

VESTIGIAL POWER

ROBERT CRAWFORD



CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2016

ISSN 2041-3548

VESTIGIAL POWER

ROBERT CRAWFORD



CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2016

Published by the Classical Association, the largest classical organisation in Great Britain. It has a world-wide membership, and unites the interest of all who value the study of the languages, literature and civilisations of Ancient Greece and Rome. Annual fee for full membership (which carries with it many benefits) is currently only £17, or £15 for student membership, or £125 for Life Membership after the age of 65. For further information contact The Secretary, Classical Association Office, Park House, 15-23 Greenhill Crescent, Watford WD18 8PH, or visit www.classicalassociation.org.

Cover illustration by Neil Barrett, from a black-figure cup by Exekias showing the god Dionysus sailing triumphant in his ship.

Robert Crawford has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

© Robert Crawford 2016

Printed in Great Britain
By Remous Ltd.
Sherborne
DT9 5EP
www.remous.com

in memory of Rosemary Bryce Stevenson

(1960-2011),

a laughing student of Humanity and Greek

VESTIGIAL POWER

Classics is a vestigial subject. It depends on physical vestiges – papyri, broken inscriptions, potsherds, incomplete texts, not to mention lost works known only through mentions in surviving fragments. Most, though not all, Greek and Latin writings had their origins before the printing press, before mechanical reproduction granted texts abundant safety in numbers. That recurring trope in poems about libraries, the fire at Alexandria, would not have been anything like such a calamity in an age of printed books.¹ But that fire heightened and epitomized a sense of the Classical as the vestigial. What we have are not just literary works, but also – and outnumbering them – partial texts, orts, fragments of incomplete and lost works, vestiges. To be a Classicist, much more than, say, to be a scholar of English, is to be close to, conscious of, even constituted by the vestigial.

We see this all too bloodily. We witness magnificently hybrid Classical temples at Palmyra being blasted apart. We see shattered stones, fragments, vestiges, alongside body parts, and can only hope some survive. On a less visceral, but also unsettling level, in 2014 Athens became the cynosure of European attention. Yet during that Greek crisis few voices were raised to ask how the European project would appear without the culture that more than any others gave us the foundation stones of democracy. When the Classical Association's greatest president, T. S. Eliot, that lover of fragments of Heraclitus, spoke in 1942 about 'The Classics and the Man of Letters', he championed 'the need of a cultural unification in diversity of Europe', emphasizing that there still had to be 'a place for Greek'.² Yet in 2014 the talk was very little about the place of Athens and Greek culture in the wider values of European democracy; it was all about which currency Greece might use. Around that same time, also, closer to home in the Athens of the North the talk around independence too often was not

¹ See Robert Crawford, 'The Library in Poetry', in Alice Crawford, ed., *The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 193-4.

² T. S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 160, 145.

about democracy, values, and cultural traditions, but instead about which currency we might use. As that sly poet Norman MacCaig, who studied Classics at Edinburgh University, once put it, sounding rather like his admired contemporary Zbigniew Herbert,

The Muse of history, yawning with boredom,
judges the judges and finds them guilty.
Poor Clio. She has long since failed to be amused
by irony, truth, lies, murder
and suicide.

Sighing, she licks her finger
and wearily
turns over another page.³

In MacCaig's Edinburgh, with its abandoned, fragmentary acropolis and its neo-Classical, empty, contested Royal High School, it seems appropriate to consider the Classical as bound to the vestigial. Classics here and now is vestigial in another sense too, a sense many of us have heard in our own place and time as language has shifted. When I studied Greek in first year at Glasgow University, there was no Department of Classics and no Classics classroom; instead, the most memorable auditorium in which I sat was the Humanity Classroom. I loved the resonance of that name, and it gave me a poem: the Humanity Classroom sounded like a place where you might be taught to be human, or, if that sounded too unnecessary, at least to be humane. In it you sensed being a part of a long, long tradition: 'Sitting there, I was a comma in the Bible.'⁴ 'Humanity' was akin to, yet also subtly different from, 'the Humanities' defended by Martha Nussbaum in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* or by Helen Small in *The Value of the Humanities*.⁵ In

³ Norman MacCaig, *The Poems*, ed. Ewen McCaig (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2005), 387 ('Clio').

⁴ Robert Crawford, *Talkies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 52.

⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

English the word ‘humanity’ was used by Caxton in the late fifteenth century and by others soon afterwards to mean the study of both Latin and Greek. Deriving from ‘humanitas’ – human nature or civilization or humane character – ‘humanity’ may have developed originally to mark out academic subjects that were not ‘Divinity’, but to many ears, surely, ‘humanity’ linked the learning of Latin and Greek to universal human and humane values. What I love about the lingering Scots use of the word ‘Humanity’ is that it simultaneously signals the Classical Association’s subject and yet includes everyone; ‘Humanity’ has the opposite resonance to the word ‘Classicist’, which signals an elite. We can listen with an etymological ear, to how language has shifted over recent centuries – shifted in ways that have moved a sense of Classical culture away from the community of humanity and into an academic redoubt.

The use of ‘Humanity’ to mean what we now call ‘Latin’ or ‘Classics’ was quickened, surely, by the rise of what later scholars came to term Humanism. More locally, ‘Humanity’, as in my ‘Humanity Classroom’, draws on all this, but is an example of what the *OED* terms the ‘later *singular*’ use, chiefly in Scottish universities: the study of Latin language and literature.’ It was in Glasgow’s Humanity Classroom that I first became conscious of ways in which, through the teaching of Adam Smith, Hugh Blair and others, the study of Latin and Greek Humanities texts had been conducted for the first time in universities alongside the academic study of texts written in English as part of the tradition called in the Scottish universities (and later in America, India, and elsewhere) Rhetoric and Belles Lettres – a subject which in the same institutions in the nineteenth century came to be rebadged (and separated from Latin and Greek) as Eng Lit.⁶ Along with the rise of the discipline of Modern Languages, the rise of Eng Lit (once scorned by some as a poor man’s Classics or a woman’s subject) may have put pressure on Classics as a discipline, until Classics came to seem academically vestigial (once upon a time, after all, 100% of British universities had Classics departments; now 17% have Classics, 68% have English, and 44% have Modern

⁶ For more detail, see Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), chapter 1.

Languages departments), but the rise of ‘Rhetoric and Belles Lettres’ is a more nuanced story than that.⁷

This so-called ‘Scottish Invention of English Literature’ may have been bound up with academics’ wish to remove from their students the markers of cultural difference they called, pejoratively, ‘Scoticisms’, but one of its more positive aspects was that it encouraged a form of ‘comparative literature’, a horizon-wide gaze aligning Greek and Latin texts beside texts authored in English and, from time to time, in French and Italian.⁸ So, Adam Smith’s students in his private class (his specialist subject, as we might say) at Glasgow studied Anglophone texts as part of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres and were lectured to in English, but they were expected, too, to recognize references to Latin texts, while alongside Rhetoric and Belles Lettres they also studied Humanity.

In England, the tradition has been subtly different: in Smith’s day England’s two universities were beginning to use the phrase ‘*litterae humaniores*’; but there is a difference, surely, between the all inclusive ‘Humanity’ or ‘Humanities’ (as humans we’re all in those together) and the use of the comparative adjective in ‘*humaniores*’; at one time that comparative may have signalled matters more human and less divine, but to a modern ear it might imply that some may be more human than others. Oxford’s term ‘*litterae humaniores*’ seems to have emerged not long after Swift published his ‘Battle of the Books’, that bibliomachia which ranges modern against ancient letters, and around the same time as Joseph Trapp lectured in Latin at Oxford on select English texts and, more radically, at Glasgow Smith lectured in English on Latin and English texts together. Gradually, Latin and Greek, even if ‘*litterae humaniores*’, no longer represented the whole of humanity but a part – a ‘more humane’ part, perhaps – but a part, nonetheless.

The development of the English word ‘Classics’ to mean Latin and Greek furthers this process. Though the term ‘classical’ in sixteenth-century English was a borrowing from the Latin ‘classicus’ and was used to denote

⁷ These percentages are extrapolated from the results of the 2014 UK Research Excellence Framework (see <results.ref.ac.uk>).

⁸ See Robert Crawford, ed., *The Scottish Invention of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

‘classicall and auncient wryters’, according to the *OED*’s first (1546) citation, perhaps surprisingly the noun ‘Classics’ meaning ‘the branch of knowledge concerned with the languages and literatures of Greek and Roman antiquity’ is not recorded by the *OED* before 1815. By then, during the Romantic period, a Classical education was not straightforwardly a way of asserting solidarity with humanity but a way of setting oneself apart. Reviewing a book called *Essays on Professional Education* by Richard Lovell Edgeworth (father of the Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth), the reviewer in the 1810 *Edinburgh Review* asserted that ‘Classical quotations are the watchwords of scholars, by which they distinguish each other from the ignorant and the illiterate; and Greek and Latin are insensibly become almost the only test of a cultivated mind.’⁹ This was Classics as something to mark off the few from the many – from the rest of humanity.

Soon after, the word ‘Classicist’ began to be used, denoting first of all (as deployed in the 1827 *Edinburgh Review* by Thomas Carlyle) an opposition to ‘romanticists’, but then from the 1860s a ‘Classicist’ was ‘a student of, or expert in, the classics’.¹⁰ Like that other recent English coinage, the word ‘scientist’, so the term ‘classicist’ marks an era of growing professional specialization: it emphasises a disciplinary setting apart. ‘Classicists’, this new word asserts, are now a small subset of the rest of humanity, a professional caste.

The word ‘Classicists’ may have had a pejorative tinge when first used. It does not feature in the opening editorial of the first, March 1887 issue of the *Classical Review*, which, aiming ‘to improve the condition of classical learning in England’, speaks instead of ‘classical scholars’; but the term ‘classicists’ did come to be bound up with arguments about educational specialization, and was adopted by Classicists themselves.¹¹ By 1905 the *Journal of Education* could comment with a certain sneer on ‘The presumption that the pure classicist would be degraded or contaminated by admixture with the modernist unregenerated by Greek’.¹²

⁹ Maurice Cross, ed., *Selections from the Edinburgh Review*, 6 vols. (Paris: Bawdry’s European Library, 1835), III, 366.

¹⁰ *OED*, ‘classicist’, 2.

¹¹ ‘Editorial’, *The Classical Review*, I.1 (Mar. 1887), 2.

¹² Cited in *OED*, ‘classicist’, 2.

So the term ‘Classicist’ and the use of the word ‘Classics’ in its modern sense were bound up with anxieties about specialization and the weakening of the centrality of Latin and Greek in the educational system. If the word ‘Humanity’ gestured towards all humankind, words such as ‘Classicist’ indicated a clearly discernible elite; to be called ‘classicus’ in ancient Rome meant ‘belonging to the highest class of citizens’: the link between Classics and what came to be called in English ‘class’ – a link scrutinised in our day by Tony Harrison ‘tugging [his] forelock fathoming Xenophon’, by Edith Hall, and by others – became both more prominent and more problematic as Classics began to worry about being marginalized, even about becoming vestigial.¹³

But we should not forget about Humanity, especially here and on this occasion. For Britain’s oldest Classical Association, the Classical Association of Scotland, has its roots in what became the increasingly distinctive Scottish tradition of ‘Humanity’. The man described as ‘the practical originator of the Classical Association of Scotland’, William Coutts, had studied Humanity and Greek in the 1870s at Aberdeen University where his mentor, the charismatic Homeric scholar William Duguid Geddes, edited the *Musa Latina Aberdonensis*.¹⁴ Geddes’s student Coutts came, then, from the same Aberdeen Classical tradition that had nurtured the greatest of nineteenth-century Sinologists, James Legge. If the future of Classics looks likely to be involved more and more with Chinese, and will have to weigh Greek, Chinese, ancient Middle Eastern, and modern texts in one balance, then the Aberdeen of Legge, Coutts, and that heretically bad lad William Robertson Smith may be its birthplace.

Receiving his early Classical schooling at Crathie, Coutts went on to become Assistant Professor of Humanity at Aberdeen, then later Senior Classical Master at George Watson’s School in Edinburgh where he lived

¹³ P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, entry for ‘classicus’; Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1987), 140 (‘Still’); see also the website ‘Classics and Class’.

¹⁴ Ronald Knox quotes G. G. Ramsay on Coutts as ‘the practical originator’ in Ronald Knox, ‘The Classical Association of Scotland: The First Hundred Years’, in Christopher Stray, ed., *The Classical Association: The First Century 1903-2003* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Classical Association, 2003), 255; for more on Coutts, see P. G. Naiditch, *A. E. Housman at University College, London: The Election of 1892* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 159; see also ‘University of Aberdeen Bursary Competition’, *Scotsman*, 27 October 1873, 6.

at 41 Braid Road in a house that still stands.¹⁵ He was concerned to foster links between Classics in local schools across Scotland and Classics in the four Scottish universities. To this end Coutts was active on the Joint Board of the Scottish Universities (an examining board) which, he pointed out to the Classical Association of Scotland in a 1903 paper, ‘gives equal prominence to the University and the School’.¹⁶

The impetus to found the Classical Association of Scotland was less a top-down one emanating from the universities than a ground-up one coming from teachers in school classrooms. Coutts explained that ‘the idea of such an association had been mooted at the meetings of the Classical Committees of the Joint Board of the Scottish Universities and elsewhere,’ and the first CAS President recalled that Coutts had ‘had the idea [of a Classical Association for Scotland] in view for many years.’¹⁷ Coutts makes clear that ‘Changes in the curricula of Secondary Schools’ that have ‘led many teachers and friends of the Classics to believe that the time had come for the formation of a Scottish Classical Association.’¹⁸

So it was at the prompting of a schoolteacher that the first meeting of the Classical Association of Scotland, with Gilbert George Ramsay, Professor of Humanity at Glasgow as President, was held at the Royal High School in Edinburgh on Saturday 1 March 1902. It took in men and women, mainly schoolteachers, though it also included Classical professors. People interested in Scottish literature will notice that among its early members were William Maybin, Rector of Ayr Academy, where he had mentored George Douglas Brown, author of that most classically-inflected of early twentieth-century Scottish novels, *The House with the Green Shutters*; and William Riddoch, Rector of Mackie Academy,

¹⁵ ‘The Court’, *Scotsman*, 21 June 1898, 4, mentions Coutts at Crathie and his sending his Horace translations to Queen Victoria; William Coutts, *Latin Prose Composition* (Edinburgh: H. and J. Pillans and Wilson, 1899), title page; Coutts’s address is given in *Classical Association of Scotland Proceedings 1902-3* (see following note).

¹⁶ William Coutts, ‘The Public Examination System in Secondary Schools’, *Classical Association of Scotland Proceedings 1902-3* (Edinburgh: H. and J. Pillans and Wilson, 1903), 77.

¹⁷ ‘Rules’, *Classical Association of Scotland Proceedings 1902-3* (Edinburgh: H. and J. Pillans and Wilson, 1903), 124; G. G. Ramsay, quoted in Knox, ‘The Classical Association of Scotland’, 255.

¹⁸ ‘Prefatory Note’, *Classical Association of Scotland Proceedings 1902-3*, v.

Stonehaven, among whose most rebellious pupils would be Lewis Grassic Gibbon, later author of *Spartacus* and *Sunset Song*. Nurtured by the ambitious William Coutts, who sent his 1898 prose translations of Horace to Queen Victoria, and who produced school editions of Virgil and a book on Latin prose composition, the Classical Association of Scotland was a ground-up organization spurred by schoolteachers but welcoming professors. Its breadth was in an important sense a product of Classics as ‘Humanity’, and its Vice-President, Emeritus Professor Samuel William Butcher of the University of Edinburgh had co-translated with Andrew Lang a best-selling prose version of Homer, probably the most popular translated Classical text of its era.

The broad-based, even popular ‘Humanity’ aspect of the Classical Association of Scotland survives to this day: by no means all of its members are academics. When a few years ago I appealed for a crib to help me make the first English verse version of the Admirable Crichton’s sixteenth-century Latin poem on his arrival in Venice, it was a CAS member from Paisley, Ronnie Santangeli (not a professional academic) who generously stepped up to the mark.¹⁹ The founding of the Classical Association of Scotland by Coutts and colleagues was the immediate spur to the founding of the Classical Association whose President for this year I am honoured to be. Coutts sent a report of the founding of the Classical Association of Scotland to J. P. Postgate, editor of the *Classical Review*, whose April 1902 editorial was headed ‘A Classical Association for Scotland’, and hoped that ‘the Classical Association of Scotland will be the fore-runner of a Classical Association in England, where it is in some respects even more required.’²⁰

In December 1903 Postgate helped set up the new Classical Association of England and Wales. The *Times* report of its first meeting mentions Scotland’s Classical Association three times. D. B. Monro, who had studied Humanity and Greek at Glasgow and was by then Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, moved the resolution ““That an association open

¹⁹ *Venice: A Poem in Latin by James Crichton 1560-1582 with an English version by Robert Crawford and eight photogravures by Norman McBeath* (Edinburgh: Easel Press, 2013).

²⁰ [Postgate], ‘Editorial’, *Classical Review*, 16.3 (April, 1902), 145; see also Christopher Stray, ‘The Foundation and its Contexts’, in Stray, ed., *The Classical Association*, 5.

to persons of either sex to be called the Classical Association of England and Wales be and is hereby constituted”’; he ‘was very glad’ Scotland was already ‘taking the lead in this excellent work.’ Seconding the motion, S. W. Butcher, Vice-President of the Classical Association of Scotland, told his London audience, ‘it was high time for them to form that association. He was quite convinced that in Scotland the discussion had already done much to touch and to quicken the interest of teachers themselves in the work of classical teaching.’²¹ The Classical Association of Scotland set in motion by Coutts was a clear spur to the foundation of today’s Classical Association.

Yet just eight days after the founding of the Classical Association in London, William Coutts, still in his mid-forties, died at Struan Cottage, Blairgowrie, in Perthshire; he was buried in Ballater on 30 December 1903.²² In a way Coutts emblemizes the vestigial nature of the Classics: if you don’t think he’s a human vestige, then ask yourself whether or not you had ever heard of this schoolteacher pioneer of your subject. Coutts lived when there was a growing perception that the subject of Classics was under threat. True, compared to today, in some parts of the English-speaking world, it was thriving: in 1899 when T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were at school respectively in St Louis and in Pennsylvania, they were among the one half of all American schoolchildren who studied Latin at school and among the 4% or so (almost 25,000 pupils) who studied Greek.²³ Yet if the Classical Association of Scotland and the Classical Association of England and Wales rejoiced in such figures (and they did), they knew too that Classical languages risked becoming more marginal in the education systems of Britain. This process gathered pace slowly, but it continues, and, though today’s Classical Association boasts three thousand members and our conference shows the depth of commitment that Classical culture still inspires, we have long ago passed a point where Classics (outside Hollywood blockbusters) has come to seem increasingly vestigial to most people.

²¹ ‘The Classical Association of England and Wales’, *Times*, 21 December 1903, 15.

²² ‘Deaths’, *Scotsman*, 30 December 1903, 12.

²³ Figures from G. G. Ramsay, ‘Efficiency in Education’, *Classical Association of Scotland Proceedings 1902-3*, 14.

Yet there is, I suggest, a powerful poetry of vestiges with which the Classical tradition remains fused, and which grows stronger in our own time. To invoke the fragmentary, the vestigial, is hardly new in art. In a Scottish and international context, Edinburgh, after all, is the city where in 1760 the young Classical scholar James Macpherson published his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, those first Ossianic productions that at the height of the Scottish Enlightenment, as Ezra Pound shrewdly suggested, initiated ‘the romantic awakening’ in literature.²⁴ In terms of form, Macpherson’s *Fragments* also initiated the prose poem in English. The lastness, the fragmentariness, the vestigiality of Ossian appealed to the Classically trained, which is why Thomas Jefferson protested Ossian was greater than Homer and why Hugh Blair lectured on Ossian alongside Homer in his university lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres.²⁵ But in a very different way the power of the vestigial is also what helps drive the most extraordinary Classically influenced poetry of our own time: the work of Anne Carson. Carson’s most immediately moving book is her parallel text *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* which, with its square brackets indicating missing lines, its islanding of tiny words and phrases – a whole page, for instance, given over to the words ‘as long as you want’ – and its often brilliant rearrangements (most striking in the way her English relineates Sappho’s evening star fragment) offers both the professional Classicist and the general reader a work that re-establishes Sappho as one of the most resonant voices of antiquity by allowing her words to resonate in English in an era where issues of female authority, desire, and breakage have assumed a new power.²⁶

Carson’s early twenty-first-century Sappho (which is far from the only translated Sappho in our time) was incited into being, surely, by a rush of feminist Classical scholarship in the 1990s that in Carson’s native North America included such works as Page Dubois’s 1995 *Sappho is Burning* with its examination of ‘the aesthetics of the fragment’ and

²⁴ Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot (1954; repr. London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 215.

²⁵ For more on this, see Robert Crawford, *The Modern Poet: Poetry, Academia, and Knowledge since the 1750s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 30-69.

²⁶ Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (London: Virago, 2003), 95, 213.

‘our own relationship to the fragmented artifacts of the archaic past’; Margaret Williamson’s *Sappho’s Immortal Daughters* (also 1995) with its interest in the transition from ‘Papyrus into Print’, ‘Female Sexuality and Patriarchal Ideology’, and ‘Sexuality and the Gods’; and Ellen Green’s collection *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission* (1996) which Carson several times cites in *If Not, Winter* and in which her University of Michigan colleague Yopi Prins discusses Carson’s translation of Sappho Fragment 31.²⁷ Each of these books mentions Carson’s earlier work, including her powerful 1986 *Eros the Bittersweet* – a volume some of whose roots may lie in Carson’s 1981 University of Toronto doctoral thesis *Odi et amo ergo sum*, and which must be the most intense, provocative, and student-beguiling book on Classical literature published in the last fifty years.²⁸ In *Eros the Bittersweet* Carson’s translation of Sappho 31 first appeared in book form; but I suspect that all this surge of feminist-inspired Sappho scholarship also formed the climate in which Carson went on to translate the whole of Sappho’s work, producing one of the classics of modern Classical translation.

The power of this work comes from its vestigiality, its fragmentariness. Carson’s remarkable prose text, *Economy of the Unlost: (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan)*, regarded by some as ‘a kind of extended prose poem’ and by others as a work of literary criticism, depends profoundly on our sense of loss, and on reading as ‘a repeated experience of loss, absence or deprivation’ – what I am calling a sense of the vestigial.²⁹ Carson’s 2010 publication *Nox* – part Classical text,

²⁷ Page Dubois, *Sappho is Burning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 35; Margaret Williamson, *Sappho’s Immortal Daughters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 34-59, 99, 109; Yopi Prins, ‘Sappho’s Afterlife in Translation’ in Ellen Green, ed., *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 38-42; in a wider context outside North America mention should also be made of the verse translations in Josephine Balmer, trans., *Sappho: Poems and Fragments* (London: Brilliance Books, 1984; repr. Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1992) and Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho Companion* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000).

²⁸ Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Anne Carson Giacomelli, *Odi et amo ergo sum*, University of Toronto Doctoral Thesis (University of Toronto Archives T1981-3003.(47)).

²⁹ Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost: (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), back cover and 101.

part photograph album, part box, part leporello – assembles in memory of her brother dictionary definitions, ripped clutter, verse and fragments accreted around Catullus’s famous poem ending ‘frater, ave atque vale.’³⁰ As Stephen Burt puts it in what is the most helpful commentary on Carson and *Nox*, ‘Everything in *Nox* points to a forever lost original.’³¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, and with preoccupied imagination, Carson then turned to *Antigone*, that play about a woman determined to accord the proper burial rites to her brother. Carson’s first, more controversial account of the play, *Antigonick*, published in 2012 not as a ‘version’ of that work but as ‘Sophokles translated by Anne Carson’, is notoriously a graphic novel.³² George Steiner wrote about it in the *TLS*, singing Carson’s praises as ‘among the most inventive, astringent sensibilities in modern letters’, and arguing that her work ‘often achieved’ an ‘ideal’ of translation’; then he added, ‘But not this time.’³³ Yet Carson’s weird and penetrating sense of the ‘nick’ – the crisis, the incursive cut, the measure – of *Antigone* yields in her fragmentary, comic-book account moments of strong poetry as ruin ‘COMES ROLLING THE BLACK NIGHT SALT UP FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR’ and Kreon goes after not ‘BOTH GIRLS’ but ‘JUST THE LOUD/ ONE.’³⁴ Even if bashed by Steiner, Carson, having honed her feminist *Antigone* in the fragmented *Antigonick*, did not give up. Perhaps her having broken down the text into fragments, off-the-wall vestiges, gave her the power to return once more to Sophocles in more conventional terms in her second published translation of *Antigone*, published three years later. This second *Antigone*, shorn of *Antigonick*’s references to Hegel, Beckett, Brecht and Woolf, but still impressively jagged and ‘nicked’, became an international dramatic success.³⁵

Carson makes *Antigone* a feminist emblem in a way seen recently

³⁰ Anne Carson, *Nox* (New York: New Directions, 2010).

³¹ Stephen Burt, ‘Professor or Pinhead’ (review of *Nox*), *London Review of Books*, 14 July 2011, 20.

³² Sophokles, *Antigonick*, translated by Anne Carson (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2012), title page; on ‘veersions’ see Don Paterson, ‘Afterword’ to *The Eyes* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 55-60.

³³ George Steiner, ‘Anne Carson “translates” *Antigone*’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 August 2012 (accessed digitally).

³⁴ Sophokles, *Antigonick*, trans. Carson, unnumbered pp.

³⁵ Anne Carson, *Antigone* (London: Oberon Books, 2015).

in Ivo Van Hove's production at the Edinburgh International Festival, and, while her translation of Sophocles may cut at times against an ancient Greek audience's sense of social order, Carson's version also lets Sophocles's work speak jaggedly to twenty-first-century societies dealing with the conflict between the rights of the individual and the state. At its heart remains that ultimate vestige, the lifeless human body, and Carson's work returns repeatedly to the vestigial, to human matter that is on the frontier between being and nothingness. In her work entitled 'Decreation: How Women Like Sappho, Marguerite Porete and Simone Weil Tell God' she returns again to Sappho, to fragment 31 that ends,

greener than grass

I am and dead – or almost

I seem to me.³⁶

That sense of vestigial 'almostness' powers Carson's work, and is, surely, itself powered by a sense of vestigiality that comes from the situation of her Classical subject in the contemporary world. The position of Classics has become vestigial, but out of that can come a newly realisable universal power – an ability to articulate fundamental humanity: a voice from the heart of destruction.

There are Classical precedents for this, of course, which go way beyond the fragments of Sappho. Most obvious are the erotically charged words of Dido when she recognizes 'veteris vestigia flammae', in those words of *Aeneid* IV, line 23, that Thomas Hardy used to preface his own haunted, haunting elegiac poems addressed to an old flame. Dido is incinerated, but Aeneas, Anchises and the Trojans are themselves surviving human vestiges – living ash – from the burned city of Troy. Two years ago, on the one occasion when I have met Carson, I asked her what sort of exercises she and her husband give their students in the course on creative collaboration which they teach in New York. 'Well', she replied in her dry but not unfriendly Canadian accent, 'We say to them: burn something, and use the ash.'

³⁶ Anne Carson, *Decreation* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2005), 159.

It is the metaphorical ash, the vestige, of which Carson makes most incisive and memorable use in her work. In a different, more conventional idiom it was first of all by fragmenting *Aeneid VI* in *Seeing Things*, then by using it as a vestigial structure in *Human Chain*, that Seamus Heaney came to translate the whole of *Aeneid Book VI* for the edition published in 2016, a text posthumously moving with its dead souls who stretch out ‘Arms that hankered towards the further shore.’³⁷ Again, not a translation of the whole *Iliad* but a fragmenting of it produces Michael Longley’s ‘Ceasefire’ which so memorably presents part of *Iliad XXIV* as a series of shards; similarly, Longley mines *Iliad VI* for his short lyric, ‘The Helmet’.³⁸ The modernist poetry of Pound, H. D., and Eliot may have led to such papyral reimagining of epic texts, and there may be aspects of it too in Michel Deguy’s use of lines from *Iliad VI* in his superb poem ‘Passim’ and in the textual shattering of Homer in Christopher Logue’s verse, but it seems clear that in recent years the poetry that has jumped the gap most often between academic Classicists’ preoccupations and the concerns of humanity in general has been writing incarnating a vestigial power, work that heightens a sense of the shattered. So Alice Oswald’s *Memorial* of 2011 approaches the *Iliad* and deliberately ‘takes away its narrative’ to present ‘a kind of oral cemetery’ in what Oswald calls her ‘reckless dismissal of seven-eighths of the poem’; what she leaves are fragments, vestiges that speak of and from the power of the vestigial – ‘Tiny dried up men speaking pure light’ – but speaking all the more powerfully for their vestigiality.³⁹

This vestigial power is one appropriate both to the decentred nature of Classics as a discipline in our time, and to the way in which as attention spans shorten (attracting many to shorter ‘texts’ in this era of ‘texting’) poets as different as Simon Armitage and Alice Oswald slice and splice Homer, or Robin Robertson reworks off-cuts of Nonnus. It is as vestigial power, the power of partial remnants, that Classics today most strongly manifests itself in our culture as poetry. Josephine Balmer discerns this, surely, when she titles her 2013 book *Piecing Together the Fragments*:

³⁷ Seamus Heaney, trans., *Aeneid Book VI* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), 18.

³⁸ Michael Longley, *The Weather in Japan* (London: Cape, 2000), 38, 39.

³⁹ Alice Oswald, *Testament* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 1, 2, 77.

Translating Classical Verse, Creating Contemporary Poetry.⁴⁰ Balmer's book is full of provocative insights, though there may be also certain tonal difficulties when she discusses her own work.

I'm aware of such problems here too because certainly reading Anne Carson's versions of Sappho (then later her book on Simonides) was part of the shaping of the installation at the Edinburgh College of Art which the photographer Norman McBeath and I produced under the title of *Body Bags / Simonides* at the 2011 Edinburgh International Art Festival. That installation, in a smaller format, became our book *Simonides* and toured as an exhibition to various locations including St Andrews, Glasgow, Oxford and Yale before finishing its run at the galleries of the Poetry Foundation in Chicago.

As a full-scale exhibition, *Simonides* presented images of human vestiges in the form of actual body bags on the floor of a gallery overlooked by that military barracks, Edinburgh Castle. In book form, the poems are prefaced by an essay, 'Simonides and the War on Terror'. The volume then presents a series of Scots versions of Simonidean epitaphs and fragments each facing a black-and-white photograph by McBeath. Though McBeath, many of whose pictures can be seen in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery, has worked as a photographer in the Middle East, his photographs in *Simonides* are not pictures of conflict zones, but calmer, more meditative images. It is the poems that several times articulate directly the matter of war and breakage, and (though they come with English subtitles) the poems speak in Scots, seeking to achieve an acoustic that may commune with common humanity rather than with any 'Classicist' elite. The impulse is to voice a solidarity with the common casualties, and to sound it in a way that may resonate with Burns's famous book title, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* – so the results sound the voice of Simonides in a tone that is not that of the 'classicus', of the highest class of citizens, but represents still the voice of humanity, and the voices of human vestiges

⁴⁰ Josephine Balmer, *Piecing Together the Fragments: Translating Classical Verse, Creating Contemporary Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

I, Brotachus, lig here, a Gortyn Cretan.
I didnae come tae die, just tae sell shaes.

or, in the case of Simonides's epitaph for the Spartan war dead at Thermopylae,

Ootlin, tell oor maisters this:
We lig here deid. We did as we were telt.⁴¹

'We share our lives with the people we have failed to be', writes Adam Phillips in *Missing Out*; but we also share our lives with a sense of the dead, and nothing can be more powerful, surely, than a voice of the dead which speaks to us intimately and immediately, surprising us into new relationships with vestiges of the deep past.⁴² Such a hope that lies behind what I've done with Simonides in collaboration with Norman McBeath, and what we have done with James 'the Admirable' Crichton's sixteenth-century Latin in *Venice*, a work published in Edinburgh by Easel Press in 2013. In the same vein, I've found myself going both to the work of Scotland's greatest Latin poet, George Buchanan (and more frequently to cribs), as well as to William Duguid Geddes's *Musa Latina Aberdonensis* to quarry the texts, translations and summaries of Scotland's second-best Latin poet, Arthur Johnston, whose hymns to Scottish towns and cities from Elgin to Haddington, his 'Encomia Urbium', are surely among the most surprising and appealing of all Renaissance poems from these islands. In his poem 'Edinburgum', he might almost have written these lines for the 2016 Classical Association conference:

Hic ubi nascentis se pandunt lumina Phoebi,
Sede sub Arturi regia tecta vides...

East, in the sunshine of the young Apollo,
A palace glints just below Arthur's Seat...⁴³

⁴¹ Robert Crawford and Norman McBeath, *Simonides* (Edinburgh: Easel Press, 2011), XII and XIV.

⁴² Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), xii.

⁴³ Robert Crawford, ed., *Apollos of the North: Selected Poems of George Buchanan and Arthur Johnston* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), 86, 87.

More swaggeringly, perhaps, in his ‘Taodunum’ Johnston also aligns the cityscape of Dundee with the pyramids of Memphis.⁴⁴

Presenting Buchanan and Johnston to modern readers, I was wanting to communicate the kick of life as well as the rhetorical elegance that is in their work, to show what makes them, in terms of my book’s title, *Apollos of the North*. This task could not have been accomplished without the help of the many Classicists acknowledged in that volume, and I hope the English versions do have life, but I am realistic enough to assume that for most people Neo-Latin Scottish verse has an absolutely vestigial importance. That may be a source of its unexpected power when it can be given new animation, but it is also part of its vulnerability as a cultural inheritance.

Just as in the *Penguin Book of Scottish Verse* and elsewhere Latin is seen now along with Old Welsh, Old French, Old English, Gaelic and other tongues as a vital part of the inheritance of Scottish poetry, so future anthologists of English verse will need to see *Deor* and *Beowulf* and Milton’s Latin poetry as part of the inheritance of England, of English tradition – its powerful, shaping vestiges. This will require the participation of both poets and scholars, and it is work that cries out to be done.

At the moment, the work I’ve been doing for an anthology called *The Book of Iona* draws on the parallel-text edition of Adomnán’s *Life of Columba* by Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Anderson as well as on older translations of Adomnán’s work and on Richard Sharpe’s Penguin Classics edition in order to produce plain but rhyme-heightened verse versions of sections of Adomnán’s Latin prose: the argument being that today the way we read poetry – the concentration we afford to it – comes closest to how earlier audiences would have responded to Adomnán’s hagiographical prose.

I can’t say I discuss what I’m doing with Classicists a lot – partly because I do it slowly and fitfully; but I’ve always found it confirmatory to be working in communities where I knew there were Classicists active.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

Over the years I have owed particular debts to John McKie and Clive Wright, to all my lecturers at Glasgow University, to Stephen Harrison, to my colleagues at the University of St Andrews, to Roger Green and to Richard Rawles; and recently it's been my delight to teach students as different as the artist and Classicist Aisha Farr and the translator of *Postcards from Sulpicia*, Tristram Fane-Saunders.⁴⁵ More generally, I'd like to think that my work on Buchanan and Johnston in *Apollos of the North* has helped encourage the climate in which one of the most innovative Scottish Classical enterprises, the 'Bridging the Continental Divide' project on Neo-Latin, has flourished; though I do think it's a shame that, as yet at any rate, this database has resulted in something markedly less than a full digital parallel text edition of the *Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum*.⁴⁶ Modern Scottish literature from Lewis Grassie Gibbon through Alasdair Gray to Ian Hamilton Finlay, Liz Lochhead, Robin Robertson and the W. N. Herbert who fuses D.C. Thomson comic books with Classical lore in *The Big Bumper Book of Troy* has gained so much from Classical inheritances that it seems dangerously self-loathing for us to chuck out Latin and Greek from the state educational system. This is not a problem I can solve here, but I note it here and urge you as a body to campaign noisily for the restitution of the training of Classics teachers in Scotland before Scottish culture is irretrievably damaged by this act of self-harm. But let me end by suggesting that in this place it is worth reflecting too on ways in which our classical inheritance continues to structure the body politic of this island: this is a point so obvious that it is seldom articulated, but, not least among Classicists, it surely remains worth making.

Hadrian's Wall, that most magnificent among surviving imperial vestiges, grew out of a network of forts in a Roman province – Britannia. Here, Tacitus's *Agricola* tells us, 'the natives of Caledonia' had 'turned to armed resistance on a large scale'.⁴⁷ This resistance was different from

⁴⁵ Tristram Fane Saunders, *Postcards from Sulpicia* (Alford: Tapsalteerie, 2015).

⁴⁶ See the website *Bridging the Continental divide: neoLatin and its cultural role in Jacobean Scotland, as seen in the Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum* (1637), available at www.dps.gla.ac.uk

⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Agricola*, section 25; see Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, trans. H. Mattingly, rev. S. A. Handford (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1970), 76.

Boudicca's revolt, which took place in the south of Britannia in territory that was brought back under full Roman control; to the north, even after the Battle of Mons Graupius, the territory was harder to manage and the natives famously restless. It was the Roman imperial historian Tacitus who gave to the literature of freedom and resistance one of its most stirring clarion calls when he put into the mouth of the British leader Calgacus those words orated to his troops on the eve of battle against the Roman imperialists who 'make a desert and they call it peace.'⁴⁸

Hadrian's Wall was a monumental stone partitioning of the province of Britain: it signalled that Roman control of the north of the island was somehow more limited. As a fourth-century Latin text puts it, the wall divided the Romans and the barbarians ('barbaros Romanosque divideret').⁴⁹ In that sense, then, though the Romans regarded Britannia as an island province, it was a partitioned one.⁵⁰ The wall marking a frontier within the province, but sometimes regarded as marking the extent of the Roman Empire itself, did allow for movements of people and animals from one side to the other as they passed through a series of specially constructed gateways: in that sense, like modern internal partitions, including those of present-day Europe, it could open and close. Yet its monumentality made it a structure to be reckoned with – as it still is.

The nations of Scotland and England did not exist in Roman times, and later kingdoms such as Northumbria might straddle the present Anglo-Scottish border, but it is surely no accident (and Richard Hingley's recent 'life' of the Wall warily backs this up) that the medieval border between those nations which came to be called Scotland and England grew to lie roughly along the line of Hadrian's Wall.⁵¹ Today when we speak casually of something happening south of the Wall, we mean that it is happening in England. 'North of Hadrian's Wall' means a different country. Those

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Agricola*, section 30; see Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, 80-81.

⁴⁹ *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Hadr.* xi, 2, quoted in Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 173.

⁵⁰ I am grateful to my colleague Anindya Raychaudhuri for encouraging me to think about acts of political partitioning.

⁵¹ Richard Hingley, *Hadrian's Wall: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 51-64; see also Stephen Rippon, Chris Smart and Ben Pears, *The Fields of Britannia: Continuity and Change in the Late Roman and Early Medieval Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

words – nation, country, and province – have a certain slipperiness, like the term ‘partition’ itself; but that slipperiness can be productive for the cultural as well as the political imagination. In any event, it is the partitioning of the island, of the Roman province of Britannia, that underlies the modern Border between Scotland and England. Britain, in one sense or another, has been partitioned for almost two millennia.

This border, the legacy of a partition, remains if not physically fluid – as it once was – then at least conceptually fluid, its meaning continuing to be a matter of debate and flux. In a sense all borders are like this: they are raised and lowered, whether by Shengen agreements or by cultural history or by refusals of currency union or by referenda. They seem fixed, but are porous and dynamic. They are matters for negotiation. Both literature and everyday language suggest that Britishness has mattered a good deal to Scottish writers, but rather less to English ones. There was a succession of Scottish novels that interrogate Britishness – from the work of Tobias Smollett and Walter Scott to John Buchan; but English novelists have never had much interest in the idea of Britishness. No major English novel is set in Scotland, unless you except *To the Lighthouse*, where a notional Isle of Skye seems to have the landscape of Cornwall. Arguments about Britishness, European-ness, and about Scottish independence are cultural as well as political and economic. As our haggling over them continues (and, in the short term at least, intensifies), the portals within Hadrian’s Wall will open and close; but, whatever happens, the monumental vestige of that old Roman partition across Britain will continue to inflect this island. In politics, as in poetry, vestigial power still matters.

