

Introduction

Hellenism and Heresy



On December 7, 1909, twelve university students convened the inaugural meeting of the Cambridge Society of Heretics.¹ The immediate cause of the society's formation was a paper entitled "Prove All Things," penned by the master of Emmanuel College, Dr. W. Chawner. Read before the first meeting of the Religious Discussion Society, the paper rejected traditional Christianity and forwarded agnostic theories that prompted dons to rebuke the author for irresponsibly endangering young men's religious foundations while inspiring students to question long-held university rules such as mandatory chapel attendance. For the founding Heretics, Chawner's paper indexed a growing frustration among scholars and students with the mandates and limitations posed by Cambridge's centuries-long tie to the Anglican church, whose structures and principles had presided over all intellectual gatherings in the past.² Creating a forum for the inquiry of spiritual, aesthetic, and philosophical issues and rejecting in its bylaws "all appeal to Authority in the discussion of religious questions,"³ the Heretics established a firm challenge to the theological boundaries limiting intellectual progress, particularly in areas where scientific research was beginning to question Christian historiography and pose a threat to humanistic curricular tradition. As a protest against institutional policies, the Heretics' formation was not an isolated event but rather a reverberation of radical changes to scholarly tradition in preceding decades. Such changes included

2 the opening of the first women's colleges at Cambridge in 1869 (Girton) and 1871 (Newnham);⁴ the 1871 University Tests Act, allowing nonconformists to accept fellowships at Cambridge as well as Oxford; and the integration of archaeology into the Classical Tripos exams in the 1880s,⁵ which registered the legitimation of scientific study within what had previously been an exclusively literary and linguistic field. These changes within the university reflected still larger movements in Victorian society as a whole toward greater diversity in categories of knowledge on the one hand (represented by developments such as the Darwinian revolution, the growth of anthropology as a scientific field, and the celebration of technological progress, spectacularly exemplified in the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibitions) and a more inclusive population of knowers on the other (prompted by improvements in education for women and working-class children, rapid increases in literacy rates, and a subsequent burgeoning of newspapers, periodicals, and other popular reading material).

Charged with revolutionary fervor, the Heretics sought to reflect these larger social movements both through their unconventional treatment of subject matter and in the openness of their membership. In contrast to the exclusivity of previous scholarly societies such as the Cambridge Apostles, there was no limitation to membership numbers in the Heretics Society, and for the first time in Cambridge history, women were encouraged to join a university-wide association of intellectual debate. To emphasize the unorthodox nature of their subject matter and participants, the members invited Jane Ellen Harrison to be one of their two keynote speakers.⁶ The first woman ever to give university lectures at Cambridge (in 1898), Harrison had become, by 1909, one of the most controversial figures on campus. Her first major work as a university scholar, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), had openly challenged the text-based approach to the ancient world that dominated classical studies throughout the preceding century. The challenge was particularly sacrilegious at Cambridge, which had historically distinguished itself from its rival Oxford by its more rigorous focus on the technical details of translation.⁷ Since the *Prolegomena's* publication and integration into the Cambridge classics curriculum, Harrison had not only continued her efforts to extend Greek studies beyond the textual world but had unrelentingly attacked works by some of the most well-respected scholars in her developing subfield of ancient Greek religion. Such unabashed contrariness, combined with her dogged advocacy of unconventional theories, made Harrison a pariah in some scholarly circles and an idol in others.

At the time of the first Heretic gathering, Harrison was preparing a new edition of the *Prolegomena* and just beginning to conceive what would become her most inflammatory work of all: *Themis*, not to be published until 1912. She was reaching the height of her insurgency, and her inaugural address, later published as a pamphlet entitled "Heresy and Humanity," did not disappoint her expectant audience. "The word 'heretic' has still about it an emotional thrill—a glow reflected, it may be, from the fires at Smithfield, the ardours of those who were burnt at the stake for love of an idea," she began, expounding on the word with which she had christened the society:

Heresy, the Greek *hairesis*, was from the outset an eager, living word. The taking of a city, its *expugnatio*, is a *hairesis*; the choosing of a lot in life or an opinion, its *electio*, is a *hairesis*; always in the word *hairesis* there is this reaching out to grasp, this studious, zealous pursuit—always something personal, even passionate. . . . [H]airesis, what you choose for yourself, is opposed to *tyche*—the chance from without that befalls you by no will of your own. Only in an enemy's mouth did heresy become a negative thing. . . . The gist of heresy is free personal choice in act, and specially [*sic*] in thought—the rejection of traditional faiths and customs, *qua* traditional.⁸

Harrison's opening statement sought not only to ennoble the insurrectionary foundations of the society but also to further her ongoing campaign against the intellectual stagnation that she feared was settling on the university in general and in particular on the field of study to which she had devoted her life. One of the chief weapons in her private arsenal was the defamiliarization of ancient Greek, a study that had become a lightning rod for debate between tradition and progress in the Cambridge community by the end of the nineteenth century.⁹ Her address to the Heretics offers a glimpse of her subversive technique. In a parody of linguistic analysis that had become her rhetorical trademark, she proceeded through a series of tenuous associations, generalizations, and emotional interjections to extend a single Greek word into a personal narrative and a spiritual mission. In her hands, *hairesis* became a manifestation of her ideological ardor even as her speech enacted the rebellion and release prompted by her formulation of the term *heretic* into a banner of free choice in thought, belief, and action. For Harrison, for the Heretics,

- 4 and for a newly legitimized generation of scholars, *hairesis* celebrated the passionate pursuit of knowledge against a bulwark of tradition that insisted on its limitations. In the re-creation of a word, an old empire of thought begins to crumble and a new one emerges into being.

Heretical Hellenism shares the renascent energy that underlay the founding of the Heretics Society and the work of Jane Harrison, which I discuss in detail in chapter 4. It seeks to dismantle the prevalent notion that knowledge of and appreciation for Greek literature, history, and philosophy were restricted in the nineteenth century to upper-class men who were formally schooled in Greek and Latin, believed they were rightful inheritors of an ancient legacy, and regarded their classical knowledge as a basis of cultural authority. I suggest, on the contrary, that Greek literature and mythology were deeply entrenched in Victorian popular culture and played a significant—if frequently overlooked—role in shaping the lives and minds of a population that had little or no formal classical training but held diverse views of ancient Greece that had evolved from a sense of exclusion from traditional classical scholarship and had been shaped in opposition to mainstream perspectives on the ancient world. It would be disingenuous to imply, of course, that the most prominent nineteenth-century hellenophiles shared a monolithic view of ancient Greece or that orthodox Victorian Hellenism constituted a unified, dominant discourse. Rather, I suggest that the authors and works discussed here posited their interpretations and interactions with Greek material against what each perceived to be a limiting, hegemonic ideology. Orthodoxy, in other words, can be defined by the voices and ideas that it appears to exclude and subsequently can take on as many nuances as its heretical detractors. My larger intent, then, is not only to draw attention to neglected aspects of Victorian Hellenism but to extend the implications of its more familiar constructs.

Toward these ends, *Heretical Hellenism* focuses on the half century before the establishment of the Heretics Society and explores two interrelated aspects of nineteenth-century England's relationship to the ancient Greek world that have attracted limited critical attention: the circulation of Greek literature and history in popular culture and women's involvement in the expansion of Hellenism beyond the boundaries of traditional humanist study. These two discursive trajectories intersect at the juncture of popular culture's indispensable contribution to women's classical education. Barred from the formal schooling in Greek and Latin that was given by rote to middle- and upper-class boys, girls in the nineteenth century

had to satisfy their desire for classical knowledge through self-education—an endeavor that, for many, bore the urgency and excitement of sexual awakening. The late-Victorian poet and social critic August Webster wrote of female autodidacts:

[T]here have always been [women] . . . who have felt the restlessness of intellectual faculties unnaturally cramped, the weariness of unsatisfied hunger of mind, and who in their drawing-room life have envied their schoolboy brothers their teachers and tasks, their books and their hours set aside for using them, as a crippled invalid on a sofa may envy the healthy their fatigues. . . . The highest education offered women was no measure of the highest education they contrived to get, for women of the sort spoken of took a higher than was offered them—some of them, in fact, *stole* [*sic*] it, working surreptitiously over their brothers' discarded schoolbooks and hiding away treatises on metaphysics and astronomy as novelists make naughty heroines hide away French novels.¹⁰

The erotic appeal of forbidden knowledge suggested by Webster's comment clung heavily to the classics, which was seen as an exclusively male prerogative. While for boys, classical knowledge was a mandatory part of the curriculum, the attainment of the same knowledge for girls was heretical in the ways defined by Jane Harrison's speech, involving zealous, self-motivated, and independent pursuits of learning that transgressed into male territory. Victorian novels and biographies abound with stories of girls whose fascination with the classics evolves from envy of their male counterparts and of sisters who learn ancient languages on their own to help their brothers with their studies. But not every woman had access to—or interest in—a brother's schooling, as did the young Elizabeth Barrett and Augusta Webster, or a husband's manuscripts, as did Dorothea Brooke Casaubon, or even a classics primer, as did Florence Dombey and Maggie Tulliver. Quite often, as in the case of Charlotte Brontë, women's exposure to the classics came from articles, translations, and reviews in popular journals and periodicals; their quest for elusive classical knowledge led them to popular reference works such as Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* (1788) and widely available translations by Dryden, Pope, Chapman, and later authors. Such texts, while still marking the classics as a distinctly masculine body of knowledge, nevertheless made ancient myth

6 and history accessible to a more diverse audience. In a bibliographical survey of English translations of Greek works, Finley Foster notes that “[t]he nineteenth century, quantitatively at least, is the most important period in the history of Greek translation. . . . More than half of the total number of translations [from Greek texts] printed between 1484 and 1916 were published during these years.”¹¹ Foster goes on to point out that introductions to classical works proliferated in the mid-nineteenth century with collections such as A. J. Valpy’s *Family Classical Library* (1830–34), which placed an emphasis on Greek rather than Latin literature, and Bohn’s *Classical Library* (1848–1912), which offered a more extensive selection than Valpy’s and featured a large number of new translations.¹² Of the former, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* commented, “Mr. Valpy has projected a *Family Classical Library*. The idea is excellent, and the work cannot fail to be acceptable to youth of both sexes, as well as to a large portion of the reading community, who have not had the benefit of a learned education.”¹³ The *Weekly Free Press* also remarked on the *Family Classical Library*’s extension of classical knowledge to women: “We see no reason why this work should not find its way into the boudoir of the lady, as well as into the library of the learned. It is cheap, portable, and altogether a work which may safely be placed in the hands of persons of both sexes.”¹⁴ Together with these concerted efforts to extend classical education to the lay reader, the proliferation of periodicals throughout the nineteenth century, the rise in literacy rates, and the increased leisure time of the middle classes made the popular press a major source for the distribution of knowledge about the ancient world.

Periodical articles held a particular appeal for women and other lay readers because, unlike textbooks and classics primers, these articles were often immediately relevant to current events, many of which centered on Greece as a site of both past cultural achievement and present political concern. England’s purchase of the Elgin Marbles in 1817, the Greek revolution of 1821, and new hypotheses concerning the historical reliability of Homer’s epics inspired numerous articles about Greek literature, culture, and history, all of which were written to appeal to the interests of the common reader. For instance, a series of articles in 1834 defending the unity of the *Odyssey* in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* strives to make Odysseus’s longing for Ithaca comparable to the Victorians’ respect for sanctities of hearth and home.¹⁵ Even articles that engage in erudite argumentation (for or against the authenticity of the Homeric works, for instance) include translated citations of Greek works and analogies to

which any reader—but particularly a female reader—might relate. An 1869 article in the *Contemporary Review* entitled “The Antiquity of the Homeric Poems” denounces the idea that “the unity of a character in an Odysseus or an Achilles was something like that in a child’s doll, where one artist fashions the waxen bust, another the sawdust carcass, a third the flaxen wig, and so on.”¹⁶ While the doll analogy reinforces this writer’s point that the art of epic construction is neither juvenile nor mechanical, it nevertheless extends itself to common understanding. If, as George Eliot suggested in *Middlemarch*, the study of ancient mythologies can be a deeply isolating task that removes withered scholars from the nourishing vibrancy of living history, the periodical press and other facets of popular culture ensured that representations of the ancient world remained relevant to modern concerns and accessible to the popular imagination.

The piecemeal knowledge that women received from periodicals and other popular sources certainly left large gaps of knowledge that in turn fostered intellectual insecurities. Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Villette* (1853) famously describes the laborious process by which she pieces together the scraps of her classical knowledge to complete an assigned essay for her teacher: “[T]he knowledge was not there in my head, ready and mellow; it had not been sown in Spring, grown in Summer, harvested in Autumn, and garnered through Winter.”¹⁷ Lucy’s self-consciousness about her lack of formal classical training gestures obliquely at the organic nature of men’s classical knowledge—which was made integral to the development of the male mind through systematic education. Women’s sense of their exclusion was particularly keen when it came to Greek knowledge, owing to the difference in the alphabet and the greater unavailability of the language in common discourse. Even Elizabeth Barrett, who knew enough Greek to translate famously difficult Aeschylean tragedy and to correspond with Robert Browning in ancient Greek, expressed insecurities about her mastery of the language. Undoubtedly reflecting the poet’s sense of inadequacy and amateurism, Romney Leigh in *Aurora Leigh* sneeringly dismisses the eponymous heroine’s attempts at the ancient language as “lady’s Greek without the accents.”¹⁸ The insecurities of these female autodidacts were echoed in the sentiments of those women lucky enough to attend university, many of whom were learning Latin and Greek for the first time. Margaret Merrifield, one of the first Newnham students and a close friend of Jane Harrison, wrote to her father in 1876 about a friend who “gets very ‘depressed’ over her work [in Latin and Greek] and comes to me to be consoled. [Her] coach [said]

8 that she was 'very sharp but hopelessly inaccurate.' She was in a most melancholy state at the news, especially as she knows it is true. She gets at the general sense of a passage at once, and goes on with a sublime disregard for gender, number and case."¹⁹ Newly accepted within the perimeter of an academic world where technical accuracy in translation was a measure of intellectual worth, the first women classicists were often subjected to the undisguised contempt of male tutors who thought little of their innate linguistic capacities and forced them to question their fitness for higher education.

But the patchwork classical education that women acquired outside of institutions and their tendency to bypass grammatical technicalities for "the general sense" also engendered a way of knowing that differed productively from the classical inheritance of men, which was based on rigid grammatical training and extensive memorization, all aimed at preparing middle- and upper-class boys for enfranchisement into exclusive social and political discourses. Commenting on the result of a mandatory Greek education for Victorian men, Frank Turner writes that "discussions of Greek history, religion, literature, and philosophy provided ready vehicles for addressing the governing classes of the country. . . . Discussions of Greek antiquity provided a forum wherein Victorian writers could and did debate all manner of contemporary questions of taste, morality, politics, religion, and philosophy."²⁰ The situation that Turner describes for the Greek foundations of Victorian culture applied exclusively to men, for whom classical training was a basis for political and social leadership. Indeed, as Turner notes, examinations for the Home Civil Service, the Indian Civil Service, and the Royal Military Academy all included sections of Greek translation. For women, Greek knowledge held far-less-ambitious goals, if no less influence. Isobel Hurst states that women "had one advantage over [men] who found the excessive repetition and grammatical analysis in the classroom dull and sickening: they did not experience alienation from classical literature . . . but could 'feel,' 'relish,' and 'love' poetry" (12). My findings suggest that women did feel deeply alienated from classical literature because of their lack of formal training, but this sense of alienation is precisely what made the classics—Greek in particular—so alluring and such a powerful means of self-expression. For women whose talents, aspirations, and characters led them to question social convention, ancient Greek and the distinctly alien world and foreign literature it offered provided a means of telling very different stories about themselves than the narratives prescribed by their own society.

These stories allowed for the exercise of “passion, intellect, [and] moral activity” that Florence Nightingale, home-schooled in Greek, famously declared were suppressed in a society that disapproved of women’s autonomy and serious intellectual pursuit.²¹ The tantalizingly subversive potential of Greek knowledge is amply demonstrated by the three focal figures of this book. Jane Harrison’s love of Greek arose from an early attraction to its forbidden allure, and she later used her renegade approach to the ancient world as an instrument for defining her powerfully liminal status in academia. The young Charlotte Brontë arranged her scattered knowledge of Greek myth into a literary mosaic that challenged the imposing mandate of a respected classics professor and established the foundations of her literary aspirations. Greek history and mythology offered George Eliot a way of thinking through and justifying women’s intellectual legacy during a crucial moment in her ascent to the position of Victorian sage. For each of these women, the value of Greek stemmed from a highly individual passion—a heretical desire to push the boundaries of knowledge beyond what each perceived to be an alienating and exclusive classical authority. The pursuit of these personal passions resulted in texts and ideas that evolved alternative approaches to the ancient world and developed applications of ancient literature and ideas to Victorian culture that subverted the traditional status of the classics as an elite, exclusively masculine field of knowledge.

While women experienced a deeply conflicted yet productive relationship with both Latin and Greek through the nineteenth century, the latter generated the most frustration and held the greatest allure, thanks largely to its dominance in Victorian culture. As David Ferris and others have recognized, Greek literature and art began to exert a strong influence on British thought in the latter part of the eighteenth century, owing particularly to the influence of German writers and thinkers such as Johann Winckelmann, whose *History of Ancient Art* (1764) and *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) helped to establish Greece, in Ferris’s words, “as a reference point for all subsequent art and literature” and “generated a view of antiquity as the model of a general cultural context in which the aesthetic served as a mode of historical knowledge.”²² Frank Turner juxtaposes the influence of Greek antiquity and the dominance of Roman literature and ideas in the first half of the eighteenth century: “Greek antiquity began to absorb the interest of Europeans in the second half of the eighteenth century when the values, ideas, and institutions inherited from the Roman and Christian past became

- 10 problematical. . . [T]he turn to Greece on the part of scholars, critics, and literary figures constituted an attempt to discern prescriptive signposts for the present age in the European past that predated Rome and [Catholic] Christianity" (2). Christopher Stray adds to this analysis of England's turn from Latinity to Hellenism the argument that the latter reflected a new spirit of individualism, social instability, and return to nature that dominated the Romantic ideal. "If Rome claimed respect because of its universality," Stray writes, "in an age of romantic particularism Greece asserted a superior status because it symbolized the power of the individual as a unique source of original value" (*Classics Transformed*, 15). The hellenophilia adopted by art critics and poets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries continued to develop in the Victorian age, acquiring more practical applications for England's educational, social, and political structures. Greek learning became a main point of both emphasis and contention in the country's evolving education system; revisionary histories of ancient Greece posited contending views of antiquity's relation to modernity, and these in turn yielded debates about the significance of Athenian democracy to Victorian political ideals.²³

Although Victorian Hellenism as defined by its more prominent representatives does not constitute a monolithic body, previous studies have established the predominance of humanism within it as a foundation and guiding philosophy. As Turner points out, "the critical moral tradition of humanism provided the primary channel through which the civilization of ancient Greece became transformed into a useful past for a large portion of the educated British public" in the nineteenth century (*Greek*, 15). To enable a better understanding of the nature and scope of Victorian humanistic Hellenism—as well as the limitations of this tradition—a brief review of the roots of the term will be useful. Humanism, as Paul Oskar Kristeller points out, has a complex history involving various transmogrifications through the ages. The term *humanista* referred, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to a literary scholar trained in grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy and conversant with the classical origins of these disciplines. In 1808, F. J. Niethammer coined the term *Humanismus* to emphasize the importance of Greek and Latin in the secondary education curriculum, in opposition to the encroachment of scientific knowledge.²⁴ The application of humanism to Victorian Hellenism stems from an integration of these Renaissance and Romantic roots to describe, in Turner's words, an "ethical enterprise" involving "the moral or normative use of the past as a guide to the human condition in

the present" (*Greek*, 15). This concept of the relationship between the Hellenic past and Victorian present is most famously expressed by John Henry Newman's idea of a liberal education. For Newman, Greek learning was fundamental to the conservative educational model that he sought to preserve against the increasingly utilitarian concerns of an expanding empire. In his *Idea of a University*, a collection of lectures delivered in 1852 at the Catholic University of Dublin, Newman expressed his nostalgia for the "time that Athens was the University of the world," and at the beginning of his discourse "Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning," he lamented, "It were well if the English, like the Greek language, possessed some definite word to express, simply and generally, intellectual proficiency or perfection, such as 'health,' as used with reference to the animal frame, and 'virtue' with reference to our moral nature. I am not able to find such a term. . . . The consequence is that, on an occasion like this, many words are necessary, in order, first, to bring out and convey what surely is no difficult idea in itself,—that of the cultivation of the intellect as an end."²⁵ Newman thus envisioned ancient Greece as presenting the spiritual intensity, moral purity, and intellectual focus that the Oxford Movement attempted to recapture for the modern world. His educational agenda took for granted the availability of ancient Greece as a reduplicable ideal of perfect culture. Not only did Greek serve as an instrument for disciplining the mind to intellectual proficiency, but ancient Athens stood for a time before science (defined by Newman as a category of knowledge rather than a specific discipline) was retrenched from its reference to mental perfectibility to a focus on external phenomena. This shift of focus was accompanied by a corresponding superfluity of language that evaded the concept of knowledge for its own end. By expressing his vision of the modern university in terms of an Athenian ideal, Newman attempted to claim the school of Hellas as a lost British legacy. If the superior Greek linguistic system represented a larger cultural heritage, then the study of Greek language, with its streamlined precision of thought and expression, ought to have broader cultural repercussions in restoring the value of purely intellectual ideas to a modern world overly concerned with external subject matter.

The assignment of cultural value to liberal knowledge that has no practical application or significance tended to elevate Greek above Latin, which still functioned as a living language in the church and in law. In 1877, W. Y. Sellar observed that "[f]amiliarity with Latin literature is probably not less common relatively to familiarity with the older [Greek]

12 literature. The attraction of the latter has been greater from its novelty, its originality, its higher intrinsic excellence, its profounder relation to the heart and mind of man."²⁶ The claim for Greek's interiority gestures at the important fact that while Latin was the language of the Catholic mass, Greek was the language of the New Testament. This distinction was not to be missed by a Protestant nation recently recovering from the turmoil of the 1850 Papal Aggression and the midcentury Oxford Movement.²⁷ In 1855, Henry Alford, dean of Canterbury, wrote, "No other language will ever express the meaning of God's Spirit as it may be seen to be expressed and known by those who read the New Testament in the original Greek. . . . Is it worthy of our Protestant position . . . that while we cry 'Give the Bible to all,' we should suffer it, in its depth and glory and beauty, to remain a dead letter to ourselves?"²⁸ Richard Jenkyns notes that there was necessarily a tension between Victorians' Christianity and their hellenophilia, but he also acknowledges that writers' attempts to use the former to justify the latter contributed to Greece's centrality in Victorian thought. It is perhaps ironic, given the importance of Greece in Newman's educational and cultural agendas, that his conversion to Catholicism should coincide with the valorization of Greek as a reaffirmation of Protestant national identity. Nevertheless, the irony reminds us that Newman's conversion was in the first place prompted by what David Delaura has called Newman's attempt to install "an ideal of totality, comprehensiveness, inclusiveness, at a time when the image of the distinctively human was being either fragmented or radically reduced."²⁹ The centrality of Greek both in what Delaura calls Newman's "theological humanism" and in the Protestant backlash against Catholic influences emphasizes the malleability of Greece's symbolic signification and thus its adaptability to various educational and moral agendas. In the area of religion, the more that Greek—as a language, as a body of literature, and as a symbolic structure—was removed from the daily concerns of modern life, the stronger became its claim to an individual's private spiritual intercourse. Indeed, the same fluidity of meaning that made Greek a ready vehicle for Newman's educational program and for Protestant nationalism also suited it for the diverse personal and social aspirations of the woman writers examined in this book.

The malleability of Greek as a symbolic structure is perhaps even more forcefully demonstrated in the writings of Newman's disciple Matthew Arnold, whose definition of Hellenism creates a transhistorical phenomenon that both evokes and attempts to resolve the implicit tension between

Christian and ancient Greek historiographies. Arguing against the paralyzing effects of an overly stringent Protestant conscience on intellectual development and culture, Arnold stated in his preface to *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), "Now, and for us, it is a time to Hellenise, and to praise knowing; for we have Hebraised too much, and have over-valued doing."³⁰ *Culture and Anarchy* neatly reconciles the religious tensions posed by hellenophilia by seeing Hellenism as representative of an interior, intellectual development forming a necessary dialectical relation to Christian morality. Suffering from an overemphasis on Puritanical moral stringency, the country needed, in Arnold's estimation, a Hellenic ideological expansion that could only be realized through the formation of an elite establishment that would determine standards of behavior and guide the judgments of the nation at a moment when the human mind was becoming overwhelmed with an accumulating mass of facts: "[T]he literature of ancient Greece is, even for modern times, a mighty agent of intellectual deliverance; even for modern times, therefore, an object of indestructible interest," Arnold wrote in "On the Modern Element in Literature."³¹ Arnold's consideration of Hellenism as a salvational force emphasizes the importance of the ancient Greek world not only to the general notion of culture but also as the basis for a set of spiritual assumptions rhetorically manipulated into a valorization of liberal education. In an 1882 response to T. H. Huxley's defense of the cultural value of a purely scientific education, Arnold asserted, "The instinct for beauty is set in human nature, as surely as the instinct for conduct. If the instinct for beauty is served by Greek literature and art as it is served by no other literature and art, we may trust to the instinct of self-preservation in humanity for keeping Greek as part of our culture. We may trust to it for even making the study of Greek more prevalent than it is now."³² Arnold's words here not only offer a defense of Greek studies but also forward a claim for the intrinsicity of Greek culture to human existence, transforming the fragmentary reality of an antique civilization into a holistic ideal for the preservation of modern culture. The conditional "if" that aligns Greek literature and art with the "instinct for beauty" initiates an ideological substitution that the latter half of the statement takes as justification for a spiritually based political agenda. The tangible referent of "Greek literature and art" is made to stand for an intangible impulse not merely within the logic of the sentence but as a practical educational policy. The question of culture, Arnold asserted, must be referred to the life impulse itself, and since the Greek world is the physical embodiment of

- 14 this impulse, its study in schools is a component of human vitality in general. The cultivation of a dead language is, in Arnold's theory, the restoration of an endangered aspect of the national and individual identity.

Newman's and Arnold's optimistic hopes for cultural regeneration through Greek revival were counterbalanced by darker visions in the latter part of the century as the Aesthetic movement grounded idealistic visions of Classical Greece in archaic sensuality and the Decadents sought in the Greeks a means both for celebrating the irrevocable fall-
enness of their own world and for challenging mid-Victorian religious and moral sensibilities. Walter Pater's essay on Johann Joachim Winckelmann, published first in the *Westminster Review* in 1867 and later collected in *The Renaissance* (1873), marked an important shift in the direction of Victorian humanistic Hellenism. Pater regarded Newman's formulation of Greece as "only a partial one. In it the eye is fixed on the sharp, bright edge of high Hellenic culture, but loses sight of the sombre world across which it strikes."³³ The Greek art that Pater viewed as an ideal model for his own time emerged, he argued, from a pagan sentiment that was "beset by notions of irresistible natural powers, for the most part ranged against man" (*Renaissance*, 160). While Arnold saw Classical Greece as the embodiment of "sweetness and light" and a cultural model, Pater, in David Delaura's words, provided a "rich prehistory" (209) for Arnold's serene Hellenic world by celebrating an archaic union of sensual and mental apprehension: "[The Greek] mind has not learned to boast its independence of the flesh," Pater wrote, "the spirit has not yet absorbed everything with its emotions, nor reflected its own colour everywhere" (*Renaissance*, 164). Although Greece remained a cultural ideal for Pater, his attitude was a product of late-Victorian disillusionment and as such was unencumbered by Arnold's struggles both to reconcile paganism with Christianity and to posit a larger vision of cultural renewal. Rather, Pater appreciated the pagan sensuality of the Greeks as a reduplicable experience for "a small band of elite 'Oxonian' souls" seeking "detachment from the vulgar actualities of Victorian life" (Delaura, 230). Although the move from Arnold's Hellenism to Pater's may seem to describe a withdrawal from culture at large, one must remember that Arnold's injunction to "Hellenise" was targeted at an exclusive, highly educated audience—in his view, the only site of real culture—and that their humanism had evolved, as Delaura has argued, from the "shared sense that the highest organization of the human powers was 'aristocratic,' a privileged mode of perception endangered in a rapidly democratizing society" (xi).

The vision of Greece as a response to Victorian vulgarity also directs, though toward a different end, the Hellenism of the Decadents, of whom Algernon Charles Swinburne has often been taken as representative. A self-described disciple of Aeschylus whose work abounds with Greek allusions, translations, and adaptations, Swinburne transformed Hellenism from a vehicle to a grave-marker of the mid-Victorian quest for a coherent set of cultural values. Rather than looking to Greece as a way of mending or escaping the ills of his time, Swinburne sought in Greek myth and poetry an affirmation for his contradictory and tumultuous age. His work draws on Greek sources to challenge Christian moral assumptions and to expose as well as celebrate the sensuous, violent, and alternately destructive and creative energies of nature and human nature.

For the gods very subtly fashion
 Madness with sadness upon earth:
 Not knowing in any wise compassion,
 Nor holding pity of any worth[.]

Thus sings the Chorus in Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon" (1865).³⁴ Here and in his later Hellenic drama, "Erechtheus" (1876), Greek tragedy not only provides a structural model and narrative history for Swinburne but also, as Margot Louis and others have discussed, furnishes an ideology that comprehends both human suffering under the incomprehensible forces operating within and without the psyche and the spiritual strength that one must develop to endure such suffering. Although Swinburne's works raised debate in his own time and in ours about the accuracy of his Greek conceptions, such debate is less conclusive about the poet's authenticity than it is revealing of the malleability of Greece as a symbolic structure for later ages. The transcendent value that Newman and Arnold located in the rationality and clarity of Greek language and culture and Pater discovered in the unity of archaic sensibilities, Swinburne found in the Greek tragic outlook, which could provide for his own age a source of consolation if not of redemption.

Despite the discrepancies in their views of the Greeks, the Hellenisms of Newman, Arnold, Pater, and Swinburne—public school and Oxford men all—situate the Greeks firmly in elite, male domains of university, politics, and other venues of cultural authority. Arnold's references to Eton and "men of genius," as well as his numerous addresses to male contemporaries, clearly imply that if Greek art and literature are equated with

16 the human (and humanistic) instinct for intellectual development and social improvement, these instincts are gendered; women are distinctly excluded from negotiations of Hellenism's place in Victorian culture. Pater likewise relegated access to the Greek world to an elite male population able to apprehend "the subtlest principles of the Hellenic manner" (*Renaissance*, 154). Indeed, perhaps even more firmly than Arnold, Pater drew distinct boundaries around Greek knowledge as a privileged, masculine body. As Linda Dowling notes, "Pater would throughout a long lifetime of writing demonstrate by his very neutrality and urbanity that he was writing from within the great tradition of humanist thought. Yet his writing would always consist of a daring texture of covert allusions working continuously and unmistakably to demonstrate that the reiterated liberal claims for liberty, individuality, self-development, and diversity as the qualities capable of rescuing England are unintelligible unless viewed within the context of a Socratic eros of men loving men in spiritual procreancy."³⁵ For Pater, as Dowling persuasively argues, Hellenism became a defining element of male intellectual culture and social regeneration that implicitly but absolutely excluded women and the female mind. Even Swinburne, whose work challenges so many Victorian orthodoxies, whose poetry often celebrates the female creative force and ventriloquizes Sappho, crafted his allusions to and adaptations of Greek sources with the consciousness of exhibiting his scholarly prowess to proclaim himself both an inheritor of the classical tradition and a formidable opponent of other prominent cultural authorities. Although his irreverent attitude toward Victorian values might seem the antithesis of Arnold's, Swinburne—like Arnold, Newman, and Pater—grounded his authority as poet, cultural critic, and self-styled prophet of his age on a privileged knowledge of Greek language and literature that situated him firmly within a male intellectual tradition and, paradoxically, legitimized his transgressive ideas. As David Riede points out, "Swinburne's reliance on a classical tradition that had become an exclusively male inheritance . . . cut his most ambitious verse off from the expression of what might be called a female point of view."³⁶ The contention between self-legitimation through appeal to tradition and a seditious impulse toward individual expression that Riede identifies in Swinburne witnesses the fact that the classical heritage claimed by male writers also posed fundamental limitations on the ways in which they were able to express their relationship to history and to their own age.

Studies of Victorian Hellenism have by and large followed the dominant, humanistic channels through which Newman, Arnold, Pater, Swin-

burne, and other influential Victorian men constructed their relationship to the Greeks. Delaura's work as well as those of Richard Jenkyns and Frank Turner in the early 1980s are landmark studies in the field of Victorian Hellenism and focus predominantly on the male, elite associations of ancient Greek studies. Linda Dowling took the field in a different direction with *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1994) by exploring the counterdiscursive possibilities of Hellenism in the construction of male sexuality, but her work further reinforces the notion of Greek knowledge as a male institutional and social discourse. Within the past twenty years, however, critics such as Yopie Prins and Lorna Hardwick have begun to explore women's involvement in the translation and adaptation of Greek poetry, and their studies have posed a distinct challenge to the gendered and institutionalized concept of Hellenism that dominated earlier works. Their writings reveal that women used Greek knowledge to assert authority in the male-dominated fields of scholarship and publishing, to express subjectivities and sexualities disallowed by conventional Victorian gender ideologies, and to challenge the authoritative structures of knowledge represented by Newman, Arnold, and other prominent male writers. Such studies have shown Greek knowledge to be a multifaceted intellectual arena for the negotiation of women's roles in Victorian society and in literary history and have paved the way for such books as Isobel Hurst's recent *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics* (2006), which offers one of the first full-length studies of the influence of classics on women writers in the nineteenth century. While Hurst's book takes into account the influence of both Latin and Greek on women's writing, her work and other recent studies have shown the idea of "knowing Greek" to be, in Simon Goldhill's words, "a bitterly contested area of social and intellectual activity,"³⁷ particularly in the fraught arena of Victorian gender politics.

Heretical Hellenism contributes to this widening sphere of understanding about nineteenth-century Greek knowledge by studying the diffusion of Greek myth, literature, and history throughout Victorian popular culture. Previous discussions of women's relations to the ancient Greek world have tended to concentrate on women with reading knowledge of the language and the ability to translate or otherwise work closely with original texts. Such a focus carries the implication, however inadvertent, that women can relate productively to Greek sources only if they achieve the literary-linguistic expertise of their male counterparts and cultivate the stringent technical expertise that, for educators such as Newman,

18 testify to a superior quality of mind. In contrast, I focus on women who either did not know Greek or whose insecurities about their knowledge drove them to find means of interacting with Greek sources beyond close work with original texts. Their lives and works exemplify the intensely mediated nature of most women's interactions with Greek literature, history, and ideas in the nineteenth century and demonstrate the imaginative, counterdiscursive possibilities encouraged by such mediation. For these and other women with limited access to original texts, the translations, commentaries, and adaptations dispersed throughout popular culture offered a rich source of images and ideas from which to construct narratives of the Greek world that differed dramatically from the visions proffered by influential male critics. If, as I discuss above, Greek was an intensely malleable symbolic structure adaptable to the theories and agendas of various writers and scholars, it appeared even more so in the diffuse world of popular culture in which the heated debates, sensational re-creations, passionate commentary, and fragmentary translations of and about Greek sources revealed Greek knowledge to be a vexed discursive arena open to imaginative projection and creative interpretation.

For my exploration of the nature and origins of what I will call "popular Greek," each chapter of *Heretical Hellenism* uses one historical event or individual as a focal point for discussing broader questions about women's relationships to Greek in popular culture: How were the Greeks interpreted, adapted, and altered to appeal to the interests of a general audience? What were the cultural, ideological, and political contexts of these adaptations and alterations? How did women use the knowledge they acquired both as a means of self-reflection and as commentary on the world around them? Because of the often-piecemeal ways through which women acquired their Greek knowledge, generalizations about how women learned Greek risk inaccuracies; if they present histories of women's education, such as Rita McWilliams Tullberg's excellent study *Women at Cambridge* (1998), they often fail to consider the ways in which the vast majority of women acquired their knowledge. My own detailed study of individual writers' experiences of knowing Greek emphasizes the unique significance of Greek literature, mythology, and history for every woman who stitched them into the fabric of her imagination.

In addition, in this volume I explore more broadly the channels through which Greek was available to the lay Victorian readership. Studying venues of popular discourse such as the stage, periodicals, personal essays, and the novel, I argue that Greek studies, like many other

regimes of knowledge in the nineteenth century, was not limited to upper-class political, social, and cultural institutions but, to borrow a Foucauldian paradigm, was located in multiple centers of discourse. Those centers with which I am chiefly concerned have not warranted extensive discussion, owing to the incohesion of the Greek knowledge they proffer. References to Greek myth are scattered through popular novels and periodical literature; reproductions of Greek tragedies are absorbed into melodrama and sensationalism. But this dispersal testifies to the endemic nature of Greek knowledge in Victorian culture. These fragments of an ancient corpus invite and evidence the imaginative projections of Victorians in general and women in particular who hungered for alternative narratives and means of self-expression beyond the confines imposed on their minds and lives by strict nineteenth-century gender codes. Yopie Prins cogently articulates this process of fulfillment through reanimation of the ancient past in describing Sappho's work: "Out of scattered texts, an idea of the original woman poet and the body of her song could be hypothesized in retrospect: an imaginary totalization, imagined in the present and projected into the past."³⁸ For Prins, Sappho's extant work and her ineffable being trigger in her nineteenth-century readers and poetic inheritors a desire for completion that constitutes a process of self-realization. *Heretical Hellenism* argues that ancient Greece in general, as it was presented to the Victorian popular imagination, was a fragmented entity, fabricated from archaeological artifacts, contesting hypotheses and interpretations, and imaginative reconstructions. But its fragmentarity is precisely what constituted Greece's appeal; by filling in the lacunae of their knowledge with their ways of imagining the Greek world, the women in this book used their unconventional knowledge to challenge the foundations of a humanist regime and its assumptions about the uniformity of knowledge.

The circumstances and consequences of Medea's rise to popularity on the mid-Victorian stage exemplify the power of ancient Greek myth and literature both to appeal to the Victorian imagination at large and to destabilize fundamental gender assumptions. As a study of Medea's evolution on and beyond the London stage in the mid to late nineteenth century, chapter 1 argues that the rising culture of sensationalism helped to launch Medea's career and that various adaptations of Euripides' tragedy throughout the 1850s, '60s, and '70s both challenged the Victorian objection to presenting women in a public, criminal context and heightened awareness of the social pressures driving women to commit violent

20 acts. A focus of this chapter is Ernest Legouv e's 1856 adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, the first serious attempt to re-create the Greek tragedy for a nineteenth-century audience. While riding the tidal wave of sensationalism prompted by such events as the Maria Manning murder trial, Legouv e's play also drew attention to pressing issues of abandonment and infanticide while prompting debates about women's maternal instincts. Scripts, theater reviews, and newspaper articles reveal Medea's role in inspiring and recording a greater sensitivity to the complexity of women's psyches, a resistance to labeling female offenders as aberrant or monstrous, and the public's growing acceptance of a heroine who challenges social mandates. Late-century adaptations of the Medea story by poets Augusta Webster and Amy Levy culminated in Medea's evolution from sensational stage object to a voice for expressing previously censored subjectivities.

Chapter 2 is an examination of how the presentation of Greek epic and tragedy in Victorian periodicals shaped the subjectivity of one particular author: Charlotte Bront e. I begin by examining the popular treatment of two important discussions about ancient Greece in the first half of the nineteenth century—the Homeric Question, surrounding the identity and genius of Homer, and the relation of ancient Greek tragedy to the developing aesthetic of realism. Both of these issues preoccupied Victorian critics and had a profound influence on Bront e's developing concept of her creative genius and of the realist narrative to whose development she would contribute. My discussion focuses on two essays from Bront e's juvenilia: "The Fall of Leaves" and "Athens Saved by Poetry," both of which borrow images, phrases, and ideas directly from articles about Homer and Greek tragedy in Bront e's favorite journals. These essays reveal that Bront e used her piecemeal Greek knowledge to argue for her creative genius, to craft persuasive arguments against the strict Aristotelian principles of her Belgian mentor M. Constantin Heger, and to develop a distinct aesthetic of female interiority. The chapter concludes by examining Bront e's incorporation of Odyssean references in her last novel, *Villette*, which uses a Homeric framework of homesickness to express the author's increasing sense of abandonment and loneliness in the final years of her life. A study of the popular journals read by Bront e emphasizes Victorians' passionate interest in ancient Greece in the first half of the nineteenth century, while Bront e's creative adaptation of popular debates reveals the importance of Greek issues in shaping her imagination and ideological convictions.

Chapter 3 is an assessment of George Eliot's novel *Romola* (1862) as a direct challenge to the humanist legacy that the Victorians inherited from the Renaissance and identified with the reanimation of ancient Greek culture and ideas. I argue that Eliot challenges the formalized and masculine ideas of knowledge resulting from the Renaissance's institutionalization of Greek knowledge, a legacy inherited by her culture. In *Romola's* incorporation of Greek mythology, Eliot identifies another strand of Greece's legacy consistent with what she called "moral sympathy"—an innate desire for intellectual and emotional connectedness to which women are particularly sensitive because of their traditional exclusion from formal, institutionalized discourse. Studying such influences on Eliot as George Grote's theory of the "mythopoeic imagination" in his *History of Greece* (1846–56), the evolving field of mythography, and England's purchase of the Elgin Marbles, I suggest that Eliot presents in *Romola* not only a justification for women's right to the Greek intellectual legacy but also an argument for the importance of recognizing this legacy to rescue her own age from materialism, personal ambition, and the sequestration of knowledge.

Chapter 4 is a consideration of Jane Harrison and the crucial moments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when institutionalized knowledge of classics was radically changing under pressure from new fields of study such as archaeology and archaic religion. Harrison argued throughout her career that the only way to save classics from obsolescence was to harness it to the engine of individual passion and creativity. Leaving a lasting impression on both Cambridge classicists and twentieth-century writers, scholars, and artists including Gilbert Murray, Virginia Woolf, and Roger Fry, Harrison's life epitomizes the impact that one individual can have on scholarship through the force of her controversial ideas and powerful imagination. Tracing Harrison's development from a young girl longing to learn Greek to her first years at Newnham College and finally to her position as a prominent lecturer in Greek art and archaic religion, I argue that the unorthodox approach that Harrison took to ancient Greece and her incendiary influence at Cambridge are what preserved her longevity and the vibrancy of the field to which she devoted almost the whole of her adult life.

Heretical Hellenism is not aimed at being a comprehensive history of women's interactions with Greek in the nineteenth century. Rather, through representative case studies, it offers a narrative of how and why Greece held such appeal for Victorian women writers. Contrary to traditional

22 humanist views, it did so not because Greece offered a parallel to the Victorian world but because Greek study provided a means of questioning assumptions about gender, religion, and the boundaries of legitimate knowledge. The women discussed in this volume created a form of Hellenism that contributed to the increasing autonomy and intellectual authority of their sex in the late nineteenth century, but perhaps even more important is that they demonstrate, for our own age, the malleability of the ancient world. This malleability, as Jane Harrison believed, is the key to the survival of the classics into modernity. Indeed, it was precisely because classics in Britain was firmly tied to conservative, primarily androcentric, cultural ideals that the discipline was in danger of becoming obsolete toward the end of the nineteenth century as critics such as T. H. Huxley, who endorsed a more practical, scientific education, openly criticized the elitism fostered by a "liberal education" grounded on the literary-linguistic study of Greek and Latin. Huxley's doubts about educational tradition were confirmed, as I discuss in the afterword, during the course of the First World War, when German tactical victories were credited to their superior technological and scientific training. Although the value of Greek learning suffered a setback in the first part of the twentieth century, Greek did not become entirely obsolete, because it was expanded to accommodate scientific approaches to the ancient world, being opened up to new fields such as archaeology, anthropology, and sociology and extended to a new range of writers and scholars. What is striking about the salvation of Greek and of classics in general at the turn of the twentieth century is that it did not depend on a detachment from personal, revolutionary agendas and on a disinterested concern to get at the truth of an ancient civilization. Rather, the modern discipline of classics was preserved and shaped throughout the nineteenth century and beyond by methodological and ideological conflicts between individuals with intensely personal investments in their limited and often biased perceptions of the ancient world.³⁹ The rich, passionate heterodoxy of Victorian Hellenism is precisely what I endeavor to reveal in this book. Drawn from sources scattered throughout popular culture, *Heretical Hellenism* emphasizes the unstable, malleable nature of nineteenth-century Greek knowledge and reveals it to be a more diverse phenomenon in Victorian England than has been previously supposed. This same diversity and capacity for reconceptualization is what is preserving classics from what some see as an impending obsolescence.⁴⁰ Now, in an age when Greek and Latin texts are increasingly read and taught in translation and stu-

dents are more often exposed to classical sources through popular culture than through formal schooling, it is my hope that *Heretical Hellenism* can provide a historical rationale for a more expansive definition of classical knowledge and offer an interdisciplinary heuristic for understanding the place of classics both in the nineteenth century and in our own time. 23