modesty, and attention to the task, it would be possible to gain sufficient familiarity with the ancient Greek and Roman texts; that is, a familiarity that would allow me – in keeping with a practice that is doubtless fundamental to western philosophy – to examine both the difference that keeps us at a remove from a way of thinking in which we recognises the origin of our own, and the proximity that remains in spite of that distance which we never cease to explore" (Foucault, 2020c: 7).
[136] Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010.
[137] Riley, 2018: 2.
[138] This is much like the earlier discussion in Chapter 1 that examined the validity of the label of 'classics'.
[139] Foucault, 2020c: 10.
[140] Peters, 21st March 2014.
[141] Halperin, 1990.
[142] Sinfield, 1994.
[143] Peters, 21st March 2014.
[144] 'Marquess of Queensbury to Oscar Wilde', 18th February 1895 (see 'Trials of Oscar Wilde', *The National Archives*); see also Tóibín, 2003c: 44.
[145] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 87.

indecency' which was also cited as a form of "'perversion' or 'decadence.'"[146] To even speak of Wilde's writing as relating to homosexuality is somewhat anachronistic and to pin a "clinical label on Wilde that he would not have used himself reduces"[147] him. However, "it is nevertheless true that Wilde writes in reaction to what we now term homophobia or heterosexism."[148] Foucault makes a similar point in terms of thought on Greek sexual practices: "the notion of homosexuality is plainly inadequate as a means of referring to an experience, forms of valuation, and a system of categorisation so different from ours."[149] The absence of a widely accepted term offers an explanation for the unique way that, through the use of classics, homosexuality in Irish literature remains simultaneously hidden and exposed.

As a result of the lack of appropriate vocabulary and terminology, the silence created:

> Distorts (or impedes) our perception of certain subjects, feelings, personal relationships, and social structures, and usually reinforces society's cultural codes (present in stereotypes and wide-spread prejudice, injurious language, taboos, a generalised lack of empathy towards the suffering of some social groups, etc).[150]

This created a form of cultural agnosia when it came to homosexuality in Ireland that can be explained by the postcolonial context in which the Irish Free State existed "since it encompasses a variety of purported threats to an existing social order, 'obscenity' is defined 'wholly in relation to what it threatens'"[151] In this way Heath echoes Foucault's work in her acknowledgement of how the "imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality."[152] Thus, "silence and language create and re-create our social realities … the issues of power, politics, aesthetics, and economics are all part of the organising of silence."[153]

Silence is not just an absence of communication, but "an element that functions alongside the things said' – 'the thing one declines to say or is forbidden to name.'"[154] Lord

[146] Duffy, 2001: 328. See Holland, 2004.
[147] Hornby, 1998: 564.
[148] Duffy, 2001: 328.
[149] Foucault, 2020c: 187.
[150] Carregal, 2021: 2.
[151] Heath, 2010: 39. Gilmore, 1994: 607.
[152] Foucault, 2020b: 3.
[153] Clair, 1998: 21.
[154] Carregal, 2021: 2.

Alfred Douglas, before Wilde, called 'it' "the love that dare not speak its name."[155] This is a loaded sentence that needs to be explicated further:

1. It was a 'love' that did not resemble the conventional love of the period. It was not a monogamous love, nor a biologically reproductive one – but it was love as affection, desire, and romance nonetheless – that existed between Wilde and Douglas.
2. The fact that this love 'dare' not speak, encapsulates the societal attitudes of the time and the fear that was felt by so many forced to hide their sexuality and identity.
3. It could 'not speak' because it had no voice in society.
4. Even if it could speak, it had no 'name' to refer to itself (except slurs and insults).

This phrase is weighed down by secrecy and fear, and this is directly reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the way that painter, Basil Hallward, alludes to his affection for sitter, Dorian Gray, yet can never actually verbalise the nature of it. Not only can he not speak it, but he cannot even display it in the form of a public exhibition of the painting: "the reason I will not exhibit this is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul."[156] Perhaps it is the case that those outside of this "shared condition and identity"[157] will never be able to fully understand it, no matter how all-encapsulating a term may be. Wilde asserts, "it can only be understood by those who have read the *Symposium* of Plato, or caught the spirit of a certain grave mood made beautiful for us in Greek marbles."[158]

'Homosexuality' as a term does not even work to cover the complexity of the dynamics of the relationships in ancient Greece that Wilde studied so closely. Kenneth Dover, in his 1978 work, *Greek Homosexuality*, defines it as "the disposition to seek sensory pleasure through bodily contact with persons of one's own sex in preference to contact with the other sex."[159] There are many instances for which this clinical definition may not be appropriate, especially as its 'technicalisation' strips the term of any social context. The Greeks behave in a way that cannot be, nor possibly should be, 'diagnosed'. Instead, through the help of works such as those by Dover and Foucault, we can attempt to approach the intricacies of the 'erotics' of the Greeks' relationships with a lens removed

[155] Douglas, 1894: 28.
[156] Wilde, 2017: 14.
[157] Woods, 1998: 6.
[158] Wilde, 2013: 68.
[159] Dover, 1978: 1.

from that of our contemporary context. Alongside the danger of assuming the thoughts and beliefs of a group of people – for which we often have no personal accounts – we also have to be careful when it comes to applying modern sets of theory to ancient minds and contexts. As Dover succinctly sums up:

> Greek culture differed from ours in its readiness to recognise the alternation of homosexual and heterosexual preferences in the same individual, its implicit denial that such alternation or coexistence created peculiar problems for the individual or for society, its sympathetic response to the open expression of homosexual desire in words and behaviour, and its taste for the uninhibited treatment of homosexual subjects in literature and the visual arts.[160]

Foucault raises this issue again when he poses the question: "were the Greeks bisexual?"[161] He concludes that, technically, we could say 'yes'. But to do so is really moot, as "the Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices, two radically different types of behaviour."[162] Hence, it is particularly useful that the works of Dover and Foucault, which will continue to be used in conjunction, agree that sexuality in antiquity was not an "identity based"[163] categorisation.

In Volume 2 of the *History of Sexuality*, the *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault was self-admittedly indebted to Dover's work, which is widely considered to be one of the most seminal considerations of *eros* in antiquity, both its erotic and sociological consequences.[164] In his preface to the work, Dover claims that *Greek Homosexuality* "has a modest and limited aim,"[165] yet many consider this to be a "turning point"[166] in the study of ancient sexuality; a far cry from the prudish hesitation to discuss the subject in previous classical scholarship, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as will be seen in the discussion of Mahaffy later in this Chapter.

Foucault contributed much to the study of ancient sexuality; however, not every instance fits conveniently into the 'reductionist' and 'phallocentric' model that he attempted to establish as the rule.[167] The idea of 'active versus passive' certainly applies in

[160] Ibid.
[161] Foucault, 2020c: 188.
[162] Ibid: 187.
[163] Karras, 2000: 1252.
[164] Foucault, 2020c: 196.
[165] Dover, 1978: viii.
[166] Halliwell, 8th March 2010.
[167] Hubbard, 1998: 71.

many circumstances, but it can also be seen to flip and invert within the same relationship depending on the situation. Not to mention that it also "imposes a uniform, one-sided dynamic upon the complex transactions of sex and does not take other factors into account,"[168] such as the power and control the beloved has in being pursued, as well as the added benefits of gifts, and pleasure from sexual acts. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault begins to transform sex into a discourse no longer governed solely by issues of procreation. In this genitally and pleasure-centred approach, he explores the creation of the homosexual as a "species,"[169] and as "an object of study in its own right."[170]

Foucault focuses on the dichotomy between 'licit' and 'illicit' sexual practices that is created by societal conditions and upheld because these power structures remain in place.[171] "Perpetual spirals of power and pleasure"[172] result from the symbiotic relationship produced – pleasure is gained from exercising power over "peripheral sexualities,"[173] as exemplified by the condemnation and imprisonment of Wilde. Similarly, pleasure comes to these subjugated groups from their efforts to evade this power, as can be felt through Wilde's smug responses to the press following the publication of *Dorian Gray*.[174] Foucault explores how society's attempt to reduce and repress sexuality to exist solely in the form of a legitimate (heterosexual) couple is dismissive of the full existing spectrum, and how casual and non-productive sex is neither an abomination nor a 'perversion'.[175] To briefly refer back to his Fairytales once again, Wilde explores this Platonic idealisation of non-reproductive sex in the *Fisherman and his Soul*,[176] but also in the sexualised non-reproductive penetration of the nightingale's breast by the rose's thorn as being the "supreme gesture of self-sacrificing love"[177] in the *Nightingale and the Rose*.[178]

The context of silence and power in Ireland has led writers wishing to engage with gay themes or the homosexual experience to seek ways to do so that is at once at a remove and deniably veiled. We have focused mostly on examples of how Wilde has done this and we will later draw Tóibín more into the discussion to show how in a similar way, "much of

[168] Skinner, 2014: 91.
[169] Foucault, 2020b: 43.
[170] Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 892.
[171] Foucault, 2020b: 37.
[172] Ibid: 45.
[173] Ibid: 40.
[174] See Gillespie, 2020: 357-80.
[175] Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 885-6.
[176] This fairytale portrays an inter-species, and thus non-reproductive, relationship between a male fisherman and a mermaid (Wilde, 2022: 115-165).
[177] Duffy, 2001: 334.
[178] Wilde, 2022: 15-23.

his writing reads as a sort of displaced autobiography, as it draws on deep reserves and probes issues which carry personal significance."[179] The 'issues' in question can jointly be considered against this framework of homosexuality and the previously discussed trend of the absence of father figures in Irish writing. This idea of the inadvertent 'autobiography' is relevant too to a discussion of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which can actually be seen to foreshadow much of what would come to happen between Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, as played out in *De Profundis*.

Conclusion

Most strikingly in the domain of (homo)sexuality within Hibernian Philhellenism, what we see is really "affiliation (the creation of one's own world and contexts and version of tradition) rather than conservative filiation."[180] This applies to all three of my central figures:

1. Mahaffy, being one of the first academics to produce a discussion on Greek practices of pederasty;
2. Wilde, as one of the first publicly acknowledged gay 'martyrs' or role models', but also the way in which he defended his sexuality and was still prosecuted could itself have acted as a cautionary tale that further contributed to the context of silence;
3. and Tóibín, as working in Wilde's context and with Wilde, among others, as a background pillar to his own explorations into sexuality, but crucially with a social and legal understanding of homosexuality that did not exist in Wilde and Mahaffy's time.

Here, Tóibín's "deployment of a 'gay past' arose from an urgent political imperative: a need to find an historical parallel and, thus, a justification for current social rethinking around sexuality."[181] In the domain of (homo)sexuality, we perceive the active formation of the rope of Hibernian Philhellenism (as identified in previous Chapters): as contributing their own fictive position within it while simultaneously responding to the same.

In interrogating this context, we have observed in relation to conceptions of homosexuality "how culture might influence a particular dimension of the reading

[179] Delaney, 2008: 10.
[180] Kiberd, 1995: 46.
[181] Walshe, 2006: 123.

process,"[182] showing how "cultural understanding is a collaborative, social operation."[183] This understanding then constitutes an "arc of longing"[184] which will connect ancient Greek thought with modern Ireland. The arc aims to link Platonic conceptions with modern Irish literature, and this 'longing' speaks to the trend of absence and silence regarding homosexuality historically in Irish society on a more literal level. Significantly for our model of the rope, neither the arc nor the act of 'longing' can be considered as linear. Longing is a crucial component of belonging to the tradition of gay writing in Hibernian Philhellenism: longing to belong to the tradition, longing to engage with past 'cultural fathers', longing in the sense of closeted desires. With conceptions of homosexuality "reference to the past, or the need to anchor the present in the past, is part of present social life."[185] This rest of this Chapter will continue to look at how issues of sexuality – both in receptions of antiquity and in the lives of my case-studies – repeatedly come to the fore.

[182] Brooks and Browne, 2012: 77.
[183] Beard, 2014: 13.
[184] Ingold, 2024: 64.
[185] Cohen, 1969: 350.

3.3. Lessons in Antiquity: The *Poetics of Pedagogy* and Homosociality[186]

In our approach to Hibernian Philhellenism in this period, our aim is "to explore continuities between the Irish past and present, to place the Irish renaissance in a constellation with the current movement."[187] This 'constellation' constitutes the 'blots' and 'meshwork' of this overarching Chapter. In this section, I will put this statement into practice through looking at how Mahaffy and Wilde respectively responded to ancient and modern conceptions of homoeroticism, homosociality, and what would come to be called 'homosexuality', and how this later impacted Tóibín's approach to his own. Through examining the interconnections of 'cultural paternal influence' in Hibernian Philhellenism, this will show how "the web of human relations"[188] constructs "the meshwork."[189] The 'relations' we are most concerned with here are the cultural and 'paternal' that created a pedagogical relationship between Mahaffy and Wilde, and those that created canonical influence as demonstrated by Colm Tóibín.

Tim Ingold reminds us that "for more than three centuries in the Western world, education has been regarded as the engine of social progress."[190] Earlier, when I defined 'cultural paternal influence', I explained that it could be considered in a direct and indirect manner – both of which show two dynamics integral to classicism: the pedagogical and pederastic practices that were a pillar of Classical Athenian society, and the practice of classical engagement and influence. The remaining two sections in this Chapter begin with the first dynamic and end with the second to show how it is education and pedagogy that provide the tools necessary for my central figures "to stand on the shoulders of [their] predecessors."[191] The pedagogical element of Mahaffy and Wilde's direct relationship and Wilde and Tóibín's indirect relationship operates in conjunction with the idea that "when Hesiod and Pindar invoke the Muses, they do so *as students*, so as to enable themselves *to teach their readers*."[192] We see our central figures dually as both student and teacher through the idea of influence more broadly. This will ultimately prove, as this thesis has

[186] Burch, 2000: 41.
[187] Kiberd, 1995: 4.
[188] Ingold, 2015: 152.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ingold, 2024: 96.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Bloom, 1975: 34.

suggested, that "every disciple takes away something from his master."[193] This 'something' can constitute acceptance or rejection.

Mahaffy was very concerned with what he considered to be the 'pedagogical moment'. He defined this as:

> "The time of opening manhood and growing intellect […] the time when the mind is for a very few years peculiarly open as well as retentive, when passion inflames enthusiasm, and thus the prominent teachers of our earliest manhood, whether preachers, or poets, or politicians, have an influence upon us which seems absurd to our elders, who keep quoting the leaders of their own youth as the ideal for our imagination."[194]

This thesis is interested in the cause and effect of this direct instruction. As we have made clear, what a 'student' chooses to reject versus accept is an integral part of the pedagogical dynamic. That is particularly relevant in this section. Our exploration of Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* will illustrate how, despite offering him an introduction to it, he also taught Wilde how not to think about Greek sexuality. In this way, we can consider this domain of sexuality as, to borrow Alistair Blanshard's term, "a study in provocation."[195]

Blanshard used the term 'provocation' in an examination of Wilde and Mahaffy's relationship, but this section will show that it is equally applicable to much of the construction of the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism. This section will first establish the ancient models that inform 'cultural paternal influence' in Hibernian Philhellenism. The fact that we are primarily dealing with non-pederastic pedagogical practice is both important and distinct in the Irish context. We will consider this particular unique and context-fuelled relationship between my central figures as 'homosocial'. We will briefly discuss the contrast between the very different pedagogical experience Wilde received when he left the Irish context in Trinity. Moving to Oxford under the tutelage of Walter Pater both enabled Wilde's sexuality and allowed him to properly see the social and intellectual gulf that had begun to form between him and Mahaffy. This will then lead to a discussion on Wilde's *The Portrait of Mr W.H.,* which almost directly tracks this

[193] Wilde, 2018: 83.
[194] Mahaffy, 1883: 54-55.
[195] Blanshard, 2018: 219-235.

realisation. *Mr W. H.* will act as an introduction to Wilde's engagement with Plato's *Symposium* that will form the basis of the final section of this Chapter.

If 'cultural paternal influence' incorporates this 'time of opening manhood', then we must remember that the tradition of classicism in Ireland in this period called for a very strictly defined form of manhood.[196] This also acts as a reminder to that other integral dynamic previously discussed, highlighted by this very language: the exclusion of women from the academy and the canon. Colm Tóibín, although living and writing in a period that saw homosexuality being decriminalised and gay marriage being legalised, nonetheless finds himself approaching classical allusion in a similar way to Wilde in his writing. This is due to the lingering effects of the restrictions that were set and perpetuated by the class to which Mahaffy and Wilde belonged. Although the social conditions have changed between the late nineteenth century and the present, Wilde and Tóibín's response to them demonstrate how the classics are still used to shadow homosexuality in Irish literature. This will be seen in practice in the final section of this Chapter, but will be established first through Tóibín's non-fiction, biographical study, *Love in a Dark Time: Gay Lives from Wilde to Almodóvar*. In its approach, this work mirrors Wilde's fictionalised exploration of William Shakespeare's life in *Mr. W.H.* Following this, we can expand our understanding of Blanshard's pedagogy through 'provocation', to consider what Kerry T. Burch called "the *poetics of pedagogy*: teaching as a performative act of creation."[197] Once again, cause and effect are crucial here to show influence through a drive to create – whether academically, in fiction, or non-fiction.

Ancient Models

Before turning to our central figures, we must establish the ancient models from which we can trace their relationships. It is not just on the value and validity of homosexuality that Foucault and Dover devoted their previously discussed studies to, but also an exploration of the necessary or assumed power dynamics that existed within pederastic practice. Despite the fact that it was largely ignored and denied until the twentieth century, "the

[196] One that was determined by Victorian conservative values in the nineteenth century, and was directly constructed against the feminine 'colonised' in the twentieth century. See Tosh, 2007; Morgan, 1993; Nash, 1996; Delay, 2020.
[197] Burch, 2000: 41.

pederastic system was a defining aspect of the structure of [Athenian] social life."[198] It is therefore absolutely right that Mahaffy included it in his volume on 'social life' in Greece. But we will also see that his discussion really "reveals as much about the anxieties of an Anglo-Irish heterosexual as he does about Greek homosexuality."[199]

The pederastic dynamics Foucault and Dover established are complex and a fine line exists between the acceptable and the unacceptable.[200] In antiquity, there was a clear awareness of this complexity and pederasty remained an "ethical crux for the Greeks."[201] In order to understand the basis of Greek same-sex relationships between men and how they relate to our central figures, the roles that were adopted must be established. The traditional position of the older male was called the *erastes* (the lover), the younger male then adopted that of the *eromenos* (the beloved). Foucault breaks down the expectations and limitations that these roles represented:

> The first was in a position of initiative [the *erastes*] – he was the suitor … he was expected to show his ardour, and to restrain it … he had functions to exercise with regard to the *eromenos* … the other partner, the one who was loved and courted, had to be careful not to yield too easily; he also had to keep from accepting too many tokens of love.[202]

The *eromenos* is not expected or encouraged to reciprocate the desire of the *erastes*, or the behaviour that comes with this type of *eros*.[203] It is this subtle choreography of "pursuit and flight"[204] that so characterised the imagery and conception of homoerotic relationships.

For this discussion, I am limiting my focus to Classical Athens. However, I would still like to draw attention to where these pederastic images can be seen and would have originated. Here, I look to the elegiac and erotic poetry of the Archaic period, most specifically to Theognis of Megara, whose corpus is "permeated with the rhetoric of control

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[198] Woods, 1998: 28. Here, the original quote read 'Greek' instead of 'Athenian'. However, I felt 'Athenian' to be more appropriate, as antiquity was not a monolith. To simply say 'Greek' is to imply that different *poleis* operated homogenously in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods. As my discussion centres on Plato and pederasty, our focus is on the Classical period, and on Athens as this is where we have the most surviving literary sources. Nonetheless, even when "allowing for local variations, in all these cases we can infer a connection between pederasty, coming-of-age, and membership to the clubs of the adult men" (Bremmer, 1990: 142). Due to the sources available, Athens is "the only Greek city where we can trace the developments of the connection between pederasty and the *symposion* in detail" (Ibid).
[199] Danson, 1997: 118.
[200] Foucault, 2020c: 218.
[201] Hubbard, 1998: 49.
[202] Foucault, 2020c: 196.
[203] Dover, 1978: 52.
[204] Ibid: 81-91.

employed by the lover."[205] There are a variety of lyric poets I could have chosen to show that that "love, and most frequently, pederastic love"[206] was lyric poetry's "dominant' concern."[207] Sappho is one of the most acclaimed lyric poets; yet, she is largely overlooked by the male-dominated canon and history of reception. For example, Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality,* not only "disregards much literary evidence from Greek tragedy and lyric poetry, which once placed women close to the centre of Greek cultural debate [,] he also ignored the only female poet whose work we have,"[208] Sappho. I have decided to point to the surviving fragments of Theognis as an example as they are all pederastic in content, but also because they align to this thesis' focus on the domination of classical perceptions and attitudes by male voices. Theognis is also relevant to this discussion because Mahaffy wrote about his poetry in *A History of Classical Greek Literature,*[209] where he makes just one brief allusion to pederasty:

> The first book, contains all manner of political and social advices, while the rest is devoted to amorous complaints of the coldness of faithlessness of a favourite boy, whom the poet addressed throughout his works.[210]

All of these surviving fragments are addressed to a 'boy', who remains voiceless throughout, proving that the elder male took the dominant role in their relationship.[211] Theognis' poetry is erotic by estimation, and Mahaffy does not offer a full exploration of his work by any means. He mentions Theognis again in his *Problems in Greek History*.[212] Here, the 'problems' relate to tyranny and violence, and no mention of pederasty is made.

The functions that the *erastes* exercised were of the utmost importance to the social and political education of the young man as the *erastes* acted as his initial introduction into adult male society. The *symposium* was "a place for the instruction of boys and adolescents,"[213] and scholars of ancient Greece often describe this "phenomenon of institutionalised pederasty as a gender-specific mode of initiation: in Classical Athens it

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[205] Skinner, 2014: 67.
[206] Ibid: 59.
[207] Ibid.
[208] duBois, 1998: 87.
[209] Mahaffy, 1880: 189-192.
[210] Ibid: 189.
[211] "Boy, you're like a horse. Just now sated with seed,/ you've come back to my stable,/ yearning for a good rider, fine meadow,/ an icy spring, shady groves" [Theognis, 'The Second Book': 1249-1251 (trans. Bing and Cohen, 1993: 95)]. See also Lewis, 1985.
[212] Mahaffy, 1892: 36-37.
[213] Bremmer, 1990: 137.

would have been the masculine analogue to marriage, the girl's rite of passage."[214] Alongside accompanying him to the *symposium*, the *eromenos* may socialise with the *erastes* at the *palaestra* or *gymnasium*, providing a further political and social education that gave rise to the pedagogical element of these pederastic relationships.[215] In fact, pedagogy in the spiritual and political sense was completely integrated into pederastic spaces and relationships. Plato speaks of pedagogy as a form of 'ascension' as he does of *eros* and the practice of pederasty.[216] In keeping with Socratic logic, could it not be said that if they both are vehicles for ascending to the Forms, and achieving 'the good', that they are the same?

James Davidson reduces Dover and Foucault's exploration of these dynamics down to the two integral factors: "whether you played the active or passive role in sex and whether you had a beard."[217] It is a fact that "adolescent males became objects of open admiration from the time of the appearance of secondary sex characteristics at puberty until the growth of the full beard."[218] It is also agreed that "youthful beauty [was] the main attraction and the lover's eventual gratification [was pederastic courtship's] objective."[219] Nonetheless, "knowing the protocols does not tell us how people behaved."[220] Another, often ignored, fact is that pederasty in Classical Athens was never "unproblematic."[221] The *erastes-eromenos* relationship was "invested with peculiar moral tensions that we, approaching it with an opposed set of assumptions, find ourselves at something of a loss to reconstruct."[222]

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[214] Skinner, 2014: 16.
[215] Percy, 1996: 95-122.
[216] See Burch, 2000.
[217] Davidson, 2001: 17. There has been much debate as to what extent penetration was at the centre of these relationships. If the main distinction that was drawn was between who was the active and was the passive recipient, those distinctions can get complex when there is no penetration present (Foucault, 2020c: 46-7). It cannot be said that penetration was always absent, some scholars put it at "the centre of Greek sexuality and sexual morality" (Davidson, 2001: 7). Instead of referring to it as 'sexuality' when talking about antiquity, Halperin even suggests that we "describe it, rather, as a more generalised ethos of penetration and domination a sociological discourse structured by the presence or absence of its central term: the phallus" (Halperin, 1989: 266). In ancient Athenian society, penetration was generally reserved for women, slaves or non-citizens. In the general absence of penetration in an *erastes*/*eromenos* relationship, the active and passive role was often distinguished by who was to receive the sexual gratification. In this case of pederastic relationships, it would be the *erastes*, even if it was through intercrural methods as opposed to traditional penetration. The difficulty here can be resolved by saying that penetration is either literal, or a metaphor for power positions. Hubbard, in an attempt to circumvent the reductionism of the penetration model asserts that in either case "the principle issue was always class, not who was penetrating whom" (Hubbard, 1998: 70).
[218] Skinner, 2014: 14.
[219] Ibid: 78.
[220] Winkler, 1990: 45. Nor does it tell us people's opinions towards it. Since pederasty was an upper-class institution, it was probably subject to suspicion by the lower classes and we must wonder if "any practitioner, whether man or boy, was suspect in the eyes of the masses" (Hubbard, 1998: 69). The lower classes were mostly illiterate, thus, our only surviving sources relating to pederasty are often in its praise. See Dover, 1973.
[221] Hubbard, 1998: 49.
[222] Skinner, 2014: 19.

For that reason, it is often the case that the "pederastic *erastes-eromenos* pair has often been treated in scholarship as if it existed in a vacuum."[223]

The social implications of pederasty are apparent through the anxiety the Athenians had that "they might come under the authority of a leader who once identified with the role of the pleasure object for others."[224] It was not that they might be governed by a man who loved boys, nor by a man who was loved by an older man as a youth, that the Athenians were unable to accept. It was the possibility that a citizen-youth (considered capable of making rational decisions) would have been susceptible to persuasion, thereby exhibiting a complete lack of *sophrosyne*; a characteristic usually reserved for women or a *kinaidos* (two categories of people considered ill-suited to partaking in civic and social life).[225] The term *kinaidos* is bound up with this system of values and practices. It exists in a "different realm"[226] to pederasty and was a "category of person, not just acts."[227] It generally denotes a "socially and sexually deviant male."[228] He is deviant in the sense that he is often described as an "effeminate seducer."[229] The important clarification between a *kinaidos* and an *eromenos* was that it was not because the former "abdicated the masculine role of penetrator that they were considered shameful but rather because they were unrestrained in their desires."[230] Our most simplistic idea, often considered problematic in a post-Foucauldian context, is the idea that it was "sexual passivity that was the sole focus of any moral or legal sanctions, not same-gender preference."[231] This is often treated as a generalisation, but for this purpose it is the best way to understand the distinction between *kinaidos* and *eromenos*, since most scholars can agree that "sexual object-choice was not in any sense an 'identity' category for ancient Greeks."[232]

The opposition to homosexuality in Victorian culture resembles the anxieties surrounding the *kinaidos*, as made abundant by the consistent representation of Wilde by London newspapers as an "aesthete dandy and [the Marquess of] Queensbury as a stalwart 'Gentleman.'"[233] Skinner describes how the *kinaidos* was "recognisable by external signs

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[223] Yates, 2005: 33.
[224] Davidson, 2001: 17.
[225] Ibid : 23.
[226] Winkler, 1990: 53.
[227] Ibid: 46.
[228] Ibid: 45.
[229] Davidson, 2001: 23.
[230] Karros, 2000: 1259.
[231] Hubbard, 1998: 48.
[232] Ibid. The *kinaidos* is the perfect example to demonstrate how the 'penetration model' falls down; for the term "designates not passivity but lack of self-control" (Skinner, 2014: 155).
[233] Duffy, 2001: 336.

[:] foppish, over-elaborate dress was a dead giveaway, as were affected language and gestures and, above all, 'feminine' appearance or demeanour."[234] While "the meaning of *kinaidos* is distinct from that of 'homosexual' in modern parlance,"[235] it is not far removed from the perceptions of Wilde, who exploited the "interdeterminacy of the dandy image,"[236] alongside how he was represented in popular media and opinion.

With the intricacies of the pederastic system now established, we can better appreciate the breadth of material that was being ignored in academia as a result of social mores and because "sex lies outside history and culture, and it also lies beyond the range of the various disciplines of cultural study."[237] Once again, the study of these parts of social life are impeded by the lack of proper terminology, and the silence that pervades the topic. As we have emphasised, pederasty and pedagogy were of the utmost concern in terms of power relations in politics. They were emblematic of the class-system in ancient Athens and are crucial subjects of study for a comprehensive understanding of Athenian society.[238] The next section will focus on: how Mahaffy, although dealing with it, treated it in a decidedly Victorian way; and the pedagogical, homosocial power dynamics that were at play between Wilde and Mahaffy. Why it had not been dealt with seriously up until this point probably has something to do with the fact that "an education […] naturally gives pride of place to subjects of study deemed by the standards of formal pedagogy to be *academic*."[239]

Wilde was not 'at the time of opening manhood', "when the soft down of the *eromenos* still lingers upon the chin,"[240] when he was at Trinity or Oxford. Nevertheless, "history has proven that accuracy about age was not one of Wilde's strong points, and Wilde was receptive to the pedagogical *moment* alluded to by Mahaffy (with Plato's erotic intent reinstated)."[241] Placing Wilde and Mahaffy in these roles underlines how these are *models*, not strict rules that are followed, and for this reason I characterise their pedagogic

[234] Skinner, 2014: 155.
[235] Winkler, 1990: 45.
[236] Sinfield, 1994: 72. See Butler, 1999.
[237] Halperin, Winkler and Zeitlin, 1990: 3.
[238] Hubbard explains how "both literary and iconographic evidence strongly suggest that it was upper-class boys who were favoured objects of such pursuit: the boys are often depicted on vases with lyres or strigils, appurtenances of the musical and gymnastic education available only to the more affluent" (Hubbard, 1998: 49).
[239] Ingold, 2024: 96.
[240] Robson, 2004: 307.
[241] Ibid. Italics original.

relationship as 'homosocial' rather than pederastic. To clarify the distinction between these two terms, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes 'homosocial' as:

> A word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is just a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual', and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'.[242]

It is this definition that allows us to use 'homosociality' in both direct and indirect relationships (which later will be tracked between the predecessor and successor in the wider canon).

Mahaffy's *Social Life*

While Mairs describes how Mahaffy attempted to deny, explain, downplay, or excuse (depending upon one's interpretations) the homoerotic aspects of *symposium* culture",[243] Blanshard believes "Mahaffy offers not a defence of Greek homosexuality, but an apology for it"[244] In 1874, Mahaffy published the first edition of his *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander.* This edition was truly unique in a Victorian setting. Mahaffy explains in the introduction how:

> There are many books, German , French, and English, on the objective side of old Greek life – upon the religion, the laws, the feasts, the furniture of the Greeks; but there are very few on the subjective side, on the feelings of the Greek in their temples and their assemblies, in their homes, and their wanderings."[245]

In this work, he hopes to change that. The distinguishing feature from the 'many books' alluded to above is the discussion found in 'Chapter X: Attic Culture – Entertainment and Conversation – The Social Position of Boys in Attic Life'.[246] This chapter explores the practice of Greek pederasty that both spoke to the aforementioned 'feelings of the Greeks' and caused major controversy, leading to its removal in further editions.

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[242] Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985: 1.
[243] Mairs, 2010: 64.
[244] Blanshard, 2018: 27.
[245] Mahaffy, 1874: vii.
[246] Ibid: 292-320.

It is interesting to note that it is ultimately Mahaffy's introduction of these topics to Wilde as part of his classical education which would cause W. B. Stanford to question:

> Was Wilde's tragedy in part the result of his classical studies, or would it have happened if his interest had always been elsewhere? No certain answer can be given. Wilde may have had homosexual tendencies before he began to study classics and might have outrage moral convention even if had been a mathematician, or even if, like F. W. Rolfe, he had become a Catholic earlier."[247]

It is not Mahaffy who is ever held accountable. Mahaffy, who adhered more closely to the acceptable model of a male Victorian, receives no admonishment for writing about Greek homosexuality in the first place.[248] The onus is placed wholly on Wilde: "but there is no doubt whatever that Wilde gladly found analogies for his behaviours in the classical tradition, and flaunted them."[249]

Near the beginning of Chapter X, Mahaffy reveals:

> The great and striking feature in all this convivial society I have kept back for a special discussion – I mean the peculiar delight and excitement felt by the Greeks in the society of handsome youths, and the attachments of this kind which were common all through historical Greece.[250]

From this, we do not immediately see the apology or denial that Mairs and Blanshard alluded to. It quickly becomes apparent though the passages dealing with this topic are sternly rooted in Victorian attitudes, and Mahaffy's own beliefs with regard to homosexuality are palpable through the page. Mahaffy hints at his own bias when introducing the subject: "there is no field of enquiry, where we are so dogmatic in our social prejudices, and so determined by the special circumstances of our age and country."[251] In it, we can also see echoes of Wilde's previous accusations that Mahaffy's work, as seen in Chapter 2, was often full of personal opinion and "miss[ing] the spirit of a true historian."[252] Mahaffy offers justification, for what he calls "things that are so repugnant and disgusting,

[247] Stanford, 1976: 239.
[248] In fact, as seen in Chapter 1, Mahaffy's part in Wilde's understanding of ancient Greek homoeroticism is completely excused by the existence of another of Mahaffy's students, John Sullivan, who was 'a candidate for beatification in Rome' (Ibid).
[249] Ibid.
[250] Mahaffy, 1874: 305.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Wilde, 9th November 1887: 3.

that all mention of them is usually omitted when treating of Greek culture,"[253] by trying to make his reader understand that in modern times as in ancient times, "sentiment [can] all[y] itself with passion"[254] in ways that can have serious social consequences. He clarifies that these ways are "less revolting (of course) to *our* tastes."[255]

What is interesting, however negative the discussion becomes, is the repeated use of the word 'modern'. Throughout the work as a whole, Mahaffy argues for the modernity of the Greeks.[256] He claims that they are the society most like his contemporary, irrespective of the distance between them: "they are the writings of men of like culture with ourselves, who argue with the same logic, who reflect with kindred feelings"[257]; "in a word, they are thoroughly modern, more modern even than the epochs quite proximate to our own"[258]; and, " if one of us were transported to Periclean Athens, provided he were a man of high culture, he would find life and manners strangely like our own, strangely modern as he might term it."[259] He explains how an ancient Greek transposed into the Victorian era would not feel alien but "would recognise the teaching of his nation in poetry, architecture, and painting; and the manifest superiority of the old models would save him from feeling small in the face of our other progress."[260] Mahaffy's comments reflect the attitude found in Hibernian Philhellenism that "the hold which Greek literature retains on our modern education is not the mere result of precedent or fashion,"[261] and that the "social life of the Greeks is more than a matter of antiquarian curiosity, it is of practical value and interest to us all."[262] Nevertheless, it is on the matter of pederasty that Mahaffy equivocates: "it should not however be concealed or denied that in no point was public opinion more idly at variance with modern notions, than in its attitude towards excesses in this direction."[263]

Parts of Mahaffy's discussion strike a discordant tone. For example, he offers excuses for the great men of ancient history like Parmenides and Alexander, describing their attachments to other men as drawing feelings "of wonder and of disgust"[264] by modern

[253] Mahaffy, 1874: 311.
[254] Ibid: 306.
[255] Ibid. Italics original.
[256] Years later in *The Critic as Artist* (originally published in 1891), Wilde would argues something similar: "whatever, in fact, is modern in our life we owe to the Greeks" (Wilde, 2019: 52).
[257] Mahaffy, 1874: 1.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid: 2.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid: 1.
[262] Ibid: 8.
[263] Ibid: 310.
[264] Ibid: 308.

readers. How can we account for this dance between defence and condemnation? As mentioned in the previous Chapter, he is grateful in the preface to "[his] old pupils, Mr H. B. Leech, of Caius College, Cambridge, and Mr Oscar Wilde, of Magdalen College, Oxford, who have made improvements and corrections all throughout the book."[265] This development in Mahaffy and Wilde's relationship was a significant point of reference when analysing the Oedipal features of the very same. But now when considering attitudes towards classical sexuality, it is crucial that not only was this edition the first time that Greek homoeroticism was discussed in a scholarly work, but that this first discussion is one that was perhaps aided or 'improved' by Oscar Wilde.

Mahaffy describes Greek homosexuality as "strange and unnatural attachments."[266] However, this is followed by a strong caveat, and perhaps the place where we can propose to see Wilde's improvements and corrections most obviously:

> As to the epithet *unnatural*, the Greeks would answer probably, that all civilisation was unnatural, that its very existence presupposed the creation of new instincts, the suppression of old, and that many of the best features in all gentle life were best because they were unnatural.[267]

This sentence seems the most at odds with the rest of the discussion which explores "a leading feature, and the principle blot, in their civilisation."[268] While there may be an argument that Mahaffy was progressive in his choice to discuss this previously hushed subject, "a remark about the unnaturalness of homosexuality sounds distinctly more like Wilde than Mahaffy."[269] This particularly Wildean language and sentiment draws to mind his speech from the dock: a speech which also draws mention of Plato, whose *Symposium*, as underlined by Mahaffy is a "primary source"[270] for this "painful subject."[271] In his own works, Wilde also comments on the modernity of the Greeks. In *The Critic as Artist*, he asserts that "whatever in fact is modern in our life we owe to the Greeks [,] whatever is an anachronism is due to medievalism.'"[272]

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[265] Ibid: viii.
[266] Ibid: 308.
[267] Ibid. Italics original.
[268] Ibid: 311.
[269] Ellmann, 1987: 28.
[270] Mahaffy, 1874: 311.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Wilde, 2019: 52. Endres also describes how "a classical reading of *Dorian Gray* thus yields something rather modern, something quite queer: the valorisation of same-sex desire in Plato remains paramount for the

Despite his negative attitude towards the matter, and "having established that all social customs are socially constructed … [and finishing] with the following position – unnatural,"[273] Mahaffy still "yielded to pressure and omitted most of what he had said about an unmentionable topic"[274] in the Second Edition.[275] The offending discussion on pederasty was replaced with one on the "appreciation of female beauty in ancient Greece."[276] As we shall see in the next section, the male homoerotic body is absent once again in an Irish context. Mahaffy did not offer a positive, neutral, or even what we may term today as strictly academic, overview of the practice of Greek pederasty. It appears that to even mention and discuss it proved too scandalous. While he clearly opposed this feature of a culture that he normally worshipped, it was perhaps because of this fondness that he felt the need to excuse these "attachments that were contrary to all reason and sense of propriety,"[277] while still hoping to show that "this feature in Greek life can be conceived as coexisting with purity and refinement."[278] It was clearly not a strong enough condemnation. The same oppressive context once again produced "instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence."[279] In other words, Mahaffy's 'Second Edition' adhered to Michel Foucault's ideas of censorship.[280]

We cannot know for certain in what way Wilde may have had influence over the proofs. The most widely believed evidence of his input is purely an educated and circumstantial guess. What we do know is that Mahaffy's discussion on pederasty and 'Greek Love' would have been one of Wilde's first introductions to the subject that did not arise from his own study of ancient texts. It was to be Plato, and the *Symposium* more specifically, that would drive more of a social wedge between Mahaffy and Wilde. The way in which the two men approached Plato was completely at odds. On the one hand, Plato was central to the way in which Wilde, unlike Mahaffy "sought to legitimise Greek homosexual relations as natural, healthy, and modern."[281] On the other hand, Plato was an

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plot" (Endres, 2018: 266). Thus, 'modernity' is something generally associated with Wilde, and something Mahaffy appeared to class as a positive attribute.

[273] Blanshard, 2018: 27.

[274] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 157.

[275] Mahaffy, 1875.

[276] Boyle, 2015: 417.

[277] Mahaffy, 1874: 305.

[278] Ibid: 310.

[279] Foucaut, 2020b: 17.

[280] Ibid.

[281] Blanshard, 2018: 27. Note Blanshard's use of the word 'natural' in light of the emphasis placed on the opposition of culture to 'nature' above.

author for which Mahaffy "had little time."[282] Mahaffy, in his *Social Life* called the *Symposium* "tedious."[283] Wilde was completely devoted to Plato in his later writings. We must wonder whether Mahaffy's aversion to the *Symposium* has anything to do with his probable knowledge of it as one of the "key texts for Victorian homoerotic communities."[284] Any allusion to the *Symposium* was supposedly, akin to the discussion on homosexual terminologies, one of the ways to combat the silence of society surrounding that matter.

In a footnote in *Social Life*, Mahaffy writes how in Plato's *Symposium*, Greek homosexuality is "distinctly set above the love of women, which is held to be inferior and carnal."[285] Mahaffy wrote strongly about Socrates, the mouthpiece of Plato's dialogues:

> This sceptical questioning fell in too well with the salient weaknesses of Greek nature to escape perversion; … to the Athens of his day the damage [of Socrates' teaching] was, I believe, grave and remarkable.[286]

I hold that Mahaffy's views on Plato mark the beginning of the "unbridgeable intellectual gap"[287] between himself and Wilde. In many ways Plato is one of the main ways we can conceptualise the *agon* that existed in Mahaffy and Wilde's relationship. We can consider *agon* to be a major feature of their homosocial pedagogical relationship (and perhaps, more broadly, all forms of filiation) as "pleasure practices were conceptualised using the same categories as those in the field of social rivalries and hierarchies."[288] Rachel Mairs raises the question as to whether Mahaffy's views on ancient Greek homosexuality – which he treated with unusual frankness for the late nineteenth century – either influenced Wilde in his formative intellectual years or in some way provoked his late critical ire."[289] I would venture to answer that it was a mix of both.

It cannot be denied that Mahaffy introduced Wilde to the "precedent for adopting and assimilating the discoveries of one's predecessors in the great civilisation of Greece."[290] This is something he continued to do throughout his life and works – *The*

[282] Ibid.
[283] Mahaffy, 1874: 300.
[284] Prettejohn, 2019: 81.
[285] Mahaffy, 1874: 311.
[286] Ibid: 314.
[287] Blanshard, 2018: 21.
[288] Foucault, 2020c: 215.
[289] Mairs, 2010: 64.
[290] Robson, 2004: 303.

Portrait of Mr W.H. will show this in practice. It is also something Wilde influenced others to do across the canon – as demonstrated by Colm Tóibín. Richard Ellmann also cites an instance where Wilde's mother, Speranza, reminded her son that it was Mahaffy who brought about "the first noble impulses to [his] intellect."[291] Strikingly, the use of the word 'noble' is normally one reserved by Wilde for his allusions to homosexuality and male friendship.[292]

We have seen the oft-referenced quote of Wilde referring to Mahaffy as his 'first and best teacher', but perhaps as well as thanking him for the introduction to Greek civilisation, he "also should have thanked his tutor for outlining so clearly the kind of antiquity with which he wanted to have no part."[293] Most people attribute Wilde's intellectual and classical growth to his time in Oxford. It was certainly the case that the "special Platonic emphasis at Oxford"[294] was fundamental to his development. His son Vyvyan Holland underlined what is often overlooked: "it has frequently been said that Ruskin moulded my father's character at Oxford, but it would be more accurate to say that Ruskin watered the seed that had been sown by Mahaffy."[295] A great example of this is the fact that Wilde's engagement with Plato is thought to have been fostered in Oxford, but it did not solely stem from there. As seen in Wilde's notebook dated from early 1873, while he was still at Trinity and under the tutelage of Mahaffy, Wilde included a sketch of the development of Plato's theory of Forms.[296] In any discussion about Wilde's study of Plato and his homosocial experience at Oxford, Mahaffy still remains one of the intertwining strands of influence proving that "Wilde's study with Mahaffy was the capstone of his educational experiences."[297] We can say that "intellectually, [Wilde's move to Oxford] was to be an encore more than a beginning."[298]

Blanshard, in his comprehensive study of Wilde and Mahaffy's relationship, supposes that a major way "to appreciate fully their difference is to focus on their differing conceptions of Hellenism."[299] This gulf between Wilde and Mahaffy began to grow when Wilde was in Oxford, and we saw hints of it while they were on their Grand Tour of Greece.

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[291] Ellmann, 1987: 27.
[292] See Price, 2004.
[293] Blanshard, 2018: 35.
[294] Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010.
[295] Holland, 1954: 26. John Ruskin (1819-1900) was the Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University at the time Oscar Wilde was a student.
[296] *Julia Rosenthal Oscar Wilde Collection*, TCD MS 11437; Ross, 2014: 163.
[297] Smith and Helfand, 1989: 8.
[298] Mendelssohn, 17th July 2018.
[299] Blanshard, 2018: 21.

In the end, it became that Wilde's life and works, and Mahaffy's style and perspective, were things that neither could comfortably abide. Despite Mahaffy saying that "he hoped he would never hear Wilde's name again,"[300] Richard Ellmann tells us he had "boasted of having created Wilde."[301] For all that changing of opinion, the end of their relationship can be really summed up by Mahaffy's refusal to give his name in support of a petition to the Home Secretary calling for leniency in Wilde's sentence in November 1895.[302] This is made more stark by the fact that Robert Yelverton Tyrrell, Mahaffy's colleague in the Classics Department of Trinity did sign it, and later wrote a very compassionate review of Wilde's *De Profundis* and the "wrecked career of a genius."[303]

Apart from Mahaffy being scandalised by Wilde's conviction, and his own personal association with him, Patrick Sammon wonders whether Mahaffy suspected that his "failure to be made Provost of Trinity in 1904 was caused in part by his early friendship with Wilde."[304] If we return to the text of Mahaffy's *Social Life*, we can see that Mahaffy is consistent in his personal beliefs about practices of homosexuality and in a way, he foreshadows his own reaction to Wilde's conviction. Of the Greeks, he says: "they were treated, I fear, more leniently than even ordinary immortality is treated by our worldly people."[305] It is no surprise then that Mahaffy did not sign a petition calling for leniency when he emphatically states that even in antiquity, this should have been a case for prosecution or social exile. As to the branding of Wilde as the 'one blot' of his tutelage following his scandal, his 1874 text again attests to this attitude:

> To these latter they held fast as the best outcome of their culture, as the highest possible stimulus to virtue and refinement; and the excesses to which they led were branded by Plato and by men of his stamp just as we should brand the conduct of modern gentlemen when they allow their admiration of the other sex to exceed the bounds of mere sentiment.[306]

Wilde's divergence from Mahaffy's teachings and beliefs could in some way be accounted for by his regular criticism of his own age for being so selective with regard to

[300] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 87.
[301] Ellmann, 1987: 28.
[302] Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 87; see also Boyle, 2015: 433.
[303] Tyrrell, 4th March 1905: 543.
[304] Sammon, 2007: 132.
[305] Mahaffy, 1874: 310.
[306] Ibid: 309.

the past, for taking only "from each [bygone form of culture] what is serviceable for the modern spirit – from Athens its wonder without its worship, from Venice its splendour without its sin."[307] This could be seen as a direct criticism of academics like Mahaffy who were happy to deny the parts of civilisations they did not like, or re-frame them in a way that would suit Victorian sentiments. It was at Oxford, outside of the Irish context, that Wilde began to deny the perception of the classics that he had formed under Mahaffy. Nonetheless, Mahaffy remained as a foil for him to rebel against and as a thread in the rope of Wilde's classicism, proving how "rebellions are conducted not so much against authority figures as against their palpable absence."[308] Ultimately it was pedagogical practice and homosocial relationships that were at the heart of Wilde's classicism showing how "in the labyrinth as in life, *submission leads and mastery follows*: education as exposure precedes education as attunement."[309] Wilde's resistance against Mahaffy, as previously seen in Chapter 2, can be seen as "gestures [that] rehearse not the erosion of power so much as the search for a true authority, … in them lurk the danger of re-Oedipalisation."[310] In choosing to model his beliefs on a rejection of much of Mahaffy's teaching and perspective, Wilde in Oxford undertook a "revolutionary slaying-of-the-father [that] most often ends simply by instituting some new father or authority-figure."[311] In this case, that new cultural father was Walter Pater, demonstrating "how much the father figure represents an anchor for a son, someone who holds the world in place."[312]

In Contrast: Pater and Plato

It is impossible to discuss Wilde's use of Plato without briefly considering Wilde's relationship with Walter Pater, who Wilde referred to as "the most perfect master of English prose now creating amongst us."[313] When asked about his time at Oxford by Frank Harris, Wilde responded that it was there he found "all romantic and ideal affections."[314] Wilde did not have far to go in order to be ingratiated into the trend and "influence of Oxford

[307] Ivory, 2007: 518.
[308] Kiberd, 1995: 389.
[309] Ingold, 2015: 140. Italics original.
[310] Kiberd, 1995: 389.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Tóibín, 2025: 45.
[313] Wilde, 2019: 47. We can contrast this with Wilde's criticism of Mahaffy's scholarly prowess, but also his prose writing. In the previous Chapter we saw him write: "if Mr Mahaffy would only write as he talks his book would be much pleasanter reading" (Wilde, 16th December 1887: 3).
[314] Harris, 1938: 33.

'tutor worship.'"[315] He already had primary experience of this type of relationship with Mahaffy.[316] In terms of the relationship Wilde formed with Pater, Mahaffy once again presents himself to us as a starting point. Pater and Mahaffy varied widely in their teaching style and social perspective but one way in which they were similar, and perhaps one of the reasons Wilde felt drawn to him, was that "like Mahaffy, Pater's attention was focused above all on Greece."[317] Pater is also an interesting figure for our purpose. In terms of tracing tradition formation, Kenneth Haynes cites Pater as "one of the first English writers to apply the phrase 'classical tradition' to European literatures."[318]

Mahaffy and Pater may have converged in their love of and focus on Greece; however, in this discussion we can consider the primary way in which they diverged to be their treatment of Plato. We have already seen Mahaffy's indifference, or even dislike, for Plato – particularly the *Symposium*. Wilde's experience with Pater was incommensurate and amounted to "a means of more or less covertly advancing the cause of homosexual emancipation."[319] It was through the instant "spiritual fellowship"[320] between Pater and Wilde that Wilde could finally experience his "beloved Platonic models of instruction that fused desire with pedagogic intent"[321] in practice. As Julie-Ann Robson describes, "Wilde would leave behind the cleric and his oral restraint, drawn like a moth to the gemlike flame of Oxford where the practice of 'homosociality' was preached (albeit in a whisper) by Walter Pater."[322] These first-hand experiences of Pater's instruction (also gained from John Addington Symonds' work too) proved something to Wilde that Mahaffy never could: "seeing new erotic possibilities in the classical tradition did not mean rejecting its other aspects."[323]

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[315] Ross, 2014: 34.
[316] His relationship with Mahaffy continued while he was at Oxford. In fact, Wilde was rusticated for 3 weeks after he was late back to the start of term following his trip to Greece with Mahaffy (Stanford and McDowell, 1971: 42). A letter to Reginald Harding shows how close Wilde and Mahaffy's relationship remained, but also the responsibility that Mahaffy seems to take for Wilde: "my mother of course awfully astonished to hear my news and very much disgusted with the wretched stupidity of our college dons, while Mahaffy is *raging*! I never saw him so indignantly angry; he looks on it almost as an insult to himself" ['Letter to Reginald Harding from Merrion Square', Tuesday 15th May 1877 (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 47; italics original)].
[317] Haynes, 2019: 7.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ross, 2014: 8.
[320] Donoghue, 1994: 94.
[321] Blanshard, 2018: 35.
[322] Robson, 2004: 306.
[323] Rutherford, 2014: 607. It is reported that Symonds' *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873) was "perpetually" to be seen in Wilde's hands (Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010; see also Schroeder, 1993).

If Wilde received 'Hellenism' from Mahaffy, we can say then that it was "hyper-Hellenism"[324] that Pater bestowed on him. This was combined with the introduction to and adoption of the aesthetic movement that Wilde experienced at Oxford.[325] Mahaffy was critical of aestheticism for the pure fact that it was "bound up with Victorian homosexuality."[326] In Wilde's life after Oxford, his way of "signalling the scholar in the dandy was to appear on easy terms with Plato and Aristotle."[327] In contrast to Mahaffy, Wilde's relationship with Pater is believed to have transcended the 'homosocial' and appears to have been more in keeping with ancient models, entering a physical realm. In short, Pater's instruction reflects the teachings of the *Symposium*. He described to Wilde the influence of the "older man over the young; the inscription of words upon the soul."[328] While I have shown that Wilde had received teaching on Plato during his time in Trinity, it was this more immersive experience in Oxford that would further fuel the engagement between Wilde and pederastic models in his own biography and in his written works.

Wilde is an example of the punishment bestowed for 'indecent' behaviour. Due to the Victorian context, any sexual relationship between Pater and Wilde, or any of his students, is either simply hinted at or assumed. In his biography of Wilde, Frank Harris tells of an instance confided in him by Wilde where, by the river in Oxford, Pater suddenly knelt and kissed his hand.[329] This is the closest we get to intimacy being revealed between the two; however, it does perhaps reveal why "Pater's reputed ability to seduce young minds through his writing – his morally corrupting influence (whether real or perceived) – unsettled Victorian moralists and delighted Wilde."[330] Walter Pater's reputation remained precarious even after the Victorian period, as although Victorian values waned, there was still a definite silence pervading matters of sexuality. For the following generation, particularly of the Modernist movement, "Pater is 'the absent father' 'disowned' at the same time as he is 'imitated'."[331] The contrast between Wilde's relationship with Mahaffy and Pater (as well as the other figures at Oxford about which he speaks highly, like John Ruskin) can actually be seen to play out in practice in his 1889 short prose work, *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*

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[324] Stanford, 1970: 79.
[325] See also Evangelista, 2009; Grech, 2019.
[326] Duffy, 2001: 335.
[327] Ross, 2014: 5.
[328] Robson, 2004: 308.
[329] Harris, 1938: 35.
[330] Robson, 2004: 307.
[331] Prettejohn, 2019: 79.

In Action: *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*

The Portrait of Mr W. H. is a blend of styles and genres. It is at once a short-story, a philosophical dialogue, and a literary theory. In it, an unnamed protagonist (initially under the tutelage of an older man named Erskine) goes in search of evidence that William Shakespeare's sonnets are written in honour of a young boy-actor named Willie Hughes from Shakespeare's company. Critics have referred to this work as "deliberately transparent."[332] It is an explicit Platonic examination and justification for the relationship that Shakespeare is purported to have had with Willie Hughes. It follows many of the same themes and ideas that would come to be seen in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a year later, and in many ways would have been much more damning evidence to have been used in Wilde's trial. It has been largely overlooked, despite the fact that:

> If there is one text in which Wilde weaves together all of the strands of his theory of individualism, its underwriting of crime and deception, its privileging of non-conventional sexual expression, its aesthetic dimension, and its debt to the renaissance it is his 1889 short story *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*[333]

I consider the unnamed protagonist to be akin to Harold Bloom's 'ephebe'. This was a term used by the Athenians for the young, future citizen. In the context of literary influence, Bloom applies it to the "young deep reader who dwells in the solitude where she or he goes apart to encounter the imagination of Shakespeare."[334]

The Portrait of Mr W. H. also raises an interesting feature of Wilde's work that relates to earlier discussions of the 'closet' (which will also be tied in through Tóibín's tendency to discuss homosexuality through the biographies of others): Wilde's use of the 'picture' or 'portrait' as his metaphorical 'closet'. It seems to me a Platonic technique. In this case, not one arising from the *Symposium,* like much of his other work, but rather from the *Republic* and the Allegory of the Cave (7.514a-518e).[335] It is only through imitation, shadows, and reflections that Wilde feels comfortable enough to discuss ideas of sexuality: "had I touched upon some secret that my soul desired to conceal?"[336] In other words, it is

[332] Gillespie, 2020: 354.
[333] Ivory, 2007: 528.
[334] Bloom, 2011: 10.
[335] Plato, 2003: 220-225. A discussion of Plato's *Symposium* will feature in the next section (Plato, 2001).
[336] Wilde, 2018: 83. In the *Critic as Artist*, Wilde also recognise show how some of the many 'artistic subjects' that Plato dealt with were "the aesthetic value of appearances, the relation of the visible arts to the external

only through these images or pictures that Wilde could momentarily 'step out' of the 'closet'.

The exploration in *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* is directly indebted to Plato's *Symposium*, once again linking Plato with poetry (Shakespeare's sonnets). Wilde even provides us with the exact edition and translation that he is working with – one which William Shakespeare himself *could* have read:

> In 1492 appeared Marsilio Ficino's translation of the *Symposium* of Plato, and this wonderful dialogue – of all the Platonic dialogues perhaps the most perfect, as it is the most poetical – began to exercise a stranger influence over men and to colour their words and thoughts, and manner of living.[337]

The work is most indebted to Plato through its explanation of Socrates' encomium on the value of non-reproductive relationships, and Wilde refers directly to Diotima and her theory:

> Beauty is the goddess who presides over birth, and draws into the light of day the dim conceptions of the soul; when he tells us of the "marriage of true minds", and exhorts his friend to beget children that time cannot destroy, he is but repeating the words in which the prophetess tells us that 'friends are married by a far nearer tie than those who beget mortal children, for fairer and more immortal are the children who are their common offspring'.[338]

Note that 'Beauty' is continuously capitalised in the elevated Platonic way that Wilde shows preference for. He refers to this Platonic idea of elevated male friendship, not just as a 'theory', but as a "creed."[339] Linking back to our discussion on the lack of terminology for gay men, Wilde's work elucidates "the true meaning of the amatory phrases and words with which friends were wont, at this time, to address each other."[340]

This discussion continues with a very frank and explicit exploration of biologically non-reproductive relationships showing how "Wilde, like other advocates of male love,

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world, and the relation of fiction to fact" (Wilde, 2019: 49). Wilde's similar use of these subjects with regards to the medium of 'paintings' and 'portraits' show how Plato trained him in these principles.

[337] Wilde, 2018: 44.

[338] Ibid: 45.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Ibid: 46.

betrays a preoccupation with non-reproductivity."[341] He describes how "this great friendship of ours is indeed a marriage, it is the "marriage of true minds,"[342] and how "the children he begs him to beget are no children of flesh and blood, but more immortal children of undying fame."[343] The relationship between Shakespeare and Willie Hughes was not reproductive in the biological sense but in the intellectual one, which Plato believes to be the higher form: "my thoughts also, are my 'children' [,] they are of your begetting and my brain is – … the womb wherein they grew."[344] Wilde refers also to how a "romantic friendship with a young Roman of his day initiated Winckelmann into the secret of Greek art, taught him the mystery of its beauty and the meaning of its form."[345] This type of relationship then also relates to the pedagogical and homosocial ones that Wilde experienced in his life that were "promoted by Plato [and] led to a 'procreancy … of the spirit', producing knowledge, wisdom, and so on."[346] Furthermore, it is associated with ancient concepts of friendship, or *philia*, often described as an "elevating force"[347] that produced an "affinity of soul, [and] mutual sympathy between man and man."[348] Although there is an 'ambivalence' surrounding ancient friendship and its true meaning,[349] since the "Greek word *philia* can cover all bonds of affection,"[350] it was considered to be a "sacred institution that had mythic founders and venerable examples"[351] that acted as "the real soul of ancient life."[352]

The Portrait of Mr W. H. shows Blanshard's notion of pedagogy through 'provocation' in action. *Mr W. H.* is an example of "correspondence thinking,"[353] once again reminding us that the strands that make up our rope are people as well as social contexts or canonical literary works. In *Mr W.H.,* Oscar Wilde draws a "line of descent from Plato to himself, via Marsilio Ficino's translation of the *Symposium*, Michelangelo's sonnets to Tommaso Cavalieri, Montaigne's essays, Christophe Marlowe, Shakespeare

[341] Duffy, 2001: 333.
[342] Wilde, 2018: 33.
[343] Ibid: 29.
[344] Ibid: 33.
[345] Ibid: 49. This relates back to the line from *Dorian Gray* compared to the 'Love that dare not speak its name' speech, in which Wilde writes: "it was such love as Michelangelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winkelmann, and Shakespeare himself" (Wilde, 2017: 151).
[346] Duffy, 2001: 332. These relationships include not just those he actively emulated.
[347] Shairp, 1884: 45.
[348] Ibid. See also Konstan, 1996.
[349] See Roshchin, 2017: 27-56.
[350] Pangle, 2003: 2.
[351] Shairp, 1884: 457.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Ingold, 2015: 154.

himself, Richard Barnfield, Johann Winckelmann and Walter Pater."[354] In drawing these individual lines, or rather entwining them, Wilde not only "shows he has been reading these authors in order to prove that his own writing is derived from an established tradition,"[355] but proves that "kinship, then, is a mesh of lines."[356] We see this reflected directly in *Mr W. H.* when our unnamed narrator describes how

> There had been a presence beside me always. Its silver feet had trod night's shadowy meadows, and the white hands had moved aside the trembling curtains of the dawn. It had walked with me through the grey cloisters, and when I sat reading in my room it was there also.[357]

We know from Wilde's life that this 'presence' could have been any number of 'cultural fathers', but one that was always there as a starting point was Mahaffy, and that is evident in the text of *Mr W. H.*

The relationship between the unnamed narrator and Erskine directly mirrors that between Wilde and Mahaffy, and how Mahaffy provided "challenges and provocations to Wilde's thinking, constantly requiring his student to recalibrate and reaffirm his position."[358] Mahaffy's discussion of pederasty in *Social Life* is immediately drawn to mind as Erskine is also the person who first introduces the narrator to this theory of Willie Hughes. It is this pedagogy that sets the narrator off on his 'quest' to uncover the truth about the subject of Shakespeare's sonnets, something that would occupy him for the rest of his life. Similar to Mahaffy's retraction of his discussion on pederasty from his Second Edition, Erskine comes to disavow the opinion he himself first offered: "I am sorry I told you anything about it, and very sorry indeed that I should have converted you to a thing in which I don't believe."[359] Throughout *Mr W. H.*, the narrator's exploration is directly informed by the works of Pater, Symonds and similar figures, all referred to in the text by name.[360] Despite us being able to clearly see the influence of these men through their named and referenced theories on Plato and elevated male friendship, it was ultimately Erskine (or

[354] Woods, 1998: 167.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ingold, 2015: 154.
[357] Wilde, 2018: 81.
[358] Blanshard, 2018: 21.
[359] Wilde, 2018: 22.
[360] For example, he writes: "as Mr Symonds points out, the Platonic conception of love as nothing if not spiritual, and of beauty as a form that finds its immortality within the lover's soul" (Wilde, 2018: 47).

Mahaffy) who first introduced these beliefs to him and set him off on the path that would lead him to further explore these ideas.

The Portrait of Mr W.H. also reflects the Victorian tendency, relevant to Wilde's own life, to constantly refer to men who partake in these elevated male relationships (who beget spiritual and intellectual offspring) as "effeminate."[361] Due to the lack of proper terminology or education, on the matter, "effeminacy preceded the category of the homosexual, overlapped with and influenced the period of its development, and has continued in potent interaction with it."[362] The men who are interested in this theory, bar Erskine (the Mahaffy figure), are all referred to as effeminate or as being similar to the Victorian aesthete. In the same way that Plato acted as an allusion to homosexuality, Wilde is playing with these stereotypes:

> There is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert: not only his mannerisms, his bearing, the way he gets dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his whole body, are regularly included in this disparaging description.[363]

Wilde was regularly known to "challenge to the stratified thinking of his day."[364] He liked to create "manly women and womanly men."[365] Critics of Wilde both before, during, and after his scandal often attacked his personal appearance and effeminacy – despite his outwardly 'manly' size, statue and voice. We have to imagine that Wilde was consciously using the word 'effeminate' to further underline what he was trying to establish in *Mr W. H.*: that England's greatest writer was in a homoerotic relationship, therefore drawing a retrospective line of acceptance through the canon into his own time.

It is perhaps his explorations in *Mr W.H.* – part story, part literary theory – that would lead him a year later in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to proclaim that "pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about."[366] There is much else in the sentiment of *Mr W.H.*

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[361] Ibid.
[362] Sinfield, 1994: 78.
[363] Foucault, 2020c: 18.
[364] Kiberd, 1995: 40.
[365] Ibid. While much of this came from his desire to challenge and to encode his texts, it also had much to do with his own personal experience and environment. Part of his 'rope of being' was his mother, Speranza. In his formative years, he witnessed her "edit journals and organise political campaigns in an age when women had no right to vote; and it was from her that he inherited his lifelong commitment to feminism" (Ibid). This once again proves that Wilde, like us all, was a direct product of the influences of his environment. The only difference between him and us is the breadth of the corpus from which we can track this evolution.
[366] Wilde, 2017: 101.

that reflects the Platonic revelations that come through *Dorian Gray*, particularly when it comes to ruminations on the soul. In Plato, the soul is the most highly valued part of a person, and through elevated male love, it can transcend. Parts of *Mr W.H.* read exactly like *Dorian Gray*. For example, painter Basil Hallward is afraid his portrait of Dorian will expose "the secret of his soul."[367] Compare now this line from Mr W.H: "the soul, the secret soul, was the only reality."[368] *Dorian Gray* will be discussed in the next section in terms of Platonic conceptions of the absent body in Irish literature. First, it is important to establish how Colm Tóibín approaches his own sexuality in a similar way to Wilde – at a distance, through the lives of others, and through Hellenism and the "antique ideal"[369] as a "mode of self-conscious intellectual development."[370] It will also demonstrate how elevated male friendship creates a "noble basis for an artistic comradeship."[371]

Colm Tóibín: Homosexuality Across the Canon

In *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*, Wilde finds relativity for his own personal experience in the canon:

> How curiously it had all been revealed to me! A book of sonnets, published nearly three hundred years ago, written by a dead hand and in honour of a dead youth, had suddenly explained to me the whole story of my soul's romance.[372]

This revelation is not a unique phenomenon in classicism. On reading about Alexander the Great in his youth, Daniel Mendelsohn wrote in the *New Yorker* that "until that moment I had never seen myself reflected anywhere."[373] In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde writes:

> Yes; there had been things in his boyhood that he had not understood. He understood them now. Life suddenly became fiery-coloured to him. it seemed to him that he had been walking in fire. Why had he not known it?[374]

[367] Ibid: 14.
[368] Wilde, 2018: 81.
[369] Ibid: 44.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid: 81.
[373] Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010.
[374] Wilde, 2017: 31.

In *Mr W. H.*, on exploring the relationship between Shakespeare and Willie Hughes, the protagonist realises that: "it seemed to me that I was deciphering the story of a life that had once been mine, unrolling the record of a romance that, without my knowing it, had coloured the very texture of my nature."[375] Colm Tóibín notes, with a similar sentiment, that unless approaching homosexuality through the lives of others, "I had nothing polemical and personal, or even long and serious to say on the subject."[376]

Tóibín saw his own homosexuality through Wilde who was, in turn, informed by the classics. This form of reception underpins this thesis as a whole, but more specifically, the indirect aspect of 'cultural paternal influence' as demonstrated by Tóibín's engagement with Wilde's work. In *Mr W. H.* and in Tóibín's *Love in a Dark Time* – we see something similar at play. It is only through fictional or biographical accounts of other canonical figures that both Wilde and Tóibín felt they were able to explore and express their own sexuality. Wilde could only articulate himself through ideas of art and imitation; Tóibín by using the art of others. As discussed, the Irish context behind Tóibín's biographical and fiction works often require him "to return to a narrative of the closet"[377] in order to express his sexuality. In doing so "Tóibín finds a way to express the homoerotic within his fictions, [often] repressed and controlled … as a writer caught between two phases of cultural development, outside the 'post-gay' moment in contemporary, decriminalised Ireland."[378]

How this presents in Tóibín's fictions will be discussed in the next section in conjunction with Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Here, our focus is more on how Tóibín does this in his non-fictional works and how, like Wilde with Shakespeare, he has a need to look backwards into the past and write about previous 'cultural fathers'. In *Love in a Dark Time*, by reinterrogating the life of often subversive and scandalised figures, Tóibín speaks of his own role in the movement where "gay writers wrote about gay characters."[379] What is also extremely relevant is not only are his chosen subjects gay or closeted, but he continuously references the "influence of artists and writers who put everything from their lives into their work."[380]

Harold Bloom explains how reading "is a belated and all-but-impossible act, and if strong is always a misreading."[381] In *Love in a Dark Time* (as was also the case in *Mad,*

[375] Wilde, 2018: 79.
[376] Tóibín, 2003c: 2.
[377] Walshe, 2006: 136.
[378] Ibid.
[379] O'Toole, 2008: 193.
[380] Delaney, 2008: 10.
[381] Bloom, 1975: 3.

Bad and Dangerous to Know),[382] Tóibín 'misreads' Wilde's work by placing himself at the centre of it, and sees it as framed against his own life and experience. As a figure, Colm Tóibín occupies multiple roles: he is a reader, critic, commentator and creator. The important thing to clarify is, as a critic and commentator, his job is "always an act of deciding, and what [he] tries to decide is meaning."[383] This meaning is in how Tóibín once again demonstrates how "he stands [in] a tradition of Irish writing where identity has been linked back to history."[384] In the history of sexuality in Ireland, one figure looms particularly large: Oscar Wilde. In fact, Eibhear Walshe states that Tóibín's entry on Wilde in this work is "perhaps the most direct account of the importance of Wilde's sexuality from a contemporary Irish gay literary and cultural perspective."[385]

Love in a Dark Time "reflects the shift in tolerance between then and now."[386] In contrast to that expressed by Stanford, this work by Tóibín is one that deals openly with the topic of Wilde's sexuality, linking "his own recognition of himself as a gay man with his reclaiming of Wilde as a crucial point of reference."[387] Tóibín writes about how he could only understand his own sexuality by dealing with it at a remove and examining that of others: "between 1994 and 2000 I found myself writing constantly on the subject not of the idea or the theory of homosexuality for the paper, but of the work and lives of homosexual."[388] By answering the question of "how can we be so intimate with something so far away,"[389] Tóibín demonstrates how the "strong poet … does not see directly, but mediately through the precursor (frequently a composite figurer)"[390]:

> Writing these pieces helped me to come to terms with things – my own interest in secret, erotic energy (Casement and Mann), my interest in Catholicism (Wilde and Casement converted close to the end; the work of Almodóvar is full of catholic imagery), my interest in Irish protestants (Wilde, Casement, Francis Bacon), my admiration for figures who, unlike myself, weren't afraid (Wilde, Bacon, Almodóvar), my abiding fascination with sadness (Bishop, Baldwin, Doty) and, indeed, tragedy (Gunn and Doty).[391]

[382] Tóibín, 2018; as discussed in the Introduction.
[383] Bloom, 1975: 3.
[384] Foster, 2008: 23.
[385] Walshe, 2010: 60.
[386] Tóibín, 2003c: 4.
[387] Walshe, 2010: 50.
[388] Tóibín, 2003c: 2.
[389] Nicolson, 2014: xvii.
[390] Bloom, 1975: 18.
[391] Tóibín, 2003c: 4.

Here Tóibín shows how "with all literary texts, then, we may say that the reading process is selective, and the potential text is infinitely richer than not of its individual realizations."[392] In a later essay, 'Among the Flutterers', from his 2022 collection *A Guest at the Feast*, Tóibín expressed how "that you were gay was something you managed to know about yourself and not know at the same time."[393] *Love in the Dark Time* shows how Wilde was a key to this knowing.

Tóibín sets Wilde as the beginning point of his study of prominent gay literary figures.[394] In the introductory chapter of the collection, 'Roaming the Greenwood', he begins with a frank discussion about his own homosexuality, describing it as a "matter … which I did not think I could write about."[395] Of course, this proves not to be the case. He writes on the subject with his own genuine perspective. Tóibín draws heavily on the works of Woods and Kosofsky Sedgwick to understand the tradition of gay themes, allusions, and representations in literature.[396] In this exploratory opening chapter, he asks why gay lives are so often presented as "darkly sensational"[397] in literature, admitting that these chosen figures "satisfy in me an urge to have gay lives represented as tragic, an urge which I know I should repress."[398] In Tóibín's newly published Laureate writings, he poses a similar problem, albeit more glibly, asking: "could a gay man ever be dull in a novel … but what would the point of his gayness be then?"[399] So much of the gay experience was forced into a secret and silent sphere, and having to bring these sentiments to light could explain why Tóibín considered his own sexuality as a part of him that remained "uneasy, timid and melancholy."[400]

Through its sentimental and poignant approach, Tóibín's study on the life and sexuality of Oscar Wilde once again underlines his position as a 'public intellectual'. He produces well-researched and comprehensive non-fiction works for a general audience. His personal stakes in the topic always remain at the forefront, proving how he at once straddles the academic and creative sphere. Similar to what is seen in his later 2018 work, *Mad, Bad*

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[392] Iser, 1972: 285.
[393] Tóibín, 2022: 131 (from the essay 'Among the Flutterers': 124-146).
[394] The chapter is titled *Love in Dark Time*, from which the collection as a whole gets its name (Tóibín, 2003c: 35-87). There is an introductory chapter before this called 'Roaming the Greenwood' in which he situates the gay struggle throughout literature (and society as a whole), and contextualises the changing attitudes and prejudices towards homosexuality (Tóibín, 2003c: 5-34).
[395] Tóibín, 2003c: 2.
[396] See Woods, 1998. See Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2008.
[397] Tóibín, 2003c: 8.
[398] Ibid: 28.
[399] Tóibín, 2025: 165.
[400] Tóibín, 2003c: 2.

and Dangerous to Know, Tóibín is again here concerned with the "social and intellectual environment in which Wilde grew up"[401] This classification of Tóibín as a 'public intellectual' is significant in comparison to the 'professional classicist' and the 'non-specialist'. Wilde's elite classical education could have allowed him to be a 'professional classicist', but like Tóibín in his wake, his choice of audience and style meant he became more akin to the 'public intellectual', which Porter contends should be the "new kind of classical academic,"[402] defined as:

> The engaged public intellectual who not only can create new public audiences for the field and academy at large, but who also can enter into debates within the larger public sphere and can contribute in ways that only a perspective on the very origins of western culture and political life can afford.[403]

The study begins *in media res*, in 1895, the year Wilde was put on trial for acts of "gross indecency."[404] The use of this literary technique is effective as it builds suspense and reminds the reader of the fated outcome of Wilde's relationship with Alfred Douglas before it has even begun. Tóibín then reverts his discussion back to Wilde's early years, giving a biographical breakdown of his family life. Tóibín asserts how Wilde's early years resulted in him becoming the true "Platonic version"[405] of himself. In his 1922 work, *The Trembling of the Veil*, Yeats shares this conception of Wilde, reflecting that: "of late years I have often explained Wilde to myself by his family history."[406] Tóibín's work truly reflects this through how it engages with the "intricacies of Wilde's literary works and the socio-historical contexts in which those works were written."[407]

Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas, is, of course, a substantial feature of Tóibín's exploration. The use of original correspondences between the two men and other acquaintances grants a true image of their relationship and its ultimately destructive nature. Wilde describes Bosie as "so Greek and gracious, distorted by passion."[408] In this language, we see Wilde's 'Platonic' conception of him come to the fore,

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[401] Haslam, 2014: 37.
[402] Porter, 2008: 479.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Haslam, 2014: 3.
[405] Ibid: 44.
[406] Yeats, 1922: 27.
[407] Haslam, 2014: 43.
[408] 'Letter from Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas', March 1893, (in Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 559).

and he creates an image of something pederastic in the nature of their relationship.[409] The letters also illustrate how Wilde, "through readings of the Greek classics, [found] both expression for and justification of his own sexual nature."[410] Wilde's focus continuously rests on the boyish, effeminate, good looks of the younger Bosie – whom he worships, in appearance and temperament, as if a mythological figure of desire:

> My own Boy, Your sonnet is quite lovely, and it is a marvel that those red rose-leaf lips of yours should have been made no less for music of song than for madness of kisses. Your slim gilt soul walks between passion and poetry, I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days.[411]

This pederastic element of their relationship is not something Tóibín considers in detail – or in these terms. Although, he does give accounts of the imbalance that was present in their relationship dynamic, similar to that seen in Classical Greece – wherein Wilde cared, catered, and paid for Douglas with no reciprocity.[412]

This account of Wilde and his sexuality marks the shift that can be clearly demarcated by drawing a line between Wilde's sexuality as private vs public. This change is monumental when it considers how Tóibín categorises his chosen subjects:

> This, then, is a book in the main about gay figures for whom being gay seemed to come second in their public lives, either by choice or by necessity. But in their private lives, in their own spirit, the laws of desire changed everything for them and made all the difference.[413]

Tóibín chose to begin his study with Wilde as he considers him to be a major starting point for general acceptance and deploys "the iconic figure of Wilde as a means of affirmation and endurance for a contemporary gay identity."[414] The proof of this acceptance being

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[409] See Dover, 1978; Foucault, 1987; Davidson, 2001.
[410] Mendelsohn, 11th November 2010.
[411] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas', January 1893 (Tóibín, 2003c: 59). 'Your' is capitalised in the original.
[412] The account given in this case is from *De Profundis* where Wilde explains how he cared for Bosie when he was sick. When Wilde too became sick, Bosie left him: "the night we arrive you fall ill … I need not remind you how I waited on you, and tended you … I never left the hotel. I got special grapes from London for you, as you did not care for those the hotel supplied, invented things to please you, remained either with you or in the room next to yours, sat with you every evening to quiet and amuse you. … After four or five days you recover … The next two days you leave me entirely alone without care, without attendance, without anything" (Wilde, 2013: 62).
[413] Tóibín, 2003c: 3.
[414] Walshe, 2010: 56.

given as the placement of a stained glass window dedicated to Wilde in Westminster Abbey, proving the change in attitudes towards his reputation by a society who once persecuted it.[415]

Eibhear Walshe traces the "pervasive influence of Wilde on Irish authors, showing how he was perceived as a patriotic dissident against England by Joyce, for example, and as a champion and liberator for gay writers."[416] It was not just solely Irish authors that Wilde has impacted with his dual-self (the Irish Wilde versus the London Wilde). He also influenced Henry James, but in the opposite way to Tóibín – drawing him further back into the 'closet' instead of providing him with the means to get out. This reminds us how influence need not always be positive, constructive, nor constituting acceptance, as we have clearly seen with Mahaffy and Wilde. Henry James was previously discussed in the Introduction of this thesis but Tóibín's fictionalised account of his life in *The Master* is relevant here too if only to prove that influence "means that there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts,"[417] and that "negation of the precursor is never possible."[418]

Wilde haunts the works and perceptions of James and Tóibín alike, showing how "to evade the precursor's imagined glance, the ephebe seeks to confine it in scope which perversely enlarges the glance, so that it rarely can be evaded."[419] Walshe claims that the "turning point"[420] in James' life came when Wilde was tried and sentenced. James and Tóibín thus prove the inverse effects of how "a poem is a response to a poem, as a poet is a response to a poet, or a person to his parent,"[421] and "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."[422] In the same ways that the classical past and classical traditions have been infected by modern and contemporary attitudes (for example, the negating of sexual contexts by Mahaffy's Victorian generation), *The Master* is an example of "cross-century and cross-genre infection of James by Tóibín."[423]

Like Wilde, Tóibín does not know where to place himself in the canon, "unlike many of his contemporaries, he writes in a variety of forms and genres, and refuses ready-

[415] Tóibín, 2003c: 86.
[416] Torrance and O'Rourke, 2020: 12.
[417] Bloom, 1975: 3. Italics original.
[418] Bloom, 1997: 102.
[419] Ibid: 105.
[420] Walshe, 2008: 128.
[421] Bloom, 1975: 18.
[422] Kristeva, 1980: 66.
[423] Dimock, 2013: 740.

made attempts at definition or critical categorisation."[424] Both figures are good examples of canonical self-fashioning resulting from working outside the bounds of traditions and, by extension, creating new ones while still speaking to an uncertainty that comes from existing in the margins of society. In other words, when society will not let you express yourself, you must find another way to do so. In our case, that way is the way of Plato. Our conception of classicism then is "fundamentally bound up with the dynamics of reading and performing the voice of a past author."[425] This cultural revision, as Colm Tóibín argues, is fundamental because it constructs "a 'sense of history' which traces the 'the faint line that connects [homosexuals] with those of earlier generations', in an Ireland where, until recently, gay desire was pathologised and lesbianism was rendered invisible."[426] Historical fiction then is a tool to approach homosexuality – Tóibín did it with Henry James, and Wilde did it with Shakespeare. We can propose then that this meta-approach further ratifies the effect that silence and the repressive Irish context had. Since, within the plots, not only is the mode of historical fiction present, there is even further distancing for that character through another historical character (Tóibín-James-Wilde; Wilde-Protagonist-Shakespeare).

Conclusion

In the previous Chapter, we saw how classicism can be "the breeding ground of dissension and not of agreement,"[427] and this is shown nowhere more clearly than in the domain of (homo)sexuality in Hibernian Philhellenism. Here it was pedagogy that led to this dissension, as "to be influenced is to be taught."[428] Harold Bloom poses the question:

> What happens if one tried to write, or to teach, or to think, or even to read without the sense of a tradition?
>
> Why, nothing at all happens, just nothing. You cannot write or teach or think or even read without imitation, and what you imitate is what another person has done, that person's writing or teaching or thinking or reading.[429]

[424] Delaney, 2008: 2.
[425] Porter, 2006: 302.
[426] Tóibín, 2003b: 11; Carregal, 2021: 160.
[427] Porter, 2006: 305.
[428] Bloom, 2011: 10.
[429] Bloom, 1975: 32.

This is directly delineated by our central figures who prove that "our historical being is part of our present,"[430] and how in Hibernian Philhellenism, "the rope is the way of education."[431]

The next section will further explore how "the most influential of the dialogues upon the development of homosexual culture and subcultures is the *Symposium*."[432] It will illustrate how in the work of Wilde and Tóibín, "it is art, and art only, that reveals us to ourselves,"[433] but also how "Irish writing and gay writing have the myth of a tragic destiny in common."[434] This relates to the discussion in Chapter 2 of mythic paradigms for civic and postcolonial violence, reinforcing that strand in the 'rope'. Something that both Mahaffy and Wilde's veiled allusions to (what we now call) homosexuality have in common, is the notable absence of language dealing with physicality. In both cases, the topic is dealt with at a remove or abstractly – albeit with opposite attitudes. As the next section will clarify, the absent body categorises much of the works that deal with homosexuality in Ireland, specifically those which rely on classical allusions or approaches, as shown through Platonic readings of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Blackwater Lightship.*

[430] Coetzee, 2001: 13.
[431] Ingold, 2024: 110.
[432] Woods, 1998: 21.
[433] Wilde, 2018: 79.
[434] Tóibín, 2001: xxvii.

3.4. The Absent Body: Plato's *Symposium* and Elevated Male Friendship

This section will focus on "how Classical Greek models have informed the politics and the literary representations of homosexuality in Ireland from Wilde to the present."[435] In this period, we will see how homosexuality was treated at a distance through Platonic allusion and representative terms, and how it is only in the current century that we truly see direct acknowledgement. Declan Kiberd describes two ways of 'reading a classic'. The first is the "familiar-enough scholarly treatment, imagining how it was intended for its original readers by exploring how it captures the ideas, feelings, and language of the time and place from which it came."[436] We can consider Mahaffy adhering more closely to this approach. It will become evident that Wilde and Tóibín, through their Platonic writings about homosexuality, are much more in keeping with Kiberd's second way. They demonstrate how to make "the ancient work contemporary, [and show] us how in reading it with reckless interpretative freedom, we allow it to read us."[437] In the case of homosexuality in Ireland, this 'second way of reading a classic' has resulted in "the effect not only of language upon bodies, but of bodies upon language."[438] This discussion will explore the phenomenon of the absent male body in Irish writing. This is set against the desexualising context established in the previous sections of this Chapter which, for our purpose, began with Mahaffy's treatment of ancient Greek pederasty.

Within the established context, Wilde's reception as a tragic figure is another important dynamic. Sexuality in Ireland was taboo in the nineteenth century up until homosexuality was decriminalised in 1993. Marriage Equality would not follow until 2015. Sexuality was characterised by silence, absence, and a general undercurrent of negativity. As a result, queer fiction was mainly characterised by tragedy. Wilde's function as a 'tragic figure' can be understood on multiple levels. As mentioned in the Introduction of this Chapter, Wilde's legacy was reappropriated for the cause of nationalism during the Gaelic Revival.[439] At this time, figures like Yeats and Joyce "recognise in Wilde the first Irish writer in whom the tragic plight of the modern artist is fully represented."[440] It is not just

[435] Walshe, 2020: 238.
[436] Kiberd, 2020: 27.
[437] Ibid. Here, the 'classic' for Wilde is the *Symposium*; for Tóibín, it is Wilde's writings informed by the *Symposium*.
[438] Heath, 2010: 3.
[439] Walshe describes how "in the first decades of the twentieth century, then, Wilde was "nationalised," and claimed as a figure of transgressive aesthetic empowerment by Yeats, Joyce, Shaw and other Anglo-Irish writers central to debates about Irish cultural nationalism in this period" (Walshe, 2010: 50).
[440] Deane, 1986: 135.

the 'artist' that Wilde represents. Tóibín, in hindsight, further adds to this model to identify how he "played out the role of the tragic queer."[441] Tóibín appears to be at once inside and outside of this trend. He asks: "why are gay lives presented as tragic in so much writing?"[442] We will see this primarily in action in a discussion of his 1999 novel, *The Blackwater Lightship*. Tóibín defends his conscious contribution to this tendency to portray homosexual stories as tragic by explaining that "tragedy … speaks to some of our deepest concerns and experiences."[443]

In *Love in a Dark Time*, it was clear how Wilde's personal tragedy and biography fundamentally influenced Tóibín's conceptions of historical homosexuality. For him, Wilde's "author function exceeds [his] own work."[444] Wilde's continued recognition as "the tragic hero"[445] provides a starting point for the discourse of these concerns and experiences – which are, furthermore, often framed against the classical. This section will focus more on Wilde's actual works, and how they contributed to a subversive canon through their portrayal of Wilde's own homosexuality, but also classical models.[446] These particular works were heavily informed by Plato, but more specifically Plato's *Symposium*. Since Tóibín admits to having found expression for his own sexuality through Wilde's works, we can say that Plato makes up a strand of the canonical influence he has received from Wilde. The impact of Wilde's Platonic writings on figures like Tóibín prove, in Tóibín's own words (and in very Wildean sentiment), that "the reader is the one who makes the difference."[447]

Ralph O'Connor has explored how "classical influence … may have reached well beyond the imitation and adaptation of individual classical texts to become part of the intellectual fabric of an entire literate community."[448] This statement speaks to the

[441] Tóibín, 2003c: 86; "Wilde is the model of the twentieth century's tragic queer" (Woods, 1998: 218).
[442] Tóibín, 2003c: 8.
[443] Wilson, 2004: 23. This applies also to his use of Greek tragedy with regards to the Troubles, as seen in Chapter 2.
[444] Foucault, 1998: 217. This is not solely the case for Tóibín, but has been well-established by a wide range of literary and cultural figures. Two of these figures from this period of study are Michael Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards, one of the first openly gay couples in Dublin literary circles at a time when homosexuality was still criminalised. Having founded the Gate Theatre in Dublin, Mac Liammóir and Edwards staged the first Irish production of Wilde's *Salomé* (Walshe, 1996: 164). Through them, we can see how Wilde represented a way to verbalise marginal sexualities. Walshe comments on how like for Tóibín, Wilde "empowered Mac Liammóir in his gayness, gave him a mask, a persona to accommodate his dissident differing sexuality" (Ibid: 164).
[445] Walshe, 2010: 50.
[446] It is important to re-emphasise that 'homosexuality' is not a label that Oscar Wilde would have used himself.
[447] Tóibín, 2003: 17. See the Preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to see similar sentiments expressed by Wilde following controversy of the novel's first appearance in Lippincott's Magazine (Wilde, 2017: 7-8).
[448] O'Connor, 2014: 22.

framework of influence and classical reception in Hibernian Philhellenism that underpins this thesis. Here, this is demonstrated by Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*, which does not show any outwardly classical material. Instead, it is a product of the formation of canons and traditions. In Hibernian Philhellenism, it is a product of the meshwork of (homo)sexuality. That is to say that in contemporary Hibernian Philhellenism and the influences that inform it, "our focus should be on forces and materials rather than form and content."[449] Tóibín's novel acts as an example of this by showing homosexuality characterised by idealised and elevated male friendship ('Platonic' in the true sense of the word), as well as the desexualisation and absence of the male body.[450] These features have reached Tóibín through entwining strands of influence and context that make up the tradition that he now contributes to. It is because of this that we can understand why "in all his gay fictions, the gay body as a literary trope is always shifting or eroded, absent or displaced."[451]

Through his works, Oscar Wilde tried to promote a "neo-platonic ideal of spiritual love."[452] Wilde's complicated reception can lead us to wonder "if the politics of canon formation has been understood as a politics of representation."[453] In our period of study, the representation of marginal sexualities was either completely absent or categorised by silence and allusion. The only way to speak of homosexuality was through veiled reference, or by desexualising and elevating it. Even a basic understanding "of 'sexuality' as a historically singular experience"[454] was repressed in conservative twentieth century Ireland. Our meshwork of (homo)sexuality in Hibernian Philhellenism then must refer to "the principle of isomorphism between sexual relations and social relations."[455] This discussion will focus on how this is evident in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, alongside necessary reference to *De Profundis*.

Through looking at the reception of these works across the canon, we also reestablish the dynamic of canonical influence that "usually constructs the reader as something to be acted upon, rather than acting, in the process of reading."[456] In an interview

[449] Ingold, 2015: 18.
[450] See Price, 2004; Pangle, 2003.
[451] Walshe, 2013: 89.
[452] Smith and Helfand, 1989: 101. 'Neo-platonic' here seems to refer more to new ('modern') Platonic and not historically 'neo-platonic'.
[453] Guillory, 1993: 5.
[454] Foucault, 2020c: 4. Foucault did not espouse Platonic metaphysics. The isomorphism incorporates as much the physicality of sexuality as it does social regimes.
[455] Ibid: 215.
[456] Moore-Gilbert, 1994: 274.

with Joseph Wisenfarth, Colm Tóibín speaks of how "you have to believe that writing is an act of conscious will: the choice of words and the choice of the next sentence seem like an act of conscious will."[457] Yet, he cannot deny that 'cultural paternal influence' is at work in his creative practice: "but in between, somewhere, there is someone pulling strings and someone withstanding that."[458] Tóibín's self-admission proves how "consciousness forms the point at which author and reader converge."[459] This reminds us of the dynamic that creates traditions: we are at once responding to a preconceived idea of tradition and self-conceiving our own position in relation to it. We tend to think of canonical figures as only being that. Each of my three central figures are both 'reader' and 'author'.

Emily Greenwood asserts that while the Greek and Roman "offer a way round the 'great tradition' of English literature, their very status as 'classics' would seem to estrange them from the focus on the subaltern that recurs in anti- and post- colonial literature."[460] I do not strictly agree. As we have seen in this Chapter so far, the Greek (and Roman) has actually facilitated the continuation or creation of 'subaltern' or marginalised groups of voices that can speak across the centuries in the form of gay literary traditions. In the previous section, we discussed Wilde's speech from the dock as evidence of how he "sought justification for a criminalised sexuality by appealing to a higher cultural genealogy, thus denying the physical and elevating his homosexuality into a safer aestheticised discourse."[461] In this Chapter, it is this trend of 'denying the physical' through Platonic conceptions of homoeroticism that will be seen in Hibernian Philhellenism. The discussion of the works of Wilde and Tóibín will show how the male body was, and, in many ways, still is absent in an Irish context.

Plato's *Symposium*

If we consider that the "Platonic dialogues gave hope and solace to gay writers like Oscar Wilde,"[462] then it is of no surprise that Plato's *Symposium* is the starting point for most discussions on the history of gay literature. In keeping with the previous discussion, Wilde exposes the tragic condition for many gay writers who "wrote a transgressive literature

[457] Wisenfarth, 2009: 3.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Iser, 1972: 298.
[460] Greenwood, 2019: 577.
[461] Walshe, 2020: 237.
[462] Poser, 2nd February 2021.

which thrived on the conditions of oppression and yet courted the approval of the oppressor."[463] These 'cultural fathers', like Oscar Wilde, demonstrate how gay literature through the ages can be seen as "an experiment in unspeakable articulations."[464] The purpose of this section is not to provide a commentary on the *Symposium* but rather to briefly explore its relevance in this discourse more generally and explain the particular speeches from the dialogue that have relevance to Wilde and Tóibín's respective thoughts and works.

Scholars can generally agree that "it is in Plato more consistently and more convincingly than anywhere else in Greek thought that pederasty is exalted from the status of a sexual outlet to a philosophical system claiming access to divinity."[465] This remark on Plato parallels the sentiments of the famous lines from Wilde's frequently mentioned speech: 'the love that dare not speak its name' … is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man … such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy … it is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection.[466] Wilde truly is the perfect case-study to directly demonstrate how "in subsequent centuries this dialogue has been used to support two completely opposing views of the moral viability of homosexual relationships."[467] In Woods' discussion, he explains how this speech can be received in such opposite ways:

a) "On the one hand, Plato is said only to approve of friendships between males – 'Platonic love' as it apocryphally came to be called – and to deplore physical expressions of same-sex desire."[468]
b) "On the other hand, the *Symposium* has been extensively exploited by apologists for male homosexuality, who cite the many signs of its approval of male-male love, regardless of physicality, and its implication that this sort of love is inevitably superior to that which may develop between a man and a woman."[469]

[463] Woods, 1998: 175.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Ibid: 19. I would also draw attention back to the previous brief discussion of Theognis of Megara and his homoerotic Book II of the Elegies [Theognis, 'The Second Book': 1249-1251 (trans. Bing and Cohen, 1993: 95)]. It is an important exaltation of pederasty, however, in our case, Plato is more relevant to my central figures – especially since in the 'Love that Dare not Speak its Name' speech, Wilde names Plato, not Theognis. Wilde does mention Theognis in 'The Poetry of the People' in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but only very briefly (Wilde, 13th May 1886).
[466] Davidson, 2001: 3.
[467] Woods, 1998: 21.
[468] Ibid.
[469] Ibid.

The *Symposium* is comprised of seven speeches that take place the evening of the poet Agathon's first success in the *Dionysia*.[470] There are six speeches given to *eros*, the speakers included are in this order: Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates. A seventh drunken speech is then given, not to *eros*, but to Socrates, by Alcibiades.[471] The dialogue of the *Symposium* establishes *eros* as a philosophical and educational activity.

In the first speech, Phaedrus (178a-180b) gives a basic description of what *eros* is and evokes Eros as the oldest god.[472] Pausanias (180c-185c) follows Phaedrus.[473] He asserts that Phaedrus was being too simplistic, for there are two different types of *eros* and gods – specifically two different Aphrodites (one causes men to love women; the other, adolescent boys). Next, from the doctor Eryximachus (185d-189b), we are given a medical input.[474] He describes how *eros* is the harmonising force between opposites, and how it acts horizontally as well as vertically (meaning it can exist between gods and humans). Aristophanes (189c-193e) gives a comic poets' attempt, which is at once satirical, philosophical, scientific and medical.[475] He aims to define the nature of *eros* as being founded on a sense of need/lacking which can be explained by the fact that there were originally three kinds of humans (male, female, and androgynous: all spherical unities that were cut in half, each wanting to reunite with the other half). Through this aetiological myth, Aristophanes can account for the origins of every type of sexual desire. For this

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[470] See Dorter, 1969.

[471] In a letter to his mother from Cairo (10th December 1893), Bosie praises Wilde's love for him as "the love of the disciple and the philosopher … as beautiful as the love of Shakespeare and the unknown Mr W.H,, or that of Plato and Socrates, and far more beautiful than the love of Alcibiades for Socrates" (Croft-Cooke, 1963: 92). This lengthy letter is reproduced in full in Croft-Cooke (89-92). Parts of it are also referred to in Endres (2018: 257). However, Endres notes Hart-Davis (1962: 92) as the reference for this letter, but on examination of that volume, this does not appear to be correct. It seems likely that Endres confused Hart-Davis for Croft-Crooke, especially since the year number is so close and the page number is the same. The letter is also referenced in Wood (2000: 56), who, unlike Endres, cites the month in which it was sent. Still, no proper reference is provided. This letter speaks to a range of issues in this Chapter and cements the homoerotic intention behind *The Portrait of Mr W.H*., but also that of the parallels to the *Symposium* and the works of Plato found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In response to his mother's next letter (again, sent from Cairo, dated January 6th 1894; Croft-Cooke: 1963: 92-95), Bosie denies Lady Douglas' claims that Oscar Wilde has acted as the Lord Henry to his Dorian, or that Wilde has been the 'murderer' and 'ruin' of his soul. The next section will elucidate the reasons behind this accusation. Bosie's use of 'philosopher' also relates directly to Plato who, in Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* says that "Love is also a philosopher … you thought that Love was the beloved, not the lover (204b-c)" [Plato, 2001: 250 (trans. Benjamin Jowett)]. Thus, here Bosie appears to speak directly to the *erastes/eromenos* relationship. The comparison between Wilde and Socrates can also be made in terms of their respective trials and charges of corruption (see O'Leary, 2019).

[472] Plato, 2001: 212-215.

[473] Ibid: 216-223.

[474] Ibid: 223-228.

[475] Ibid: 228-234.

reason, Aristophane's speech in its "division of the human race according to sexual-object preference, has regularly been used to support essentialist readings of Greek sexuality."[476] Agathon (194e-197e) is next and disagrees by saying that love is not about lack but plenty.[477] Agathon's speech really acts as a prompt for Socrates' to interrogate all his ideas and prove him to be stuck in aporia.

Until this point in the *Symposium*, *eros* is portrayed as being beyond mortal constructs of 'the good' and 'the bad'. But Socrates in his speech (201d-212c), asserts that *eros* cannot be both beautiful and good.[478] This stuns the group as the gods, by nature, are supposed to be both beautiful and good. Socrates engages a dramatic technique by performing a conversation he had with a woman named Diotima. Socrates, through 'Diotima's Ladder' (the *epanabasmos*: 211c), portrays *eros* as an aspiration towards the good and the beautiful.[479] He explains how humans desire immortality, and the only way it can be achieved is through reproduction. This stimulates the desire for sex through the desire for immortality. But one can become pregnant in mind and body. Socrates' speech emphasises that being pregnant in mind is more admirable as ugly things cannot be birthed from beautiful things. Therefore, a beautiful boy will lead you closer to climbing 'Diotima's ladder' which enables you to access the truth of the Forms and philosophical breakthrough.

Alcibiades (214e-222c) arrives drunk and brings the conversation back to the individual through his speech dedicated to Socrates.[480] Alcibiades' main effect on the evening is to show how succinct Socrates' argument was through his chaos. We can also consider Socrates' speech from a meta-perspective as a way for Plato to defend Socrates against charges of corruption by explaining the philosophical reason why he spends his time with so many beautiful boys. It also gives us an example of "the various strategies by which Plato and his contemporaries spoke about women by speaking for women."[481]

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Volume 2 of his study, Foucault's exploration of how sexual activity can transcend the practicalities of society and enter a plain of pleasure and freedom is very closely in keeping with the ideas first introduced in the *Symposium*'s philosophical discussion of *eros*.[482] In the *Symposium*, *eros* is transformative, uniting, and harmonising

[476] Carnes, 1998: 104.
[477] Plato, 2001: 236-240.
[478] Ibid: 246-261.
[479] Ibid: 259-260.
[480] Ibid: 264-275.
[481] Halperin, Winkler and Zeitlin, 1990: 17.
[482] Foucault, 2020c; Plato, 2001; see also Miller, 1998; Harper, 2013. I would like to note that Foucault's work has faced much criticism for its acceptance of the "interpretation of Greek culture that made the history of the self the history of the male self, with women always subordinated" (Karras, 2000: 1253). For example,

and Foucault argues the same in his *History of Sexuality*.[483] Foucault's study is particularly applicable to Aristophanes' encomium (189c-193e).[484] Aristophanes' myth about the three original genders embraces all sexual desire and makes no distinction between one more socially acceptable 'need'. Aristophanes' all-inclusive speech maintains Foucault's justification for the importance of the equal study of homosexuality.

Similarly, Foucauldian sex is not something solely contained within matrimonial relations. Since Socrates believes that *eros* is an emotion that is both deficient and productive, it is an aspiration towards 'the good' and the 'beautiful'.[485] This version of *eros* is especially in keeping with Foucauldian conceptions of homosexuality, which encourages pleasure for pleasure's sake. The focus on physical reproduction means that heterosexual relationships determine the "division between licit and illicit,"[486] even though homosexual ones have the opportunity to be productive in a spiritual sense (208e-209a).[487] Socrates affirms that we are driven towards sex due to our desire for our own form of immortality, so since one can be pregnant not only in body, but in mind, all forms of desire are thus equally worthy.[488] Yet, Plato writes that "those who are pregnant in their souls – conceive the kinds of things that it is proper for the soul to conceive and give birth to … wisdom and virtue in general (209a),"[489] so that the "implication is that physical creativity is clearly inferior to the spiritual; and, therefore, that male-male love is superior to male-female love."[490] Even though Foucault and Plato are arguing for the value of non-biologically reproductive relationships, the fact that they must still be seen as reproductive *in some way* shows the preoccupation of all societies. By referring to male relationships as being 'spiritually' reproductive, we are again seeing the same language that, at once, desexualises homosexuality and removes the body from its surrounding discourse. In the next two sections we will examine this in practice in the works of Wilde and Tóibín, alongside the focus on creative reproduction and spiritual fulfilment.

"by focusing only on Classical Athenian culture, rather than the lyric culture of Sappho, he wrote women out of the history of sexuality" (Ibid). In this way, he is in keeping with the cultural *paternal* influence found in Western traditions.

[483] Halperin, 1998: 94-8, 104, 110. Again, I underline that there are fundamental differences between Plato and Foucault with regard to metaphysics.

[484] Plato, 2001: 228-234; see also Hooper, 2013: 567, 576, 578-9.

[485] Levy, 1979: 285.

[486] Foucault, 2020b: 37.

[487] Plato, 2001: 256-257.

[488] Pender, 1992: 75-6, 78, 80.

[489] Plato, 2001: 256 (trans. Benjamin Jowett).

[490] Woods, 1998: 23.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The Picture of Dorian Gray, and its subsequent comparisons to *De Profundis*, most clearly underline how "Wilde's classical education provided him with patterns for the entire continuum of his sexual and emotional life."[491] Wilde's reliance on Platonic models confirms two things about the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism and how influence acts within it. Firstly, in Wilde's own words, it states that "literature always anticipates life."[492] Life in this case involves the "ancient affection"[493] that he both experienced and wrote about. The second condition is equally important when it comes to how literature-influencing-life-influencing-literature acts: "it does not copy it, but it moulds it to its purpose."[494] This ability to mould, something we could consider as one of the active processes in Hibernian Philhellenism, is a direct result of canonical pedagogy. Similarly, acting on this ability constitutes a type of 'follow-through', and it is through this combination of receiving and creating that "mastery, born of past practice, kicks in."[495] Again, we see how a person can at once witness a tradition and actively construct their own place within it.

Without an understanding of Platonic thought, or the context of Hibernian Philhellenism, it is not immediately clear why "parts of *Dorian Gray* were, or were used as, a handbook of gay style and behaviour."[496] The notion that 'it is the reader that makes meaning' is once again brought to the fore. Wilde explicitly advocates in favour of this in the Preface to *Dorian Gray* following its initial serialisation in *Lippincott's Magazine*. In it, Wilde purports that "it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors,"[497] probably as an attempt to further distance himself from the implication of the novel's allusions, and to put the onus back on the reader who is claiming indecency or immorality. This argument is supported by other claims that maintain how "all art is quite useless,"[498] making it impossible for one to be held accountable. The Preface is, in many ways, quite contradictory. It is as if Wilde is still trying to hint at what the novel's true meaning is. While he is sure to stress that it is the reader that infers meaning, he clarifies that "those

[491] Ross, 2014: 162.
[492] Wilde, 2020: 24.
[493] Wilde, 2013: 45.
[494] Wilde, 2020: 24.
[495] Ingold, 2015: 140.
[496] Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985: 95.
[497] Wilde, 2017: 8.
[498] Ibid.

who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming,"[499] but "those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated."[500] His very language, that of the 'beautiful' and 'ugly', is remarkably Platonic. The Preface remains resolute to Wilde's personal philosophy as he alludes that only the enlightened will recognise 'the love that dares not speak its name' in the ways he will come to describe it, namely: elevated, lofty, noble, spiritual and not physical.

The strength of the intention behind the Preface is also weakened by the contradictory statements made in the revised edition of *Dorian Gray.* In the body of the novel, Wilde asserts that "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter."[501] However, as seen in the Preface, he states quite emphatically that "it is the spectator … that art really mirrors."[502] This is a prime example of Wilde exhibiting his need to simultaneously hide and exhibit himself. He was trapped in a struggle between his true identity and the confinements of society's illegality – between how art is "at once surface and symbol."[503] He is also caught between wanting to express his true identity and the valid fear of it being uncovered. This dichotomy between the Preface and the novel also perfectly reflects Foucault's ideas of "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure,"[504] that result from the formation of a symbiotic relationship. For the oppressive class, pleasure "comes out of exercising a power that questions, monitors, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light."[505] In our context, we can also add 'censors' and 'silences' to this list. Then, for the "peripheral sexualities,"[506] it is "the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or traverse it."[507] This section elucidates how classical allusions and references directly contribute to this latter type of 'pleasure'.

In *The Portrait of Mr W.H.,* as in many other places in his writing, Wilde expresses the idea that "art, even the art of fullest scope and widest vision, can never really show us the external world [,] all that is shown is our own soul, the one world of which we have any real cognizance."[508] In his 1909 essay, *Oscar Wilde: The Poet Of Salome*, written after Wilde's death, James Joyce writes in defence of Wilde and *Dorian Gray* in a similar way:

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[499] Ibid: 7.
[500] Ibid.
[501] Ibid: 14.
[502] Ibid: 8.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Foucault, 2020b: 45.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Ibid: 40.
[507] Ibid: 45.
[508] Wilde, 2018: 79.

"each man writes his own sin into *Dorian Gray* […] what Dorian Gray's sin was no one says and no one knows [,] anyone who recognises it has committed it."[509] Eibhear Walshe recognises how Joyce at this early point was making the "enlightened observation that homophobia is generated as a counter-discourse against which heterosexuality can define itself and thus became assured of its own naturalness and centrality."[510] We can attest "that Wilde's version of homosexual literature depends entirely on the presence of the heterosexual reader or spectator."[511] This idea is reminiscent of another of Wilde's statements in the Preface, that "those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril."[512] It is even clear from the original 'Plea of Justification' filed by the Marquess of Queensbury and signed by Charles Gill on the 30th March 1895, that it is the effect on the reader (or, rather, how the reader will understand *Dorian Gray*) that is the problem, and not the Platonic allusions to homosexuality in the prose itself. In the Plea, *Dorian Gray* is described as: "a certain immoral and obscene work in the form of a narrative […] *understood by the readers* thereof to describe the relations[,] intimacies and passions of certain persons of sodomitical and unnatural habits [,] tastes and practices."[513]

Nevertheless, this vague 'understanding' by the nameless readers did come from somewhere. Wilde creates a paradox when it comes to the sexual aspects of *Dorian Gray*, both in the text and in its defence. He names Plato, "but his terminology is blurry."[514] Wilde seemed almost internally at odds as to the true nature of *Dorian Gray*. His "use of Greek sources was both conscious and unconscious"[515] meaning that the novel was "a richly suggestive text when read through the prism of the Platonic theory of Forms."[516] That is not to even count the explicit allusions to Plato in the novel. A good example of the Forms in action, that refers back to earlier discussions on how Wilde needed a form of *mimesis* in order to comfortably take a step out of the closet, is in Dorian's brief infatuation with young actress Sibyl Vane in the novel. Akin to Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave' (7.514a-518e), Dorian's strongest expressions of desire occur when Sibyl is dressed as a boy as Rosalind.[517] Perhaps this could in some way also hint to the relationship previously explored, yet overlooked at trial, between Shakespeare and Willie Hughes. The use of

[509] Joyce, 2000b: 151.
[510] Walshe, 2020: 241.
[511] Woods, 1998: 175.
[512] Wilde, 2017: 8.
[513] 'Plea of Justification, Entered by Charles Gill on March 30, 1895', (Holland, 2004: 290-91). Italics mine.
[514] Endres, 2018: 265.
[515] Ross, 2014: 8.
[516] Ibid.
[517] Plato, 2003: 220-225; see also Manny, 2018: 278.

paintings or pictures, images, or representations, as a way to move outside of the closet results in Wilde not just painting a picture of Dorian Gray but, as we will see, a picture of his own Tripartite Soul.

There is much in the novel of *Dorian Gray* that foreshadows the "return to the Hellenic ideal"[518] that Wilde and Bosie enacted in reality. This 'Hellenic ideal' that he is referring to can be roughly summarised and categorised as that which was discussed in Plato's *Symposium*.[519] *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is often read as a footnote to Plato, and there is much in the novel that can thematically attest to that. Not only does Wilde reflect Platonic ideas, he also directly engages with the ideas found in the texts. Before considering how the characters in the plot enact thoughts and models from the *Symposium*, we can establish how the triangulation of the three main characters (Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward, and Lord Henry Wotton) can be understood as representing the historical Wilde respectively at different stages of his life. They appear in the novel as "twisted representatives of Plato's tripartite soul:"[520] Lord Henry as reason, Basil as desire, and Dorian as appetite (*Republic*: 1-4.349b-444a).[521] Thus, the novel begins as Platonic through the *dramatis personae*.

The tripartite soul is first introduced in Plato's *Republic* in a dialogue in which Socrates describes how the soul is divided into the three different parts named above, and how these parts are found in different levels of balance in every person (4.436a-437c, 4.439a-444e, 9.581c, 9.586d-587a, 9.588a-591b).[522] In this novel, as with the structure of the tripartite soul, the three parts come together to form one person: the author, Oscar Wilde. In his character's own words, *Dorian Gray* contains "too much of"[523] Wilde, and

[518] Wilde, 2017: 30.
[519] Plato, 2001.
[520] Hill, 2018: 234.
[521] Plato, 2003: 28-141; see also Hill, 2018: 234.
[522] Plato, 2003: 131-133, 135-142, 298, 305-306, 307-311; see also Stocks, 1915: 216-221. Plato's tripartite soul is divided into three separate parts that are said to be found in different levels in each person. The *logistikon* is reason and "loves wisdom and learning" (Lesses, 1987: 148). The *thumoeides* is spirit which "loves victory and honour" (Ibid). The *epithumetikon* is appetite which loves "money and profit" (Ibid). Thus, each part represents a desire for something, and it is a matter of which desire is to be found in more abundant levels that decides the character of a person.
[523] Wilde, 2017: 21. In another part of the novel, he reemphasises this sentiment: "I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much, that I had put too much of myself into it" (Ibid: 146). Out of context, this statement by speaker Basil Hallward to Dorian Gray in Wilde's novel could read as a testimonial from Wilde himself to Lord Alfred Douglas in *De Profundis*. In the novel, Basil believes that the exhibition of his portrait will expose "the secret of [his] own soul" (Ibid: 14) and his infatuation with Dorian to wider society. Unfortunately, this realisation came too late for Wilde when it became clear through public trial that he had 'put too much' of his own personality, desires and philosophy into *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

he sees versions of himself in each of the main characters.[524] This occurs not just in a philosophical way, but plays out historically through Wilde's biography. Hence, the supernatural element of the book is not the fact that the portrait changes and distorts, but rather the prophetic effect it had on Wilde's life: "of course all this is foreshadowed and prefigured in my art."[525]

Despite this, Wilde "in print and in person, refuted a reductive, biographical reading of *Dorian Gray*, which was presented in court as proof of its author's 'sodomotical' p(r)ose."[526] His solution to countering these claims was to adopt a shadowy position on the matter both in public and in his writing. Iain Ross sees this as an "uncharacteristic dualism: there was sodomy, with which he had nothing to do; and there was an entirely intellectual love between men, with which the law had nothing to do."[527] I do wonder though how 'uncharacteristic' this actually was for Wilde. In every domain and instance explored in this thesis so far, we have consistently gained an understanding of Wilde's influences (and influence) as being part of a "carefully constructed identity."[528]

The Picture of Dorian Gray demonstrates how "the most striking characteristics of [Wilde's] classicism are its timing, its theatricality and marketability, and its part in the evolution of [his] own myth."[529] This discussion of *Dorian Gray* displays the non-professional classicism and evidence of the 'study of interest' that would later influence Tóibín in the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism. It was first published by Wilde in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890.[530] Its publication instantly resulted in a barrage of public outcry. An unsigned review of it printed in the *St. James' Gazette* four days after the story's publication in the magazine called it a "stupid and vulgar piece of work."[531] This particular review prompted a heated exchange between Wilde and the Editor of the *Gazette*. Wilde's response was published the following day. In it, he strongly asserts that "the sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate."[532] He states that the reviewer's

[524] "I am so glad you like that strange coloured book of mine: it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps" ['Letter from Oscar Wilde to Ralph Payne', 12th February 1894 (in Holland and Hart-Davis: 585)].
[525] Wilde, 2013: 113.
[526] Manny, 2018: 270.
[527] Ross, 2014: 162.
[528] Riley, 2018: 2.
[529] Ibid: 9.
[530] Ross, 2014: 161.
[531] 'A Study in Puppydom', 24th June 1890 (in Gillespie, 2020: 358).
[532] 'Oscar Wilde to the Editor of the St. James's Gazette', 25th June 1890 (in Gillespie, 2020: 361).

incapability of appreciating the art for art's sake was not his responsibility, for "I wrote this book entirely for my own pleasure, and it gave me very great pleasure to write it."[533]

Between the various contradictions Wilde makes in the Preface and novel, it is indisputable that *Dorian Gray* was "far from working as art for its own sake, [it] was an experiment in unspeakable articulation."[534] The Editor's response which was published alongside Wilde's on that same day (25th June 1890) speaks to this. The Editor states that "that the story is corrupt cannot be denied."[535] Somewhat surprisingly, he swiftly follows this by assuring that "it is not dangerous, because, as we said, it is tedious and stupid."[536] It is significant that the book is instantly labelled corrupt, but even more so that it was the actual artistic merit of the work being attacked. We must consider that perhaps this was a way for commentators to hide their own Victorian discomfort with its subject matter and themes. Even in criticism the matter of sexuality could not be voiced.

The contemporary context was clearly internalised. In his own personal correspondences, Wilde relied on classical allusion as a way to jointly hide and elevate the nature of his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas. The comparison between the events of *Dorian Gray* and his relationship with Bosie are striking, as already alluded to.[537] In the letter to Ralph Payne, Wilde stated that "Basil Hallward is what I think I am."[538] From reading the novel with this lens, this seems obvious. Basil's infatuation with Dorian is something that can be evidently seen from Wilde's personal correspondences to and about Douglas.[539] The lofty ideas of 'Love' and 'Beauty', frequently capitalised in the novel, are worshipped in both relationships, and described in almost identical terms. Both Basil Hallward and Wilde have the same tendency to describe Dorian and Alfred, respectively, through classical and poetic references. Basil repeatedly portrays Dorian as desired and beautiful figures in Greek myth, including Antinous, Adonis, Paris, and Narcissus.[540] Wilde also commonly wrote about Douglas in similar guises in letters to Bosie himself and to

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[533] Ibid.
[534] Woods, 1998: 176.
[535] 'Editorial note', 25th June 1890 (in Gillespie, 2020: 362).
[536] Ibid.
[537] In one of the most overt parallels between *Dorian Gray* and *De Profundis*, Wilde says of Douglas: "I could have held a mirror up to you, and shown you such an image of yourself that you would not have recognised it as your own till you found it mimicking back you gestures of horror, and then you would have known whose shape it was, and hated it and yourself forever" (Wilde, 2013: 81). It is hard to imagine that Wilde wrote these lines unaware of the similarity they had to Dorian Gray's experience of watching the portrait change according to the degradation of his soul. The same language is clearly used to this gothic effect.
[538] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Ralph Payne', 12th February 1894 (in Holland and Hart-Davis: 585).
[539] See esp. 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas', January 1892 (in Tóibín, 2003: 59).
[540] Wilde, 2017: 19, 145.

others. To Bosie, he wrote: "I compare you to Hylas, or Hyacinth, Jonquil, or Narcisse, or someone whom the great god of Poetry favoured and honoured with his love."[541] In a letter to Robert Ross in 1892, he says: "

> Bosie has insisted on stopping here for sandwiches. He is quite like a narcissus – so white and gold. I will come either Wednesday or Thursday night to your rooms. Send me a line. Bosie is so tired: he lies like a Hyacinth on the sofa, and I worship him.[542]

These letters appear as if lifted out of *Dorian Gray*: "this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus."[543] This is just one comparative example of how "Basil pays homage to Dorian as Paris, as Adonis, as Narcissus, as Antinous, all young men and suitable *eromenoi*,"[544] prefacing the relationship that was to come between Wilde and Bosie.

Wilde's introduction to pederastic practices (and the respective roles both parties played) by Mahaffy was clearly more integral than simply influencing his written works. Wilde modelled his own relationships – whether subconsciously, as a matter of personal philosophy/self-fashioning, or as a way to further distance himself from the homoerotic reality – on that of the *erastes* and *eromenos*. In *De Profundis*, Wilde describes the unequal power dynamic that exists between him and Bosie. Through a joint reading of *Dorian Gray* and *De Profundis*, we are "initiated into the secret of that passionate friendship,"[545] and simultaneously reminded that their relationship was often classified as a 'friendship'. Wilde is the pursuer, and Douglas, true to his place as *eromenos,* does not show the same interest. Wilde reflects in detail on the destructive nature of their relationship, the "reckless dinners"[546] and extravagance that left Wilde nearly bankrupt; the sudden-changing moods and vicious letters: "when you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting;"[547] and the lack of regard or care for him in times of need and illness: "the next two days you leave me entirely alone without care, without attendance, without anything."[548] He tells how, in the

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[541] Wilde, 2013: 68. About his own letter, Wilde remarks it is "like a passage from one of Shakespeare's sonnets, transposed to a minor key" (Ibid: 68). The reference to Shakespeare has more weight knowing the implication of his relationship with Willie Hughes, and the 'minor key' is in keeping with the trend of gay lives being portrayed as tragic.
[542] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross', May or June 1892 (in Tóibín, 2003c: 59).
[543] Wilde, 2017: 11.
[544] Endres, 2018: 256.
[545] Wilde, 2018: 80.
[546] Wilde, 2013: 51.
[547] Ibid: 65.
[548] Ibid: 62.

entirety of his imprisonment, he did not receive one letter from Douglas.[549] It was in no sense a reciprocal relationship, and in that way it was in keeping with Greek models.

One year before Wilde and Douglas even meet, Basil experiences something strikingly similar with Dorian.[550] In the opening episode, before Lord Henry has met Dorian, Basil confides in him that:

> Now and then, however, he is horribly thoughtless, and seems to take real delight in giving me pain … Then I felt, Harry, that I have given away my whole soul to someone who treats it as if it were a flower to put in his coat.[551]

It is quite amazing, given that Wilde had not yet met Bosie, how similar the sentiments expressed by Basil in *Dorian Gray* and by Wilde in *De Profundis* are. It is a clear example of Wilde's life imitating his art. When looking at the *erastes*/*eromenos* relationship, the *eromenos* (Bosie) was traditionally not expected to meet the *erastes* (Wilde)'s level of desire. From the evidence, Douglas appears to have rigidly stuck to the conditions of his 'Greek' role.

Wilde as a tragic figure is a fundamental shaping element of the domain of (homo)sexuality in Hibernian Philhellenism. It was also something he recognised in himself. In *De Profundis*, we see Wilde literally being a "spectator of his own tragedy."[552] In one of very few attempts at communication between Bosie and Wilde while he was in prison, he received a message that "Prince Fleur-de-Lys wishes to be remembered to you."[553] While this reminds us again of the need for allusion, secrecy, and the lack of proper names and terminology for marginal sexualities in this period, it led Wilde to realise that Douglas saw himself as "the graceful prince of a trivial comedy, not the sombre figure of a tragic show."[554] The language here once again mirrors that of *Dorian Gray* in the instance of Dorian's eventual indifference towards Sibyl Vane. After inadvertently causing her death through his rejection of her, Dorian reflects on the situation with a strikingly similar sentiment:

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[549] Ibid: 45.
[550] *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was initially published in 1890, Wilde and Douglas first met in 1891, see Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 461.
[551] Wilde, 2017: 22.
[552] Wilde, 2013: 151.
[553] Ibid 84.
[554] Ibid.

> It seems to me simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded.[555]

In *De Profundis*, Wilde speaks of Bosie's reaction to Wilde's tragedy in the exact same manner as that of Dorian to Sibyl Vane: "you had the sympathy and sentimentality of the spectator of a rather pathetic play."[556] This type of writing speaks to how the:

> Underlying rigour of Wilde's classicism was crucial to the act of taking charge of his own myth, to his *modus vivendi* as a protean self-stylist; hence the need in *De Profundis* to turn the grotesque comedy of his disgrace and imprisonment into the stuff of Greek tragedy, complete with anagnorisis (recognition).[557]

The nature of Wilde's classicism is both "within and without"[558] the text.

For the purpose of this discussion, the most important Platonic thought identified in *Dorian Gray* is that of 'Platonic insemination' and non-biological procreation.[559] It was not just homoerotic allusion and suggestion that caused controversy but, also, the threat the message of the book posed to Victorian society. Wilde purports that "there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book."[560] *Dorian Gray*'s danger was in how it could jeopardise societal (and social) continuity: "for opponents of male love, this non-reproductivity made homosexual relations – or even chaste devoted friendships to the exclusion of heterosexual marriage – a threat to the continuance of the human race."[561] Even if Wilde could deny the physical, sexual element of his male relationships, his idealisation of male friendships still transformed sexuality into a discourse "not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction."[562] As was pre-empted by the philosophical discussion in *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*, Basil Hallward is similarly inspired by Dorian's beauty. Wilde once again shows how "intense male friendship was another way to tap into one's creativity and to cultivate

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[555] Wilde, 2017: 129.
[556] Wilde, 2013: 78.
[557] Riley, 2018: 20.
[558] Fitzgerald, 1990: 37.
[559] Ross, 2014:168.
[560] Wilde, 2017: 7.
[561] Duffy, 2001: 332. Wilde, through his engagement with Plato, showed how "life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realises in fact what has been dreamed in fiction" (Wilde, 2020: 27). Capitalisation original.
[562] Foucault, 2020b: 36. For more on the "myth of sexual reproduction" (Harris, 2017) both in antiquity, and in the words of critical theorists, Lacan and Irigaray, see Figuera and Nagy, 1985; Harris, 2017; and Tzelepis and Athanasiou, 2010.

one's personality,"[563] further proving the enduring power of non-biologically reproductive relationships to create something 'higher'.

It is not simple historical reappropriation that allows us to see Wilde and Bosie fulfilling these pederastic roles. Wilde actually puts words to their relationship in these terms in *De Profundis*: "the 'influence of an elder man over a younger man' is an excellent theory till it comes to my ears."[564] Part of the downfall of his relationship with Bosie had to do with the fact that it was not adhering to the fundamental spiritually-productive part of these relationships. While in every other way, they were in keeping with pederastic models, Wilde exclaims of Bosie that: "while you were with me you were the absolute ruin of my Art."[565] Wilde saw Bosie as having perverted values when it came to his work. Bosie appears to only have been impressed with the status and luxury that came with the production of a new show or the publication of a new work, not with the value of the art itself.[566]

If we consider the focus on non-biologically reproductive male relationships to be one of the most explicit uses of Plato in the novel, it is extremely interesting when we examine Walter Pater's response to it. Pater, in his review of *Dorian Gray*, is complimentary of Wilde. Yet, he makes a concerted effort to distance himself from the character of Lord Henry, "the spoiler of the fair young man."[567] Lord Henry is a figure with whom Pater could easily have been identified as due to his focused Platonic instruction and the homosocial context of Oxford. Lord Henry is repeatedly accused of introducing Dorian

[563] Ivory, 2007: 529.
[564] Wilde, 2013: 145.
[565] Ibid: 49. Hill has paralleled this situation in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in Platonic terms. Sibyl Vane is known as a very talented young Shakespearean actress with whom Dorian falls in love with. He initiates a relationship with her and they are set to be married. Dorian invites Lord Henry and Basil to come and watch her perform. However, when she does, she is lifeless and unconvincing. Dorian is heartbroken and embarrassed by this, as it turns out it was simply the idea of her talent that he was attracted to. He goes backstage to break their engagement and Sibyl confesses to him that since they fell in love, she has lost any interest in acting, as it is merely imitation and she would rather experience reality. She speaks of this enlightenment in extremely Platonic terms, more specifically in alignment with the Allegory of the Cave as found in Plato's *Republic* [(7.514a-518e); Plato, 2003: 220-225; see also Hill, 2018: 134]. True to Socrates' parable, "Dorian, as a cave dweller who prefers the shadows, mocks her and then effectively kills her" (Hill, 2018: 234). In *De Profundis*, Wilde similarly explains how he sacrificed his art for the sake of Douglas; Douglas the cave-dweller cannot appreciate this.
[566] That is not to say that Wilde was not also focused on pleasure. Self-admittedly, he acknowledges that Dorian is 'what he would have liked to have been'. If we triangulate the characters according to Plato's tripartite soul, Dorian stands for appetite, then we can say that Wilde did in face live in part like Dorian: "I filled my life to the very brim with pleasure" (Ibid: 107).
[567] Pater, 1891-2: 59.

to the aesthetic way of life, much like Pater was with Wilde.[568] Lord Henry is the classic figure of the older man imparting philosophical education. He is also the one ultimately to blame by Dorian and others at the end of the novel for Dorian's 'corruption'. We can understand why, due to his relationship with Bosie and the age gap between them, Lord Henry is what Wilde asserts that people believe him to be.[569] This is how the public, certainly the Marquess of Queensbury, would have considered the influence that Wilde had on Bosie.[570] But it is also the influence that people assumed that Pater had on Wilde.

Interestingly, Mahaffy is never held to the same suspicion, despite openly writing about Greek pederasty, a seriously taboo subject.[571] Pater's need to deny and reject this part of the novel shows us another example of how Wilde's intention to "reveal art and conceal the artist"[572] ultimately failed. In this bleeding of fiction into reality, it is also significant how Pater felt the need also to distance himself from Wilde, like Mahaffy did. Despite being almost opposite figures in style and perspective, both Mahaffy and Pater seemed to have the same context-led understanding of the need for silence and dissociation on this matter. The response to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the role it played in Wilde's trial proves as Foucault says that the nineteenth century homosexual was "a secret that always gave itself away."[573] This language of secrecy and silence will be further explored in *The Blackwater Lightship*, showing how in both Wilde and Tóibín's work and reception, "silence … features as a narrative element which makes visible for the reader hidden realities of Irish society."[574]

We saw in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian* Gray how Wilde remarked that: "all art is at once surface and symbol."[575] It is true that *Dorian Gray* could be read without a Platonic overtone; but to do so would be to diminish much of Wilde's self in the work – it would be to take it as 'surface' and completely disregard the 'symbol'. Richard Hornby maintains that "treating the homosexual undercurrents that can be found in all of Wilde's major works as if they were dominant themes reduces a great writer to a producer of

[568] Dorian to Lord Henry: "yet you poisoned me with a book once" (Wilde, 2017: 272). The identity of this book has been speculated to be one integral to Wilde's learning at Oxford – presumably under Pater or John Addington Symonds.
[569] 'Letter from Oscar Wilde to Ralph Payne', 12th February 1894 (eds Holland and Hart-Davis, 2000: 585).
[570] In reality, this is unfounded as Wilde was not Bosie's only sexual partner. There is much evidence to show the many relationships he had with various rent-boys (Endres, 2018: 257).
[571] Again, he wrote about the erotic lyric poet, Theognis of Megara, but did not offer a focused exploration of the pederastic aspects.
[572] Wilde, 2017: 7.
[573] Foucault, 2020b: 43.
[574] Carregal, 2021: 119.
[575] Wilde, 2017: 8.

political tracts."[576] But we cannot deny that these themes are there. I think that to ignore these undercurrents is to further the silence that has dominated so much of the queerness of the Western canon. It would be to further veil the legacy of these hidden and repressed sexualities in the present. As will be seen in *The Blackwater Lightship*, homosexuality in Irish literature still struggles to transcend the spiritual realm and enter the physical. I agree more with Walshe's estimation that Wilde's "position as a writer of 'foreign' or decadent literature in his own lifetime now means that he has a kind of symbolic resonance with contemporary Irish literary notions of 'queer' as disruptive and subversive."[577] In the next section, the significance of Walshe's use of the word 'foreign' will be made clear. Though here, it calls to mind its use in Yeats and Synge's argument about 'foreign' masterpieces. I would argue that while Wilde's use of classical allusion could have technically been considered as 'foreign' contemporarily, in Hibernian Philhellenism they were right at home.

Wilde's reliance on the *Symposium* and his use of Plato as a mouthpiece for his own sexuality reflects that of Socrates and Diotima's function in the dialogue itself, underlining the "justificatory uses of myth."[578] Due to his Victorian context, it is apparent how "the turning from physical to spiritual eros, justified already by Plato, is excellently described in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*."[579] One hundred years later, Tóibín's context still called for the same absence of the physical and homoerotic body. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is rife with the language of secrecy and silence, with Lord Henry Wotton even proclaiming, "I have grown to love secrecy."[580] Sexuality is also described as being a route to one of "the great secrets of life – to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul."[581] As will be seen in the next section, homosexuality in *The Blackwater Lightship* was categorised in the same way. Through analysing how Tóibín has come to understand and articulate sexuality in a similar manner to Wilde, we can observe how Wilde "remains a vivid presence in the world one hundred years after his death,"[582] showing how "art, as so often happens, had taken the place of personal experience."[583]

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[576] Hornby, 1998: 565.
[577] Walshe, 2010: 46.
[578] Woods, 1998: 19. It is important to reiterate that this is fundamentally for different reasons. In Plato, it is a matter of ontological perspective and Platonic idealism – without any moral censure. In Wilde, Hibernian Philhellenism, Catholic and Victorian contexts, it is essentially about social taboos.
[579] Ostermann, 1994: 298.
[580] Wilde, 2017: 12.
[581] Ibid: 33.
[582] Tóibín, 2003c: 86.
[583] Wilde, 2018: 79.

The Blackwater Lightship

Due to Ireland's oppressive Catholic political context in the twentieth century, Colm Tóibín's work is in keeping with trends of silence that resulted in the desexualisation of homosexuality and the absence of the physical body in male relationships. In this way, despite not containing any outwardly classical material, *The Blackwater Lightship* adheres to the conditions first established by Wilde in Hibernian Philhellenism that show how "intertextuality interacts with influence in a more interdependent way than proponents of the theory might be willing to concede."[584]

The social atmosphere surrounding the publication of *The Blackwater Lightship* is strikingly different to that of *Dorian Gray*. The novel was published in 1999 but is set in 1993 – significantly, the year of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland.[585] Despite the advent of this watershed moment, homosexuality in Ireland for the coming decades was still characterised by silence and absence.[586] In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Tóibín voices this through Larry, one of his central gay characters: "you know, in my family my brothers and sisters – even the married ones – still haven't told my parents that they are heterosexual. We don't talk about sex."[587] This inarticulation of sexuality is due to a number of features in Hibernian Philhellenism, but in the case of homosexuality we can consider it being fed by Platonic strands of influence. This discussion will highlight a number of features of Tóibín's work that speak in this way to the classical past, but most specifically to Wilde's reception of the classical past (specifically Platonic thought). As a novel, *The Blackwater Lightship* also works to show us how "Ireland in the twentieth century was a land in which the classical past was still a substantial part of Irish identity."[588] Most importantly for our purpose though, *The Blackwater Lightship* demonstrates how "we can approach classics as a set of feelings and attitudes towards the past."[589]

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[584] Doody, 2018: 12.
[585] 'Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act', 1993.
[586] This is true for all sexuality, not just homosexuality. In Ireland, the last Magdalene Laundry did not close until 1996, and the first State apology for the abuses that took place there (in which Church and State were complicit) did not come until 2013 – proving how there was a continued attempt in the first decades of the twenty-first century to keep these 'transgressive' or 'subversive' matters hidden and removed from public discourse. See McAtackney, 2022; Fischer, 2016.
[587] Tóibín, 1999: 146.
[588] McGing, 2020: 58.
[589] Porter, 2006: 305.

The Blackwater Lightship has a central character, Declan, who is "unambiguously figured as Irish and gay."[590] The plot is commanded by Declan's struggle with AIDS and his family's reaction to the news of his condition. The extent of Declan's 'gayness' ends at this label and his illness. Despite being the focus of the narrative, "he is allowed no gay subjectivity beyond his bodily frailty."[591] In terms of his illness, this novel is written at a time when "the AIDS-ridden body was too often relegated to abjection."[592] The fact that Declan is "never deprived of his dignity"[593] is, of course, a positive feature in the wider tradition of queer writing – especially since the gay experience is often treated as explicit. In an Irish context, it speaks directly to the fact that Declan is disembodied, and that the homoerotic body, even in illness, is absent. Declan also has "no boyfriend, no lover, no named sexual partners, no erotic past."[594] Therefore, even in the details of the narrative itself, let alone the context, "silence also covers up stories which need to be told."[595] In the book, his family never learns about that part of his life or identity. His only explicit connections to homosexuality are his illness (and its implications) and his two close male friends (Larry and Paul), who are also gay and also have "hidden lives."[596] The friendship between the three men is shown as infallible and idealised. Even in 1999, Declan's homosexuality must be characterised by an elevated male friendship, reminding us that "the Western ideal of Platonic friendship suppresses its origins in homosexual desire."[597] We could perhaps go as far as to say that we can associate the 'phil' in 'Hibernian Philhellenism' as pointing to this aspect of *philia*, friendship or 'brotherly' love within the 'chosen family', in Irish queer fiction.

In keeping with this Chapter's overarching exploration of the interlink between (homo)sexuality and pedagogy, it is very important to note that in its own right, "as an AIDS novel, the Blackwater Lightship has much pedagogical strength."[598] Eibhear Walshe rightly acknowledges how through its publication Tóibín achieved "a cultural centrality for

[590] Walshe, 2008: 119.
[591] Ibid: 121.
[592] Carregal, 2021: 96.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Walshe, 2008: 121.
[595] Delaney, 2008: 19.
[596] Walshe, 2013: 95.
[597] Woods, 1998: 18. See also Price, 2004. In an Irish Catholic context, where physicality was treated as a social taboo, Tóibín appears to be taking back the power of the elevated male friendship, presenting it as "guided by self-control to the highest good, and strengthen[ed] by communion with souls equally attuned, … lift[ing] a man above everything sordid, and [making] him aspire toward heavenly virtues" (Shairp, 1884: 457).
[598] Walshe, 2008: 119.

the discourse of aids in Irish fiction, almost single-handedly."[599] This effect he has had respectively in this domain mirrors Wilde's impact at the beginning of homosexual discourses, underlining how Tóibín is a 'cultural father' in his own right. Both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Blackwater Lightship* act as watershed moments in their own contexts.

What is striking is that *The Blackwater Lightship* has a triangulation of three gay characters and three female characters across three generations. As discussed, Wilde's *Dorian Gray* is also triangulated between Basil, Dorian and Lord Henry. Colm Tóibín speaks about these characters in much the same way that Wilde did in his letter to Ralph Payne: "each of the characters is me, each and every one of them."[600] This idea of "split personality"[601] is recognised as a recurring trope in Tóibín's writing but also speaks to the conditions and construction of Hibernian Philhellenism where each figure is composed by multiple strands of influence that inform the present creation. Through their engagement with Platonic thought, through their acceptance and rejection of their own ranges of influences in their own context and place in the tradition, both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Blackwater Lightship* can be considered novels of "textual infections."[602]

One of the major ways in which *The Blackwater Lightship* is in keeping with Platonic conceptions of homoeroticism is through its focus on elevated male relationships and the dichotomy that is created between reproductive and non-reproductive relationships. As mentioned, the novel is made up of two sets of threes that represent completely opposite relationships. The three women are grandmother, mother, daughter; a connection which is made possible through biologically reproductive relationships. The action of the novel (a domestic tragedy in and of itself) is allowed to take place as a result of this reproductive family dynamic. When it came to the mainstream nuclear family, "the conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction."[603] As was just exhibited in *The Blackwater Lightship,* it was not just homosexuality that was characterised by absence but generally "on the subject of sex, silence became the rule."[604] The relationship and "sex between husband and wife was [also] beset by rules and

[599] Ibid: 120.
[600] Wisenfarth, 2009: 12.
[601] Delaney, 2008: 14.
[602] Dimock, 2013: 740.
[603] Foucault, 2020b: 3.
[604] Ibid.

recommendations."[605] This being said, the silence that pervaded matters of homosexuality was distinct from that conservative heterosexuality,[606] and can be categorised as 'absence'. The relationship that the three men represent in the novel is that of the chosen family.[607] The narrator, Helen, comes to the discovery that "Declan, she thought, had replaced his family with his friends."[608] In Tóibín's own words, Declan, Paul and Larry "show how gay men can be a family."[609] It was the first time "a mainstream Irish novel [had] a central Irish character who is unambiguously gay and is [also] part of a gay network of out Irish men."[610] His characters then respectively work to dismantle traditional family dynamics, while also contributing to understanding the social tensions underpinning the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism.

In this way, the importance of a relationship with a cultural father expounds in the domain of (homo)sexuality. Gregory Woods explains how:

> Coming out as gay involved networking – sexually, socially, politically – with the living and identifying with the dead. Gay men have gay fathers, even if their natural fathers are generally straight.[611]

This 'networking' is exactly what we saw taking place in Tóibín's *Love in a Dark Time*. It is a way of "locating someone among the hordes of the dead to whom we wish especially to speak."[612] The theme of 'cultural paternal influence' is upheld in *The Blackwater Lightship* through the Platonic, and by extension, Wildean approach to homosexuality. But it is also sustained through the very plot and subject matter. It being an AIDS narrative perpetuates the "idea that gay writing has a tendency to deal in the tragic and the unfulfilled

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[605] Ibid: 37. Tóibín demonstrates an instance of this: "contraception and divorce were discussed regularly; her grandparents watched in embarrassed silence, but the only time when they threatened to send Helen to bed was when a woman on the show pointed out that most Irish couples had never seen one another naked, even people who'd been married for years" (Tóibín, 1999: 65).
[606] This can be considered as two separate matters. One is sexuality from the perspective of worldly power, the other is the distinction between male and female sexuality and between homosexual and heterosexual desire.
[607] The 'chosen family' can be understood to describe "social formations that take over the role of support and care normally sustained by the biological family, giving instead a sense of close community to otherwise stigmatised individuals" (Robinou, 2023: 117). This equation of friend to family is in keeping with Plato's elevated male friendship (and Wilde's direct reference to this theory in *Mr. W.H.*) who describes how "they are married by a far nearer tie and have a closer friendship than those who beget mortal children (209c)" [Plato, 2001: 257 (trans. Benjamin Jowett)].
[608] Tóibín, 1999: 34.
[609] Wisenfarth, 2009: 17.
[610] Walshe, 2013: 86.
[611] Woods, 1998: 357.
[612] Tóibín, 2025: 13.

… [which] has echoes in writing, which seems at its most content when there is a dead father or a dead child … and domestic chaos."[613]

In *The Blackwater Lightship*, the absence of the male homoerotic body is not the only "vanishing male body"[614] that is recalled. Tóibín's own father's death is mirrored in the novel and contributes to the pervasive silence. It is interesting to note that the body vanishes differently in Plato, Wilde, and Tóibín, but vanishes nonetheless. As Helen recalls after her father's death: "she had never noticed silence before."[615] Silence and absence come to characterise the novel as a whole but the notable absence of a male paternal figure is also significant in Tóibín's own life, and in the established trend where gay men seek out a 'gay father'.[616] This is reflected in Hibernian Philhellenism where 'cultural paternal influence' is a driving constructive force. Due to this context, and in contrast to what was seen in the last Chapter, *The Blackwater Lightship* retells "Oedipal plots by locating stories of same-sex desire within the closeted, eerie space of the maternal."[617]

Another way in which the theme of 'cultural paternal influence' (which can be driven by absence as well as presence) persists was seen in Tóibín's previously discussed biological work, *Mad, Bad, Dangerous to Know: The Fathers of Wilde, Yeats and Joyce*.[618] In much biographical writing about Wilde, and in the testimonies of his contemporaries, it is often his mother, Speranza, who is cited as being of crucial influence to him – stylistically, but also in the day-to-day of his life. Most accounts tell how Speranza was the one to persuade him not to flee England and evade his trial, but to face it.[619] However, Tóibín, "unusually for an Irish commentator writing on Wilde, […] cites Sir William as the crucial parental influence that made Wilde decided to prosecute Queensbury."[620] This is reminiscent of how in *The Blackwater Lightship*, although Lily (his mother) is the one who primarily raised Declan and who now cares for him in his sickness, it is the absence of his

[613] Tóibín, 2003c: 26.
[614] Walshe, 2006: 132.
[615] Tóibín, 1999: 79.
[616] 'Erosion' is also considered a central theme of the novel, and it is one that ties into the ideas of silence and absence. Paul Delaney purports that erosion in Tóibín's work stands for his "understanding of the nature of historical change … [and] has also been understood to signify the loss of a unified consciousness or a unitary sense of identity, as well as the gradual wearing down of collective belief structures and traditional practices" (Delaney, 2008: 5). This is supported Tóibín's own claims that "erosion […] is an interesting image of time, and a metaphor for what time does" (Tóibín, 2022a: 78).
[617] Fogarty, 2008: 174.
[618] Tóibín, 2018.
[619] Ellmann quotes Lady Jane Francesca Wilde (Speranza) telling her son: "if you stay, even if you go to prison, you will always be my son. It will make no difference to my affection. But if you go, I will never speak to you again" (Ellmann, 1987 : 439).
[620] Walshe, 2010: 60.

father that looms large – particularly in the silent parallel between both father and son's experiences of illness.

Tóibín appears to favour the impact of the *paternal* influence over the *maternal* in many cases. This is not always strictly the case in all of his writing: he has a collection of short stories called *Mothers and Sons*. But he also has two completely separate essays entitled 'New Ways of Killing Your Father' and 'New Ways to Kill Your Father'.[621] He has another non-fiction book about writers and their families called *New Ways to Kill Your Mother: Writers and Their Families*.[622] This book is about families in general, not just mothers. In fact, "very few of the essays are actually about mothers [,] more often, he examines the role of fathers instead and the idea of the disrupted family as a source for novel and poetry-making."[623] This is further to the point that this collection contains an essay called 'W. B. Yeats: New Ways to Kill Your Father'.[624] This is a sentence structure that Tóibín clearly favours and is in keeping with Oscar Wilde's sentiment that 'it is always necessary to kill your father', which began this thesis.[625] In any case it appears that if the maternal dynamic is favoured, it is in light of a paternal absence. If the paternal dynamic is favoured, it is often either due to absence or strife. He himself asks "are there any examples … in literature or in the lives of writers … where one generation hands on to the next with no tension?"[626] There are two quotes from Tóibín that attest to this trend. The first is his "need to annihilate the previous book for [himself],"[627] maintaining the *agon* of Hibernian Philhellenism. The second speaks to the entwining strands of influence and cultural conditions that create a tradition and its members: "you can't control the reasons why I was choosing certain things."[628]

Something that is certain, and is widely commented on by critics, is how, among other things:

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[621] Tóibín, 18th November 1993; Tóibín, 12th June 2003.
[622] Tóibín, 2012.
[623] Walshe, 2013: 173. In *Ship in Full Sail*, in an essay entitled, 'Father and Son' (43-46), Tóibín remarks on how "it seemed important, however, for both James Baldwin himself and Barack Obama too, as they both write their autobiographies, to establish before anything else that their story began when their father died, to emphasise that they set out alone without a father's shadow or a father's permission" (Tóibín, 2025: 44).
[624] Tóibín, 2012.
[625] This repeated use of language is interesting especially since he writes that "if you trawl through fiction, there's nothing I could find of anyone that murders his mother. Hamlet doesn't murder Gertrude" (Costello-Sullivan, 2019: 11). It appears that he has forgotten his own retelling of the *Oresteia*, in which Orestes kills his mother, Clytemnestra. Perhaps this proves that he sees this story as revolving more around conflict arising from the father's absence, rather than the mother's presence.
[626] Tóibín, 2025: 45.
[627] Wisenfarth, 2009: 18.
[628] O'Toole, 2008: 198.

> Occlusions, omissions and erasures; […] the acts of recovery and remembrance; […] the ambiguous pull of collective or tribal identities […]; the proximity of the past and the narrativization of history; and the use of the past to justify or make sense of the present – […] are all recurring concerns in Tóibín's writing.[629]

All of these are acutely relevant to the domain of (homo)sexuality and our exploration into Platonic conceptions of homoeroticism in Irish fiction. Through the absence of the male homoerotic body in *The Blackwater Lightship*, we see how "much of the energy in Tóibín's writing is released through the unsaid or barely suggested."[630]

How Tóibín deals with homosexuality speaks to Foucault's idea of socially fuelled self-imposed exile where people of marginal sexualities are "driven out, denied, and reduced to silence."[631] We see this in the novel through the character of Paul, whose chosen life in Brussels with his husband shows another feature of Tóibín's writing: one in which he "situates 'Irish' concerns against the backdrop of other cultures, [allowing] for sometimes startling comparisons to be made."[632] The fact that Paul is married is the closest we get to the implication of consummation in a gay relationship in the novel. Tóibín demonstrates how the "erotic world exists either outside Ireland, or within heterosexuality."[633] Paul frequently asserts that leaving Ireland was not solely a choice, but rather a consequence of the silent, conservative society: "that's why I left this country, remarks like that."[634] This is a common feature of Tóibín's gay fictions where "the homoerotic as a literary trope is shifting, eroded, absent or displaced to somewhere outside the everyday life of 1990s Ireland."[635] That Paul lives in Brussels is also significant to what Eibhear Walshe sees as "three defining moments when male homosexuality entered into Irish literary and cultural life."[636]

The first 'moment' was in 1895 when Oscar Wilde spoke the 'Love that Dare Not Speak its Name' speech while on trial.[637] The second 'moment' was in 1942 when Kate

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[629] Delaney, 2008: 13.
[630] Ibid: 18.
[631] Foucault, 2020b: 4. Paul Delaney notes how "the themes of exile, emigration and travel are part of a long tradition in Irish culture, which stretches back across the centuries to include many of the key figures in Irish writing" (Delaney, 2008: 5).
[632] Frawley, 2008: 72.
[633] Walshe, 2006: 131.
[634] Tóibín, 1999: 176.
[635] Walshe, 2008: 118.
[636] Walshe, 2006: 125.
[637] Ibid.

O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* was banned for a one-sentence description of male homosexuality.[638] The third 'moment' was the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993, and *The Blackwater Lightship* "appears within the framework of this third moment."[639] The novel can actually be seen to touch on all three 'moments'. The first is obvious through our previous discussions of Tóibín's reception of Wilde's classical reception, particularly in the veiled Platonic references to homosexuality and the absence of the physical male body. The third 'moment' is also self-evident in Tóibín's contemporary, but also because it is the year in which the novel is set. We can also find a link between Tóibín's novel and the second moment as Brussels is the site of the homosexual 'transgression' in O'Brien's book, and the place where Paul and François live in *The Blackwater Lightship*.[640] This is a perfect example of influence in Tóibín's writing and Wai-Chi Dimock's notion of 'textual infections'.[641] For Wilde (who died in Paris) and Tóibín (and O'Brien), we see how Europe is commonly used as a place of exile, or as a place of sexual freedom where they can both have and express these experiences. Therefore, 'exile' is "a process by which a difficult past can be confronted."[642]

This context of silence creates "an unease which is declared, ironically, in Tóibín's reluctance to talk about sexuality and the gay male body."[643] This unease is something that we saw in Mahaffy's discussion of Greek homosexuality, and in Wilde's veiled allusions. Each of my central figures *wants* to discuss matters of sexuality but "silence […] disturbs and disfigures"[644] the discussion. Walshe believes that the "unease in the imagining of the gay male body is a hallmark of Tóibín's writing,"[645] and this is apparent in *The Blackwater Lightship*. At multiple times, the female, heterosexual characters wonder "and why didn't he tell us?"[646]; "why did he keep it from us?"[647] The reason for this can be seen as an effect of the unease that homosexuality created. Helen and Lily possibly knew that Declan was gay, but it was easier to ignore that fact than to address it. In representative language, and Wildean terms, Helen considers herself as a "figure who had to be brought into the

[638] Ibid. This particular line is: "She saw *Etienne* and her father in the embrace of love" (O'Brien, 2006: 165; italics original).
[639] Walshe, 2006: 126.
[640] Ibid: 125.
[641] Dimock, 2013: 740.
[642] Walshe, 2013: 27.
[643] Delaney, 2008: 16.
[644] Ibid: 19.
[645] Walshe, 2008: 118.
[646] Tóibín, 1999: 34 [Helen speaking].
[647] Ibid: 98 [Lily speaking].

picture."[648] Here, the language of pictures, images, and imitations is again used to refer to matters of homosexuality. As to why this reality was easier to ignore, and easier for Declan to remain silent about, could be explained by Tóibín in, again, seemingly Wildean terms: "that is a secret history of each of us!"[649]

Conclusion

From this section, it is evident that "writing in modern Ireland has been preoccupied with the intersection of literature with Irish history, society and politics."[650] Our interpretation of this 'history' depends less on literal facts than on 'images of the past.'"[651] Recently, the "role of classics as an agent of political change has perhaps been most evident in the history of sexuality and debates about LGBTQ rights,"[652] and in Ireland that manifested in "a great unsettling, Ireland's opening itself to the outside world."[653] Certain legislation that contributed to this, like the reform of the Censorship Law 1967, is cited by Tóibín as a crucial moment alongside Decriminalisation in 1993.[654] Woods has claimed that "Wilde survives as a cultural monument rather than a writer."[655] I would argue that in Hibernian Philhellenism, his role as both is of equal importance. He is someone who, following Mahaffy's pedagogical influence over a "direct link between education and the passions,"[656] becomes a prime reference point as to how society treats marginal sexualities. But, also, his Platonic writing confirms how "another's voice – words written under long-forgotten moons – builds that extraordinary bridge that art can make across time."[657]

This section and Chapter as a whole is concerned with Wilde's idea formulated in *The Soul of a Man Under Socia*lism, that the "new individualism is the new Hellenism.'"[658] Iain Ross explains this as "an aesthetic ideal, a corrective force imparting the critical spirit, bestowing form."[659] Ross also explores Aristotle's distinction between "the *akolastos*, the self-controlled man who deliberately fashions his life in accordance with a set of immoral

[648] Ibid: 34.
[649] O'Toole, 2008: 198.
[650] Kenneally, 1988: 4.
[651] Bradley, 1988: 52.
[652] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 40.
[653] Tóibín, 2022a: 40.
[654] Ibid: 39.
[655] Woods, 1998: 176.
[656] Robson, 2004: 290.
[657] Everett, 2020: 14.
[658] Wilde, 1900: 90. See Chislett Jr., 1915.
[659] Ross, 2014: 4.

precepts, and the *akratês*, the man without self-control who falls a pray to his appetites."[660] Following the discussion in this Chapter, we can wonder whether Tóibín and Wilde are *akolastoi* or *akrateis*?[661] This causes us to consider, in keeping with the underlying questions of this thesis, how conscious these figures are to the influences that act upon them, to the tradition to which they belong, and to the place they wish to fashion for themselves in the canon? Are they the *akolastos*; self-conscious constructors of themselves and the tradition? Or the *akratês*; figures upon which forces act?

To conclude our discussion of the absent body, we find that we must return to poetry. Throughout this Chapter, a question has been raised alongside the main discussion as to why poetry was a place where homosexuality was not questioned or criminalised? Wilde's poetry sees the most explicit Greek allusions to homoeroticism, yet it was *Dorian Gray* that was cited as corruptive. After establishing how much of Tóibín's writing is characterised by silence, the only place where Tóibín has explicitly talked about his own sexuality in physical terms is in his poetry. His first and, as of yet, only collection of poetry, *Vinegar Hill* was published in 2022. In *Dublin: Saturday 23 May, 2015*, a poem commemorating the passing of the Gay Marriage Referendum in Ireland, he once again equates homosexuality with friendship: "they had got together./ But it didn't mean much. It made them friends."[662] As the men walk around Dublin, the poem acts as a map of all of the secret places for cruising that were known in the gay community. This trip down memory lane also includes reminders of the friends who died of AIDS. This is very much in keeping with how Tóibín's "treatments of gay male identity find common ground only in the coercing of the homoerotic within death, illness or the closet."[663] However, in the poem, *Gellert Baths, Spring 1990*, we see an uncharacteristically sexually explicit and genitally-centred description of a homosexual encounter.[664] It must be noted that the sexual

[660] Ibid: 8.
[661] I ask that question without the moralising undercurrent of the eroticism of the original definitions, but the distinction cannot be completely separated from moralizing discussions, especially in a political sense that, of course, assumes the classical paradigm of the supremacy of *logos* and the *logisticon* part of the soul, alongside the superiority of, for example, man over woman and human over animals.
[662] Tóibín, 2022c: 60. Again, for these associations between male friendship in antiquity, see Konstan, 1996; Shairp, 1884; Roshchin, 2017; Price, 2004; and Pangle, 2003.
[663] Walshe, 2006: 128.
[664] "If you pour sparkling wine onto an erect cock,/The bubbles stay there for a while, even if/ The champagne wets the floor. This means/ That when I kneel to suck this Hungarian's dick,/ To my great delight, I discover that my mouth/ Is soon alive with bubbles" (Tóibín, 2022c: 70). The fact that this encounter assumedly took place in the past yet was only published in the contemporary moment speaks to Tóibín's statement that "the gay past in writing is sometimes explicit and sometimes hidden, while the gay present is, for the most part, only explicit" (Tóibín, 2003c: 7).

act in this poem takes place outside of Ireland, once again showing how perhaps Tóibín is still not comfortable with articulating physical elements of his sexuality in an Irish context.

Nonetheless, we again question why the body must be absent in novel-form, but can be explicit in poetry? It is really interesting to see how for Wilde and Tóibín, poetry offers a safe space for expression that at once leads readers to wonder "what is it about their sexiness that was not so clearly apparent?"[665]; and what is it about the form of poetry that allows for this freedom of expression? Cheekily, we may wonder too in Frank Harris' question to Wilde, whether there is some euphemism connected to Mahaffy's willingness (albeit Victorian and close-minded) to discuss Greek homosexuality: "and did you find any teacher there like Mahaffy?' I asked, "any professor with a touch of the poet?"[666] Is 'poet' just another word, like 'Dorian' or 'Narcissus', to add to the list of classical references and allusions to "Hellenic homoeroticism?"[667]

[665] Woods, 1998: 174.
[666] Harris, 1938: 34.
[667] Manny, 2018: 275.

3.5. Conclusion: Highlighting The Margins

This Chapter has hoped to examine "the will to truth which insists on taking as its object of knowledge the undisclosed details of the sexual acts of a distant culture,"[668] while also "establishing the interconnexions between the different functions performed by the same item of culture."[669] In this Chapter, that item of culture was homosexuality (and, in some ways, gender expression). Following his survey on the history of sexuality across the early Greek, Classical, and Roman periods, Foucault concludes:

> Does this mean that one must recognise, in the scheme thus constituted, the lineaments of a future ethics, the ethics that one will find in Christianity, when the sexual act itself will be considered an evil, when it will no longer be granted legitimacy except within the conjugal relationship, and then the love of boys must be condemned as unnatural?[670]

This maps out exactly what we have seen at play in our Irish context from the late nineteenth century to the present.

In his controversial first edition of *Social Life in Greece*, Mahaffy's exploration into Greek pederastic practices (edited and aided by Oscar Wilde) made clear that "that pedagogy and pederasty had shaded one into the other in Classical Greece was understood well by both proponents and opponents of Hellenism."[671] Despite the negative conclusion to this discussion, Mahaffy still advocates for the greatness of the Greeks, resulting in his inclusion of the practice of pederasty that reads more as an apology. Across all of his works, Mahaffy argues for the complex state of originality that he perceived in Greece:

> Though there never was a nation endowed with more original genius than the Hellenic … It were better to say *because* they were original, therefore they borrowed largely from the attainment of others. Nothing in a nation, nothing in an individual, is a surer test both of ability and of sound sense, than to adopt the discoveries of other. But a nation of sense will not only adopt, but assimilate them … asserting their originality, as contrasted with their predecessors in culture.[672]

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[668] Davidson, 2001: 7.
[669] Cohen, 1969: 337.
[670] Foucault, 2020d: 235. See also Goldhill, 1995.
[671] Ross, 2014: 34.
[672] Mahaffy, 1869: 201-202. Italics original.

This model that the Greeks set forth of assimilation and adoption is one that has been picked up in Irish traditions. Here, the 'Greek' is the 'thing' being assimilated. Oscar Wilde's adoption of Platonic thought and pederastic models in his life and works attests to that. Contemporarily, the practice of pederasty is still treated as taboo in Irish literature. In her recent 'two-play theatrical event', *The Boy*, Irish dramatist Marina Carr re-casts "the curse"[673] of the Theban Cycle as stemming from Laius' partaking in the "epidemic"[674] of "men and boys."[675] In the play, Laius is explicitly referred to as a "paedophile,"[676] something that results in the ensuing tragedy in his lineage.

Wilde's use of Greek understandings of male homoerotic relationships shows how "historical understanding is understanding of the past as a shaping force upon the present."[677] Wilde's present was a conservative Victorian context and thus, the lofty reception of Plato and the marked absence of physicality in the relationship between men meant that he was able to use classicism as a way to approach and vocalise his sexuality. In this way, Wilde shows how "insofar as that shaping force is tangibly felt upon our lives, historical understanding is part of the present."[678] Wilde's legacy as a tragic figure in homosexual history, is often considered akin to Greek tragedy which, as seen in the previous Chapter, feels very at home in Ireland. Wilde as a Greek tragic figure proves how a Greek tragedy is "neither a window on a remote past, nor is it discontinuous with the present,"[679] instead, "the ancient original Greek infiltrates life in modern Ireland."[680]

Colm Tóibín has written extensively about Oscar Wilde as a tragic figure, but this Chapter has also shown how Tóibín follows Wilde's Platonic conceptions of (homo)sexuality through their focus on elevated male friendship and the absence of the male homoerotic body.[681] His reliance on Wilde as a cultural father, not just stylistically but in his personal life too, demonstrates how the classical tradition has always been

[673] Carr, 2025a: 4 (The Shee speaking).
[674] Carr, 2025b: 118 (Jocasta speaking).
[675] Ibid.
[676] Carr, 2025a: 4 (The Shee speaking).
[677] Coetzee, 2001: 13.
[678] Ibid.
[679] Hamilton, 2003: 78.
[680] Kennelly, 2001: 51.
[681] Tóibín's *House of Names* (2017a) is not a feature of this Chapter's discussion but we could consider the relationship between Orestes and Leander as existing within this realm. Similarly, this novel is also in keeping with Tóibín's tendency to have fathers absent from his narratives. This is a trend that has carried over from ancient Greek literature to contemporary Irish literature. Griffith describes a 'solution' that could be applied to Tóibín's difficulty in articulating the tension between the father and the family as being "for the father to have died already; for after his death he could be safely idealised, his name and achievement constantly invoked without anxiety about his actual presence" (Griffith, 1998: 34).

something that "unites not separates."[682] Tóibín also demonstrates how "one sub-category of classicism entails an author identifying with a classical literary figure."[683] In this case we have multiple levels of reception from Plato to Wilde, to Wilde to Tóibín. Both strata demonstrate Bloom's understanding of influence that disproves Wilde's assertion that one must always 'kill their father', for "the voice of the other, of the *daimon*, is always speaking in one; the voice that cannot die because already it has survived death – *the dead poet lives in one.*"[684] Wilde had to encode and heighten any allusion to homosexuality in his work, and Tóibín's elusive "transgressive male body"[685] and choice of cultural figures similarly show how it is only "by returning to a narrative of the closet, [that he] finds a way to figure the homoerotic within his fictions."[686]

'Paternal' influence across the canon substantiates that "the dead may or may not return, but their voice comes alive, paradoxically never by mere imitation, but in the agnostic misprision performed … by only the most gifted of their successors."[687] It is not insignificant, especially to the purpose of this thesis, that it was in an essay for the *London Review of Books* entitled, *New Ways of Killing Your Father*, that Tóibín came out as a gay writer. Here, the father that is being 'killed' could be a 'cultural father' – a Mahaffy-like figure who represents the conservatism of the previous century. Alternatively, this 'father' could be the tradition as a whole that, up until this point, had sustained a silence surrounding homosexuality in Ireland. Both cases would once again demonstrate how each active member of a tradition works to shape and create their own active position within it. Today, we are more sensitive to the importance of the 'coming out' moment, thus Tóibín's admission has gained more weight, and the timing of it was also notable: "it is no coincidence that in June of the same year male homosexuality was finally decriminalised in Ireland."[688] This reminder is important as it underlines the specific cultural context that was also underlying the meshwork of (homo)sexuality in Ireland: one of silence, absence, and, in many ways, fear.

This Chapter discussed one domain of Hibernian Philhellenism that speaks to how we can understand queer literature in Ireland as belonging to "a literary tradition which has

[682] Haynes, 2019: 8.
[683] Hall, 2022: 8.
[684] Bloom, 1975: 19. Italics original.
[685] Walshe, 2008: 118.
[686] Ibid: 30. See Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2008.
[687] Bloom, 1997: xxiv.
[688] Walshe, 2008: 115.

undergone a series of revivals and collapses, all of them centred upon an idea of Ireland."[689] This has been most clearly corroborated by the context-driven reception of Wilde. We have seen "the ways in which the figure of Wilde in the dock in the Old Bailey was reappropriated for a particular tradition of rebellious Irish nationalism after his trials in 1895."[690] Yet, at the same time, the same figure was "shrouded with shameful silence, because they contradicted the 'language of national identity formation', with its emphasis on Catholic moral values."[691] This is the paradox of this domain, showing as we have seen throughout this Chapter how people pick and choose the parts of the past that they like. This language of national identity formation was made possible by figures like Pádraig Pearse and Roger Casement – both of whom engaged with classical material in their nationalist rhetoric and ideology, and were (believed to be) gay.[692] There has always been, "from the late nineteenth century onwards, […] a distinct homoerotic presence, centring on the emblematic figure of Wilde."[693] The silence masking this presence is largely due to Ireland's post-colonial context which led to a "distrust of the 'unmanly' homosexual result[ing] in a complete obliteration of the homoerotic from nationalist discourse."[694] Linking back to the earlier discussions on homosexuality and effeminacy, "the post-colonial struggle to escape the influence of the colonising power is also a struggle to escape the gendered relation of male coloniser to female colonised."[695] Here, another way of 'killing' the colonial father was through silencing marginal voices.

In the period of the late nineteenth century to the present, "sometimes the Ireland we speak of is an Edenic, sometimes it is a Utopian place."[696] This is largely to do with the post-colonial context and the movement established by the Gaelic Revival to reclaim the past and a national identity. Nevertheless, this 'Utopia' was only the case for part of the population and, in fact, led to a large portion of voices and experiences being erased. This type of tension complicates our understanding of 'traditions'. Delcan Kiberd clarifies that "*history* is what gets written in books by life's winners and *tradition* is what gets

[689] Deane, 1986: 8.
[690] Walshe, 2010: 45.
[691] Carregal, 2021: 3.
[692] Here, I note a line from Pearse's *The Intellectual Future of the Gael*: "all that is beautiful, noble, true, or grand will always find in him a devotee" (Pearse, 1997: 230), and highlight the similarity in language and sentiment to Wilde's 'Love that Dares not Speak its Name' speak which was already being considered "one of the great Irish anti-imperialist speeches from the dock" (Meadow, 1992: 189).
[693] Walshe, 1996: 162. It is important to clarify that this presence existed prior to the nineteenth century but did not have a figure like Wilde to popularly characterise it.
[694] Walshe, 1996: 162.
[695] Ibid.
[696] Deane, 1986: 8.

remembered and told among the common people."[697] This indicates how silences and absences in a society can damage the legitimacy of a marginal tradition. It is also crucial not to disregard the allusions to the homoeroticism of the past made by figures like Wilde. We must accept that these classical references were chosen carefully and purposefully. The works of Tóibín and Wilde then reveal that "the very meaning of the word *tradition* changes since it no longer implies a museum of nostalgias but a reopened future."[698] This clarifies how our conception of Hibernian Philhellenism purports that a tradition is never a static thing, but instead is a firmly active process.

[697] Kiberd, 1995: 15.
[698] Ibid: 292. Italics original.

CONCLUSION

"There are no interpretations but only misinterpretations."[1]

~ Harold Bloom

[1] Bloom, 1997: 95.

Among other things, this thesis has grappled with questions of tradition and canon formation, literary influence, Irish identity, and the "deconstruction of the burden of the past."[2] Here, I raise one more question: is the past indeed a burden? I would argue that for my central figures, it is not. Through the decisions they have made creatively, philosophically, and socially, they have shown that the past is a tool and not something to be written, nor re-written, but rather something with which the present and the future should "*correspond* with."[3] The Conclusion of this discussion thus hopes to highlight the creation of a relationship between the past and future, in which the contemporary occupies a space 'in between' that, in turn, shapes and modifies the tradition for future members. Throughout this thesis, we have commented on the significance of Ingold's use of 'in between'. Here, it remains relevant in our conception of Hibernian Philhellenism. The past and present intertwine to create the future of the tradition and the spaces on the rope 'in between' constitute the individual domains in which the tradition itself can be mapped in practice.

In *Nobody*, a 2019 poem based on the *Odyssey*, Alice Oswald describes how her work "lives in the murkiness between"[4] the story of Agamemnon and the story of Odysseus. Noting the significance of the word 'between', we too can see Hibernian Philhellenism as 'living in the murkiness between': an ancient tradition; a traceable, yet underdeveloped and underarticulated, modern tradition of reception; and a tradition of self-fashioning and self-named kinship by its members. The way in which Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín straddle this 'murkiness' presents them as "threshold figure[s]."[5] As seen in *Fig. 1*, they have had shared conditions and experiences, yet also stand 'in between' labels. They are at once a "cultural commentator"[6] of their own time consistently writing "against the grain of reader expectations."[7] They also illustrate the need for the crucial distinction between that of "Public Scholarship and the role of the Public Intellectual."[8]

The works of Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín that I have discussed have shown how "intertextual"[9] the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism is. They have also demonstrated the

[2] Walshe, 2013: 10. Here, I believe that Walshe means 'deconstruction' in the sense of the 'breaking-down' of the past, and not as an anti-essentialist phenomenological perspective that seeks to demonstrate that the structure of ideas/objects is such that they embody an irreducible inherent contradiction. If this was the case, that would be that the burden of the past is, irreducibly, both there and not there, which I do not think to be the case.
[3] Ingold, 2024: 62.
[4] Oswald, 2019: i.
[5] Delaney, 2008: 16.
[6] Ibid: 1.
[7] McCourt, 2008: 162.
[8] Hardwick and Harrison, 2013: xxxv.
[9] Delaney, 2008: 5.

relevance of adopting a "culturally situated reader response,"[10] when approaching these texts, one that prioritises culture and in the author's case, "how culture might influence a particular dimension of the reading process."[11] This is important for us as readers but also in our consideration of one of my central tenets of the 'author as reader'. In the case of my primary figures, they have each demonstrated the "capacity to continuously *produce* culture in [their] wake,"[12] and how "in terms of the *agon* of literary influence, [they have] exerted a significant degree of imaginative control over [their] precursor, making [them] into a figure of [their] own creation and thereby greatly increasing [their] own literary prestige."[13] Thus, what they choose to accept or reject from their respective 'cultural fathers' demands a level of imitation. This act of self-fashioning in relation to a perception of the precursor and self-fashioning implies and depends upon a "process of transformation."[14] This is why we can speak of Hibernian Philhellenism as a "rope of metalepsis or transumption."[15] As a tradition, its success "comes only from a triumphant wrestling with the greatest of the dead, and from an even more triumphant solipsism."[16]

Critics writing about Colm Tóibín's work have repeatedly commented on how 'erosion' is a central theme in his writing.[17] I am not concerned with 'erosion' in the sense of how it complicates his "writing of place,"[18] but rather in how through it, he (like Wilde and Mahaffy) can actually be seen to erode the bounds of a tradition.[19] They manage this by being 'in between' categories, by "invent[ing] self-invention,"[20] by allowing the "ancients speak to [them] in the present tense,"[21] and by encompassing a traceable and chronological "shift from a primarily tradition-bound and inward-looking society to a more open and flexible nation."[22] We can see this change taking place by looking to where Mahaffy stood to where Tóibín is writing now, with Wilde standing for the 'murkiness' in between.

[10] Brooks and Browne, 2012: 77.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Porter, 2021: 128.
[13] Perkin, 2010: 126.
[14] Alfaro, 1996: 270.
[15] Bloom, 1975: 6.
[16] Ibid: 9.
[17] One that relates to the previously discussed theme of 'silence'.
[18] Delaney, 2008: 5. He frequently "dissolves the boundaries which are marked between land and sea" (Ibid).
[19] See also Costello-Sullivan, 2012.
[20] Tóibín, 2003c: 86.
[21] Hall, 2022: 3.
[22] Kenneally, 1988: 1.

It is here that we must remind ourselves that Hibernian Philhellenism is not a 'stack', where "the life of every generation is confined to its own layer."[23] The story of Mahaffy is just as important to acknowledge in order to understand the space Tóibín occupies now. The key to understanding the two is to see how agonistic influence was transferred directly from Mahaffy to Wilde, and then indirectly across the canon and the tradition from Wilde to Tóibín. It is impossible to untangle the strands of influence that created these domains in Hibernian Philhellenism from the late nineteenth century to the present. The idea of 'erosion' is therefore vital in deconstructing not the past, but the rigidness that controlled how "we think about generations."[24] Tóibín's focus on erosion in his works also speaks to his role outside of professional classicism in Hibernian Philhellenism, as he places "the first-hand knowledge of classical texts on the cultural margins rather than in the centre,"[25] proving how margins are not fixed.

This trend speaks to the overall globalisation of Irish classicism. This is not to say that the 'tradition' has become universal. Classics should never be treated as "a grand narrative that regulates a universal truth embodied in a universal subject."[26] The 'Irishness' of the discourse is still there, it is just the specific nature of it that is changing. Globalisation casts these distinct Irish voices in a new perspective, creating the opportunity for a broader reception as authors are not just writing for an Irish or anglophone audience. This recalls my earlier discussion as to whether we can call Hibernian Philhellenism an 'untraditional tradition', or a study of reception. As has been argued throughout this thesis, terms like 'tradition' and 'reception' need to be flexible and context-dependent.[27] 'Reception' is described by Lorna Hardwick as an 'activity' of "'doing', 'making', 'responding' and 'creating'."[28] In other words, it is an active process that further shapes and remodels a preceding tradition. Thus, perhaps it is not helpful to think of models of 'tradition' as completely separate from models of reception studies, as really 'reception' is a development of 'tradition'. One must always be thought of in light of the other.[29]

Hibernian Philhellenism is a concept that exists 'in between' its 'traditional' and professional starting point, and has been in a state of constant flux from the late nineteenth

[23] Ingold, 2024: 9. This reminds us that we are writing against the dominant 'stratigraphic' (Schliemannian) conception of archaeological structure, as established in the Introduction.
[24] Ibid: vii.
[25] Harrison, 2009: 2.
[26] Decreus, 2010: 262.
[27] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008: 14.
[28] Hardwick, 2003: 12.
[29] Budelmann and Haubold, 2008: 24.

century to the present day as it further wraps and entwines to resemble something closer to globalised reception. Through my central figures we see this hypothesis in motion, even though "the process is a slow one."[30] I have argued that Colm Tóibín embodies this process. In other words, he exists 'in between' a model of 'tradition' and 'reception'. This shift between tradition and reception also constitutes the change from the professional classicist to the non-professional classicist, allowing authors to benefit from what they contribute to the classical tradition give. In this new space, Porter argues, "the history of the study of the Classics and indeed the entirety of its reception could be easily rewritten from the perspective played by public intellectuals."[31] In this way, Tóibín too stands 'in between' ideas of the 'non-professional' and the 'non-specialist', between the 'public scholar' and the 'public intellectual'.

An EIREnic Tradition?

I have constructed Hibernian Philhellenism to be an agonistic tradition that is shaped in a fundamental way by 'cultural paternal influence'. We can understand this process in Hibernian Philhellenism as Harold Bloom describes how the "*clinamen* between the strong poet and the Poetic Father is made by the whole being of the later poet."[32] In the history of Hibernian Philhellenism, we do not see these 'swerves' as acts of avoidance but rather, in an attempt to avoid: a looping back around and entwining. Hibernian Philhellenism is driven by active processes. Richard Ellmann states that "writers move upon other writers not as genial successors but as violent expropriators … they do not borrow, the override."[33] I do not think that it is as definite or aggressive as Ellmann makes out, and I prefer to think in terms of Bloom's 'swerves' or Ingold's 'entwining'. Nevertheless, from the evidence extrapolated from the previous Chapters, I do think that this tradition exists somewhere 'in between' agonistic and eirenic.

An eirenic process is thought to be "distinct and different from agnostic,"[34] and in keeping with ideas of peace and unity. While Hibernian Philhellenism sits 'in between' Ellmann's violent 'killing' of the father and Bloom and Ingold's theories of

[30] Wilmer, 2010: 242.
[31] Porter, 2008: 480.
[32] Bloom, 1997: 44. See also Greenblatt, 2012.
[33] Doody, 2018: 14.
[34] Ibid.

correspondence, there are parts of the eirenic process that do apply. Noreen Doody explains that an eirenic process of influence:

> Denotes all non-aggressive, non-power centred theories; it encompasses influence brought about through the expression of a ludic urge to refashion one's precursor text to better reflect the perceived greatness of the precursor, and its includes influence grounded in concern or feelings of kinship.[35]

This feeling of 'kinship' is the most relevant and applicable part of that description. It relates to what Marina Carr called 'dealing with dead' and to how Frank concurs with T. S. Eliot that "the originality of new works of art lies in their origin in the past, lies in the fact that 'dead voices speak through the living voice'."[36] Even so, I do not believe that we can in any way remove ideas of power relations from these dynamics.

As I see it, the relationship of influence in Hibernian Philhellenism is agonistic:

1. Mahaffy and Wilde demonstrate that it is agonistic and why "it is always necessary to kill your father;"[37]
2. Alone, Tóibín claims he is "through with history"[38] and engages in an agonistic relationship with the past;
3. However, towards Wilde, Tóibín appears to adopt a more eirenic viewpoint (particularly when it comes to shared experience in terms of sexuality and its articulation).

The power-relation at play depends wholly on the reader or the person receiving the work or precursor, and it is impossible to map "all the reader's possible reactions."[39] Something we can be certain of is the formation of the dynamic between the reader and the work of a predecessor "who may discover an echo, but may equally silence it."[40] In this thesis, we see these two things at play – Tóibín 'discovering' (through Wilde) and Wilde 'silencing' (through Mahaffy). It could be said that in the Gaelic Revival, the 'certain Greek kinship' was eirenic. However, the means to achieve that process (i.e. killing the colonial father) were agonistic. Really, whether it is agonistic or eirenic, the concern of this study is

[35] Ibid: 15.
[36] Frank, 1971: 161.
[37] Rothenstein, 1935: 184.
[38] Tóibín, 1987: 11.
[39] Alfaro, 1996: 279.
[40] Ibid: 281.

ultimately "the absolute absorption of the precursor,"[41] regardless of whether that involves the acceptance or rejection of the model: repudiation of influence is still influence.

Tim Ingold explains how "it is not that humans are becoming rather than being; rather, their becoming is continually overtaking their being."[42] In this tradition, we could call this complex mix of agonistic and eirenic influence by a new name. Ingold proposes: "why not turn 'human' into a verb, and call the process 'humaning'?"[43] It is contrary to human nature to move forward without an understanding of the past.[44] Similarly, it is not possible to make your own way in a tradition without being aware of the path your predecessor took. An awareness of a combination of these things feed into, and in many ways determine, your conception of what 'belonging' looks like in the tradition. In the discipline of 'classics', it is extremely rare to have engaged with your 'cultural father' directly. It is more than likely that they lived more than 2000 years before you. Mahaffy and Wilde are certainly an anomaly in this respect. Historical distance, and the element of ambiguity it creates in classical reception, determines the dynamic in the tradition where "there can be no becoming without coming; no belonging without longing,"[45] and since "we will never reach them, let alone overtake … we long for them."[46] The most important part of this study is that none of these aforementioned processes of tradition formation "imply a passive process of handing over or handing down,"[47] as might have been seen in Stanford's *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*. There is agency at every level, showing how "it is a process of longing, but equally, as it rebounds upon the one who longs, a process of *belonging.*"[48]

Subaltern Classics

This thesis has necessarily focused on the local in order to ascertain a selection of the conditions and contexts that contributed to the formation of Hibernian Philhellenism. Nonetheless, everything discussed locally also has a significant global impact and influence, apparent through the placement of my central figures in the Western canon. As

[41] Bloom, 1997: 11.
[42] Ingold, 2015: 118. For more on 'becoming' and 'being', see Grosz, 1999; Sartre, 2018.
[43] Ingold, 2024: 84.
[44] Once again, this is true whether the choice is made to accept or reject the past.
[45] Ingold, 2024: 45.
[46] Ibid: 46.
[47] Arkins, 2005: 9.
[48] Ingold, 2024: 45.

a result, Ireland can be considered as having been "both the beneficiary and benefactor in the ever-developing classical tradition."[49] Fiona Macintosh describes how "Ireland is understood as a storehouse of cultural traditions."[50] As we have seen throughout the domains explored in this thesis, "the mosaic of Irish identity is made up of many different pieces, not just the Catholic and nationalist, and the classical world is one of them."[51] This gives us further justification as to why non-professional classicism thrives in Ireland since "knowledge is relative to its cultural milieu,"[52] and in Ireland, classical knowledge is part of that milieu.

We have identified how classics has been used as a way to articulate a whole range of Irish experiences. We have seen the journey that the tradition of classicism has undergone in Ireland: from being a central part of an "exclusive curriculum"[53] to being a way to understand "a crumbling patriarchal society suffering from an acute castration complex."[54] Ancient Greek myth, literature, philosophy, and social structures were used as both curative and disruptive ways of dealing with issues in Irish society – ones that were often taboo, transgressive or unarticulated. The ancient materials were taken, not as a universal, but as an intrinsic force in Irish society that aided in understandings of agonistic patriarchal structures, family models, and the way to escape the role of the 'effeminate colonised'.[55] Hibernian Philhellenism was also a way to join the global canon and make a name intellectually and artistically as a place that was, at once, disconnected from an English identity, and worthy of entering the Western canon. Throughout the history of its use, Irish adopters have "engaged with the classical tradition to show that their culture measured up to a classical yardstick."[56] It is fitting that classics was the way to achieve this as Harry Levin notes the first recorded use of the term 'classical' in English (from 1599), "paired it with *canonical.*"[57]

We have now established that it is not the content or the works within a tradition that change, but rather the way in which we think about them.[58] When Stanford was

[49] Stanford, 1976: 245.
[50] Macintosh, 1994: 11.
[51] McGing, 2019: 147.
[52] Ingold, 2015: 135.
[53] Hall, 2022: 10.
[54] Wilmer, 2005: 146.
[55] This is said with the understanding that those applying the label 'feminine' to the colonised saw it as a derogatory and negative designation.
[56] O'Connor, 2024: 18.
[57] Levin, 1957: 52. Italics original.
[58] While translations vary, the essence of the ancient texts that Wilde read are the same as those Tóibín does now.

compiling his work on the tradition in Ireland, he had access to the same material (up until the point of writing). However, it is through approach that his work differs from mine. I have chosen to look at the tradition thematically, as an active process, and as 'untraditional'.[59] This allows the tradition to continue to change and grow alongside the contemporary, while still considering the past of the tradition as an essential strand in its make-up. I see this approach as in keeping with the phenomenon of 'subaltern classics'– the use of Greek and Roman materials to negotiate and articulate subaltern experiences.[60]

Increasingly, Ireland's unique place as a subaltern voice in Europe means that its professional and non-professional classicists use "subversive issues of class, colonialism, and gender in order to challenge traditional classics as a perceived preserve of elite culture."[61] Irish classical reception reflects the need for accountability on the part that the discipline of classics played throughout social history – its destructive and harmful legacies, as well as the positive ones. The ancient world did not just present us with a collection of wonderful gifts from the past (like the foundation of Western democracy, art, literature and philosophy) but in fact set the precedent for xenophobia, slavery and sexism across the globe. The power of subaltern classics appears through the approach that if "classics played a role in constructing whiteness … perhaps the field also had a role to play in its dismantling."[62] A tradition never is, and should never be, static.

The contributors to Hibernian Philhellenism represent "the explicit and implicit ways in which our readings and interpretations mediate between the needs of the moment and the authority of the past."[63] We saw this in practice in colonial Ireland through how "classical antiquity has, for better or worse, provided a base-line of value."[64] Classics in Ireland was considered simultaneously a tool of oppression and resistance in a colonial context, so we can conclude that "to study the ancient past is inevitably to notice the historical processes by which values come to be assigned, transmitted, transformed, and

[59] Arkins too supports the 'active' view of classical reception and rejects the idea that it is passive: "when a modern person make use of Greek or Roman material, the process is, from their point of view, active" (Arkins, 2005: 9).
[60] Greenwood, 2019: 577. I think we can see this happening at the same time that Ireland was using classics to join the Western canon in an attempt to move away from the periphery. However, I do not believe that these two processes are mutually exclusive; both can happen concurrently. Even if the writers at the time may not have considered themselves or their work subaltern, the very fact that they were using classics as a postcolonial response marks it/them as subaltern.
[61] Harrison, 2009: 3.
[62] Poser, 2nd February 2021.
[63] Varikas, 2010: 231.
[64] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2002: 14.

transvalued, both in that past and since then."[65] Mahaffy, Wilde, and Tóibín have all come to different conclusions about the value of the ancient past and the way in which it should be used. For Mahaffy, this was in terms of the academy and more elitist understandings of the word 'tradition'. For Wilde, classics was a form of "cultural power."[66] Tóibín used classical antiquity as a way to indirectly correspond with Wilde, but also as a way to tackle "ambivalence and ambiguity"[67] in his work. This allows me to consider all three of my central figures as 'critical classicists' of sorts. This label emerges from their use of classics for real-life purposes and how classics, in turn, affected their perceptions of reality. Furthermore, they are all 'critical classicists' through their respective efforts to explore "the nature of these processes of valuation."[68] It is only through hindsight that we can track these changes.

In this Conclusion, I want to finish by looking forward to see where value can be found next in the tradition, and whether that value can be considered a form of 'post-classicism' – or, perhaps 'post-classism'.[69] Personally, I believe that new value can be found by using classics to highlight "the subjugated position of women in contemporary society through analogies to classical myths from past"[70] and in the use of subaltern classics to "denote an anti- and post-colonial tradition of engaging with the classics in sympathy with the dispossessed, the pre-proletariat, the colonised and with minority cultures."[71] This shows, as with the formation of the tradition, that "valuation has a present, but also a past and future"[72]

Hibernian Philhellenism is the name of the specific form of the untraditional tradition in Ireland, and I believe its members enact a type of "radical classicism."[73] I consider this idea of 'radical classicism' in Ireland as beginning with Oscar Wilde. Wilde used classics to shape and define his own life, and not just to elevate his artistic work. Now that classical allusions and references are no longer code-words meant to silence things like

[65] Ibid: 9.
[66] Porter, 2021: 128.
[67] Delaney, 2008: 15.
[68] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 5.
[69] See The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020.
[70] Dedebas, 2013: 256.
[71] Greenwood, 2019: 580.
[72] The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020: 17.
[73] Hall, 2022: 2. Edith Hall explains that "the term 'radical classicism' is intertwined with 'black classicism,' which emerged in relation to African-American authors' engagement with ancient authors and with the white ruling-class' invention of an American classical tradition in the cauldron of eighteenth-century slavery debates" (Ibid: 12). That is not to equate the experience of African-American slaves to the white-Irish experience, it is to reiterate the place of 'radical classicism' among subaltern people.

sexuality (though they certainly retain their relevance in issues of colonialism, gender, slavery, and race), the new form of radical classicism will be to make further change in the discipline, in its legacy and its future. As Colm Tóibín uses classics to comprehend different concerns about Irish identity and social history, so too does Marina Carr. Marina Carr existed outside the bounds of this thematic interrogation of 'cultural paternal influence' in Hibernian Philhellenism, but she stands as a clear example of what is next in this study. Whereas Tóibín bridges the gap between a model of 'tradition' and one of 'reception', Marina Carr is more firmly linked to that of reception. However, both show the progress in that direction through how they set "a new text to vibrate with an ancient one,"[74] through their infusion of their own contextual strands and themes.

It is a well-regarded phenomenon that the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have heralded the advent of a new demand for feminist retellings of Greek myth and literature. This is pervasive globally and it is an "interesting but comprehensible paradox that classical texts have achieved a high profile in contemporary literature at a time when fewer people than ever can read these works in the original languages."[75] No one has done it in such a fundamentally Irish manner as Marina Carr. Carr is one of the most prolific contemporary Irish dramatists, known for recasting Greek female characters within "a male-dominated dramatic tradition in Irish literature."[76] Eda Dedebas has identified two main contradictory yet co-existent features of Carr's revisioning of Greek myths: they are 'conservative' in how they uses "the story line and some of the concepts such as destiny, fate and necessity drawn from Greek tragedies,"[77] and they are 'innovative' in how they show "extreme violence and destruction on stage (unlike Greek drama), which eventually leads to a creative act."[78] To these, I propose, we should add a third: they are essentially comparative. Through applying an Irish lens and "by bringing Greek myths and problems in a contemporary context, she elucidates the ancient texts."[79] The canon from which they are drawn, and her use of global themes, means that the Irish stage is by no means the only place for them.

Carr's work is of relevance to the era of Hibernian Philhellenism that we exist in now as it opens up "the possibility for reading and rewriting the past and [builds] up an

[74] Kiberd, 2020: 33.
[75] Harrison, 2009: 1. See also Goldhill, 2002.
[76] Dedebas, 2013: 248.
[77] Ibid: 249.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid: 269.

agency rooted in the destruction of the past."[80] I do not consider this 'destruction' to be negative. Rather, it is a process that allows historically hidden and silenced voices to find community in the reception of ancient materials. Carr's 'Midland Tragedies', in particular her 1998 work, *By the Bog of Cats*,[81] is a perfect example of how she enters "old myths from new angles."[82] It is a refashioning of Euripides' *Medea* and one of the most explicit examples of Carr re-casting "Greek heroines in a contemporary context."[83] In place of Medea, who in antiquity was considered a dangerous and unpredictable 'barbarian', Hester Swane is the protagonist. She is a Traveller woman who lives on the 'Bog of Cats' (a fictional area of bogland in the Midlands of Ireland).[84] Instantly, Carr has related her contemporary character to Medea through their intersectional experience of 'Otherness' in society.

By the Bog of Cats was first performed in the Abbey Theatre in 1998.[85] Through her retelling of Euripides' *Medea*, Carr succeeds in "mak[ing] us understand the reasons behind the acts of violence that are committed in Greek tragedies."[86] She does this by resituating villainised figures like Medea in contemporary Ireland, and allowing her decisions a more nuanced exploration. Carr's characters still commit disturbing acts of violence. For example, in keeping with the myth of Medea, Hester Swane kills her brother, who she believes is trying to prevent her marriage. Unlike Medea, Hester does not kill Carthage (the father of her child)'s new wife, but she does kill her seven-year-old daughter, Josie, before she kills herself. Through her treatment of the story, Carr helps us realise Hester and Medea's agony and isolation.[87] Not only does Carr's use of ancient texts

[80] Ibid.
[81] Carr, 2004. Again, this gives us an example beyond the bounds of this thesis' critical theme of 'cultural paternal influence'. Marina Carr could be seen as a contemporary 'mother' of the tradition, but it is also noticeable that in this shift we also see more of a focus on mythic 'mothers' (Medea is the example here, but she has also looked to Clytemnestra in a number of guises, see Carr, 2002 and Carr, 2023), which adds to the movement away from male domination of the discipline – both in terms of production and subject matter.
[82] Randolph, 2012: 47.
[83] Ibid: 249; Euripides, 2008b.
[84] Here, 'Traveller' refers to a specific minority and an often prejudiced, ethnic group in Ireland. For discussions of Irish Traveller history, see ní Shuinéar, 2004; Gmelch and Gmelch, 1976; Gmelch and Gmelch, 2014; and Helleiner, 2000.
[85] Murphy, 2006: 389.
[86] Dedebas, 2013: 256. This is also the case in many of her other plays. For example, *Hecuba*, which looks at the eponymous figure (Carr, 2015; Euripides, 2009); *Ariel*, which loosely follows that of *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Carr, 2002; Euripides, 2008a); *Girl on an Altar*, which examines the *Oresteia* from Clytemnestra's perspective (Carr, 2023; Aeschylus, 2009a); and *The Mai*, which is based on Sophocles' *Electra* (Carr, 1995; Sophocles, 2008).
[87] In the play, Hester is being forced off the bog, something that has come to symbolise her identity: "Ah, how can I lave [sic] the Bog of Cats, everythin' I'm connected to is here. I'd rather die" (Carr, 2004: 11). The dialogue is written with an Irish 'Midlands' accent.

revitalise them, she also offers new perspectives on the acts of violence that take place within them. In her dialogue with the classics, Marina Carr especially explores "the culpability of a society that both knows and refused to know its own shadow side in relation to the suffering of women and children."[88]

It is a common practice to rely on the ancient world as a tool in which to deal with difficult contemporary issues. My central figures, particularly Wilde and Tóibín, use classical allusion in the same way that Adrienne Rich describes using formalism: "like asbestos gloves [that] allowed me to handle materials I couldn't pick up barehanded."[89] For Carr, it was difficult discussions about rural Ireland and the plight of Travellers in society in *By the Bog of Cats.*[90] A hundred years previously, Oscar Wilde was approaching antiquity in a similar way. Through simultaneously overt and veiled allusions, Wilde was able to articulate homosexuality (particularly in his poetry where we see frequent references to Hyacinth and Antinous) through the respected vehicle of Greek myth.[91] Although separated by 100 years, Wilde and Carr's approaches speak to Tóibín's recent observation (in his 2025 Foreword to a new edition of Oscar Wilde's *Stories for Children)* in how they make "use of an old form to emphasise [their] own originality."[92] I could have used the work of Seamus Heaney as an example of Irish interaction with subaltern classics instead of Marina Carr. To do so would also have further acknowledged how analysis of the Latin and Roman tradition is absent from this thesis. However, I decided to focus on Marina Carr instead as her work more obviously rejects the restrictive conditions that previously determined why this thesis was looking at cultural 'paternal' influence and not 'maternal'.

There can be no doubt that women have been written out of the history of classical traditions – whether as ancient figures, or as members of a discipline of classical reception. The purpose of this thesis was not to further contribute to this trend. Rather, it was to establish how Hibernian Philhellenism acted in this way thematically, so that in the future, it will be clear to observe how it changed. The theories being used to understand influence need further interrogation. This was clear from various discussions (and rejections) of the works of Freud, Jung, and Foucault. But it is important to acknowledge that while Tim Ingold offers a more comprehensive, modern, and less-gendered approach, Harold Bloom's

[88] Randolph, 2012: 50.
[89] Rich, 1972: 22.
[90] Carr, 2004: 17. Racial and prejudiced language directed at Hester Swane in the play attests to this: "I warned him about that wan, Hester Swane, that she'd get her claws in, and she did, the tinker. That's what yees [sic] are, tinkers" (Ibid).
[91] See esp. 'The Garden of Eros' (Wilde, 1997: 108) and 'The Sphinx' (Wilde, 1997: 142).
[92] Tóibín, 2025: 7 (in Wilde, 2025).

theories were heavily driven by study of a male tradition. Even on the surface, "Bloom's parricidal model of the Wunderkind completely ignores the female."[93] As I said, that fact certainly made these theories useful when looking at 'cultural paternal influence' as a critical theme and the family language of fathers and sons (in keeping with the family model), but it continued to erase an entire perspective of the tradition. Criticising Bloom is not to say that I discount his theories of influence, I still believe that the majority of what we have seen in Hibernian Philhellenism is agonistic. The difference is that I think that *agon* remains regardless of whether the figures are male or female – it is what they are respectively raging against that changes. For men, it may be their male predecessor. For women, it is the conception that their predecessor *has to be* male.[94] The colonial experience of Ireland is not the only qualification for 'subaltern classics', but also the position and persecution of women in a heavily patriarchal and religious society.

Re-thinking female contributors to the tradition of reception, as well as in the materials studied emphasises "alternative readings of the tradition, readings that reinterpret women's character, motivations and action, and that identif[ies] and challenge[s] sexist ideology."[95] This is the type of treatment we saw Tóibín give to Clytemnestra in *House of Names*, and (albeit much more briefly) Marina Carr afford to Medea in *By the Bog of Cats*. Both of these works, and Carr's oeuvre more generally, "attempt to bridge the gap between the Greek world view and the contemporary world,"[96] more specifically, the Irish contemporary world. In this way, these works serve a double function that speaks to the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism that we have seen elucidated in this thesis as a whole: "to re-think Greek mythology and texts and to throw light on contemporary issues."[97]

We are far from gender inequality being eradicated in the discipline. The recent restrictions placed on DEIs across universities in the United States by the Trump Administration make this glaringly apparent.[98] Historically, academia has been a male-

[93] Greensmith, 2020: 247.
[94] In a footnote, María Jesús Martínez Alfaro underlines this point: "there are no female figures against which a woman writer can react in an attempt to demarcate herself from them, since not only Bloom's but any literary canon among those traditionally proposed include no women writer's in addition, Bloom's theory reproduces very specifically the Oedipal conflict between *sons* and *fathers*, which makes it ultimately inapplicable to the case of women" (Alfaro, 1996: 282-283; italics original). For more on this idea see Hauser and Taylor, 2025a; Hauser and Taylor, 2025b.
[95] Alfaro, 1996: 283.
[96] Dedebas, 2013: 252.
[97] Ibid: 256.
[98] DEI stands for 'Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion'. The policies of the Trump Administration demand that universities cut their DEI initiatives or risk losing federal funding. See 'Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Reforms Accreditation to Strengthen Higher Education', 23rd Apil 2025; Anguiano, 24th April 2025.

dominated arena. It is especially telling that the first English translation of Homer's *Odyssey* by a woman was only published in 2017.[99] But there is now a "new ability of women to claim a position of power in postcolonial Irish culture,"[100] and in the discipline of classics. This ties directly into the role of our public intellectual too who, like women more generally, is attempting to challenge the historical patriarchal power and prestige attached to the classics. It is, in a way, an attempt to subvert Foucault's "power/knowledge relations"[101]; to allow us to hear both "the laugh of the Medusa"[102] and "the subaltern speak."[103]

Looking (Backward and) Forward on the Rope

This discussion has largely attempted to interrogate "nouns such as 'tradition', 'influence', 'legacy', and 'heritage'"[104] before putting them to use. Similarly, this thesis has questioned those who consider "'Greek' and 'classical' interchangeable words."[105] While it is definitely the case that "classicism cannot escape the paradoxes of its own definition,"[106] I do not suppose that the term 'Hibernian Philhellenism' is without its shortcomings. For example, it disregards the rich history of engagement with Latin sources and Roman material in Ireland (beyond how they contribute to the context that led to engagement with the Greek sources). As seen in the interrogation of terminology earlier, a Roman and Latin tradition should really be considered a tradition governed by its own conditions, instead of being encompassed by a not-so-all-encompassing term like 'classics'. Such problems, or what may appear on the surface as simplified or convenient binaries in the terminology and theorising around Hibernian Philhellenism can be explained by the simple fact that "the meeting of minds weaves a whole rope, but so long as life goes on there must always be loose ends."[107] These 'loose ends' are part of what makes Hibernian Philhellenism its own unique context.

[99] See Homer, 2018 (trans. Emily Wilson); Homer, 2023 (trans. Emily Wilson).
[100] Wilmer, 2005: 141.
[101] See Foucault, 1988; Foucault, 2020a.
[102] See Cixous, 1976.
[103] See Spivak, 1988.
[104] Arkins, 2005: 9.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Porter, 2006: 306.
[107] Ibid: 12. This idea of 'shortcomings' or 'binaries' was previously acknowledged in the Introduction when examining the strength of the 'paternal' relationships between the central figures in this study.

The idea of there being a 'tradition' at all has also been called into question by an analysis of the characteristics of reception studies. Many people have argued in favour of the idea of a 'democratic turn' in classics, however, Lorna Hardwick's belief that "there is not yet sufficient evidence to support the argument of a 'turn'"[108] proves my argument that we are currently in a space 'in between' 'tradition' and 'reception' (manifested here by Colm Tóibín). Instead, we should clarify that we are in the active process or 'turning', or 'entwining'. Acknowledging past models and past traditions is what allows us to move further towards 'reception', but doing so also creates 'loose ends' on the rope.

A way in which I like to view this study's 'gaps' or 'loose ends' is in similar terms to how Neil Sammells articulates the problems a study of Wilde presents:

> Rediscovering the Irish Wilde is not a matter of *excavation*, of scraping away the accretions of Englishness to reveal a Celtic core: it is, rather, a matter of recognizing alternative identities simultaneously maintained.[109]

The same way as the relationships (direct or indirect) between my central figures were not stand-alone or strictly defining ones, so too can this be the case in the tradition of Hibernian Philhellenism itself. There are always exceptions to the rule. There is more than one way to recognise these 'alternative identities simultaneously maintained'. In *The Portrait of Mr W.H.,* Wilde examines the dangers of "working purely by internal evidence"[110] and relying "not so much on demonstrable proof or formal evidence, but on a kind of spiritual and artistic sense, by which alone … could the true meaning of the poems be discerned."[111] There does not always need to be concrete proof, nor does a culture "make prior determination of its goals."[112] Rather there is a 'spiritual and artistic sense' – or, we could say, a "certain Greek kinship"[113] – that drives the formation of this tradition and the relationships of the members within it.

Perhaps this discussion will invite further study of the conditions of the Latin tradition. This is a study of how we can reconceive a Greek tradition, a Roman one needs its own consideration and its own name. This is where the problem of 'classical' comes in again as thousands of years of ancient civilisation and subsequent reception cannot be

[108] Hardwick, 2013: 31.
[109] Sammells, 1994: 369.
[110] Haslam, 2014: 44.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Goldhurst, 1955: 15.
[113] Synge, 1966: 365.

considered homogenous. Even today, "the attributes of classicism and the classical suffer from under-definition rather than from over-definition."[114] To an exploration of the 'untraditional tradition' of engagement with Latin and Roman materials in Ireland from the late nineteenth century to the present, I propose the name the 'Catholic-Roman Tradition', as the undeniable effect that the Catholic Church's monopoly on Latin had on subsequent reception of Roman materials cannot be denied … but that is for another day.

[114] Porter, 2006: 306.

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