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WESTERN CLASSICS

Newsletter from staff and students in Classics at the National University of Ireland, Galway

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Cover image: Detail from the basilica of Saint-Denis, Paris ©George Nutulescu, 2015.

Johannes Scottus Eriugena and Gothic Architecture

An essay by Michael J. Clarke

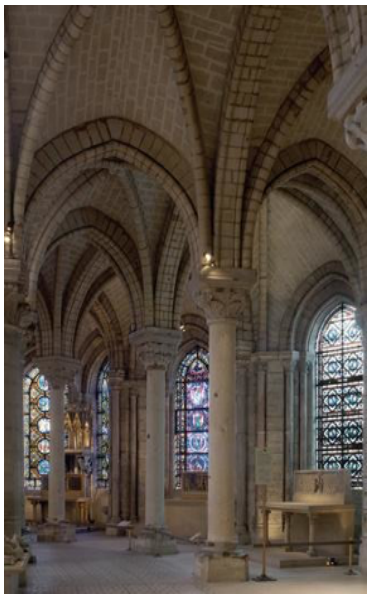
WHERE DOES IRELAND BELONG in the cultural history of the West? Are we central, marginal, or simply part of a story in which national identities are never more than tokens of self-assertion and self-invention? Those questions nag at any attempt to construct a new grand narrative of the past. However weary we are of the attitude that treats Gaelic Ireland as a kind of archaic wonderland, cut off from mainstream reality, or that lumps together the so-called 'Celtic realms' in a single token chapter at the back of the survey-book, it is worse to hear the bombastic claim that sees the Irish as saviours of civilisation, in the early period or any other. Yet there remains something strange about the Irish *peregrini*. Their sudden appearance in the courts and schools of the Carolingian era is unsettling above all because of the astonishing sophistication of the Latin and even Greek learning that many of them practised.

None of their stories is more puzzling that that of John Scottus Eriugena. He has the strongest claim to escape the shadow of Irish marginality and to occupy a position of unshakable centrality in the transmission of Western thought. While academic philosophy places Eriugena's writings in the golden chain of Neoplatonism, speculation per-

sists as to how an Irishman in the ninth century might have achieved such subtlety of thought and precision of knowledge. And, of course, we follow that up with the virtual certainty that Eriugena self-identified with the culture and language of his homeland; he uses the Irish *Ériu* as the first element of his own epithet, in place of the Latin *Scotti-*, which seems to have been universal among his contemporaries.

Academic philosophy, more perhaps than any other discipline, follows its own path. Therefore, it is a surprise to find that Eriugena figures as a kind of founder-hero (albeit contested and controversial) in the grand narrative of another discipline—architectural history—nearly three centuries after his death. Beginning around 1135 CE, the abbey church of Saint-Denis near Paris—then a bastion of royal power and spiritual authority—was rebuilt in a manner that seemed completely new. The new features—which we now see as characteristic of Gothic architecture—included pointed arches, flexible rib-vaulting, and spaces streaming with the light of stained-glass windows. It would be easy to explain this twelfth century development purely in terms of architectural evolution. However, the surviving writings of Suger, the abbot of Saint-Denis, who managed the project, suggest an intellectual and theological impetus behind the new design.

The founder of Saint-Denis was St Dionysius, who was identified (incorrectly) as the author of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, a great work of Christian Neoplatonism likely composed by an unknown Greek-speaking Syrian around the sixth century CE. Here is where Eriugena enters the architectural story. Around 862 CE, Eriugena was commissioned by Charles the Bald to translate, or re-translate, the *Celestial Hierarchy* into Latin from a Greek manuscript of pseudo-Dionysius. When reading this text, it is a strange experience to turn from pseudo-Dionysius' spiritually profound, but stylistically difficult, Greek, to the clarity and regularity of the Latin commentary that Eriugena produced. If one's focus of interest is the cultural world of the Carolingian *peregrini,* the question too easily reduces to that of Eriugena's educational background. The architectural historians remind us that the way in which Eriugena's work was written is not more important than the way it was read. Indeed, the brilliant interpreter of Gothic art, Erwin Panofsky, argued that Suger's redesign at Saint-Denis was directly inspired by Eriugena's *Celestial Hierarchy*. He contended that Suger looked to Eriugena's articulation of the power of light as a symbol and embodiment of the divine. He also saw the process of leading-upward, the *mos anagogicus*, which is at the centre of the *Celestial Hierarchy*'s vision of the merger between Platonic idealism and the theology of divine grace. Suger's poem on the west doorway seems to refer directly to this vision:



Nobile claret opus, sed opus quod nobile claret

clarificat mentes, ut eant per lumina vera

ad verum lumen, ubi Christus ianua vera.

Quale sit intus in his determinat aurea porta:

mens hebes ad verum per materialia surgit,

et demersa prius hac visa luce resurgit

'Bright is the noble work; but, being nobly bright, the work should brighten the minds so that they may travel, through the true lights, to the True Light where Christ is the true door. In what manner it is inherent in this world, the golden door defines: the dull mind rises to the truth through that which is material and, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion.' (Panofsky 1979: 23)

Panofsky's interpretation of Saint-Denis was brilliant in conception, but shakier on the interrelation of art and text. After a torrent of re-examination, there is now a consensus that the pseudo-Dionysian influence on Suger was more likely mediated through the work of Hugh of St Victor, who revised and reinterpreted the *Celestial Hierarchy* in Suger's own time. Yet even if this new emphasis is justified, there seems to be no doubt that Hugh himself was revising Eriugena, rather than working from the original work by the unknown Syrian. Either way, however, the shadowy figure of this ninth-century Irish Neoplatonist sits guarding the crossroads at one of the most momentous moments of change and renewal in the history of architecture, and indeed, of Western spirituality. *Image: Chapels of the chevet, Saint-Denis © Mary Ann Sullivan, 2007.*

Culinary Chauvinism: From Caesar to the Coronavirus

An essay by Edward Foster, NUIG BA Classics (2020), who was the overall winner of the Global Undergraduate Award for Classical Studies & Archaeology 2020

First-time readers of *De Bello Gallico* could be forgiven for thinking that Julius Caesar was something of a gourmand. Numerous times, he digresses from his military commentary to tell us what his enemies eat. The Germans live on meat, cheese, and milk and do not practise agriculture; the Suebi also live on meat and milk, but with a little corn; the islanders near the mouth of the Rhine consume fish and eggs; as for the Britons, while the most civilised around Kent keep cattle and farm, their diets revert to standard barbarian fare further inland: meat and milk, no crops. As fascinating as these ethnographic observations are to the modern reader, they do raise the question: why was Caesar so interested in foreign eating habits?

Unfortunately, these passages do not reflect simple anthropological curiosity. Rather, they are skilfully crafted propaganda. To educated Romans, there was a philosophical correlation between food and civilisation. This mindset had been inherited from the Greeks, who viewed agriculture as the subjugation of nature. Logically, if a people had not achieved mastery over the natural world, they were still a part of it. The subtext of Caesar's culinary observations was thus clear to all educated Romans: these meat-eating, milk-drinking, agriculturally naïve peoples were uncivilised barbarians, closer to animals than humans, and were therefore dangerous and unpredictable. Food, and specifically food chauvinism, was a tool in Caesar's rhetorical repertoire to rally support for a military campaign of questionable legitimacy.

This framing of foreign cultures through their food has persevered throughout history. In modern English, Germans have been called *krauts*, the French *frogs*, and the English *limeys.* Food is also politicised, such as when *French fries* were rebranded *freedom fries* in the USA in 2003 as a response to France's opposition to the Iraq War. In recent times, the culinary culture of China has been scrutinised following the outbreak of Covid-19.

Videos purporting to show Chinese people eating bats have been widely shared online and even picked up by major media outlets. The *Mail Online*, for example, ran an article with the headline *Revolting Footage Shows Chinese Woman Eating a Whole Bat at a Fancy Restaurant as Scientists Link the Deadly Coronavirus to the Flying Mammals.* Beneath the article, hundreds of comments expressed everything from amusement to outrage.

Why, though, is food such a persistent cultural delineator? As humans, we all share the same basic biological requirements. While there is little cultural variation in how we breathe, drink, and sleep, however, there is enormous variation in what we eat and how we eat it, with norms often tied to deeply held philosophical and religious belief systems. Transgressing these norms, especially taboos, triggers powerful emotional responses such as shock and revulsion. Of course, cultural norms are inherently ethnocentric—we all tend to regard our own culture and customs as what is necessarily right, proper, and normal. The logical progression of this thinking, however, is to consider practices outside these norms as less right, less proper, even abnormal. And if an outgroup strays too far beyond our ethnocentric norms, we may even begin to question their humanity.

Such thinking is highly problematic. For one thing, it ignores the fact that virtually every culture has foods that an outgroup will find distasteful, disgusting or even taboo. Western cuisine is no exception, think of Scottish haggis, English jellied eels, French pressed duck, or American Rocky Mountain oysters. Wholesome Irish fare doesn't escape scrutiny either—we regularly eat sausage infused with pigs' blood for breakfast and every year Galway hosts a festival dedicated to the swallowing of live molluscs. Another problem is generalisation. We intuitively know that not every English person is partial to a pot of jellied eels, just as plenty of Irish people are repulsed by the thought of gulping down a raw oyster. While we recognise such differences within familiar cultures, the nature of ethnocentrism makes this much harder to do so for outgroups. Unfamiliar cultures are therefore deindividualised into one homogenous mass for which a single statement can hold true: *the French eat frogs, the Japanese eat raw fish, the Chinese eat bats*.

One of the most disturbing facets of our inherent ethnocentrism is how easily and subtly it can be weapon-

ised by skilful rhetoricians. Caesar, for example, does not explicitly label his enemies as animals. Rather, he uses his understanding of Roman norms, prejudices, and taboos to employ language that triggers the desired response in his audience. There is similar circumspection in the *Mail Online* headline – the *footage* is revolting (not the person); the *whole* bat is eaten (the English-speaking West tends to consider the consumption of whole animals distasteful); the footage is from a *fancy* restaurant (if this is their fancy food, imagine what their normal food is like!). Finally, the article states that scientists are investigating bats as a possible source of Covid-19. It does not explicitly link the *eating* of bats with the outbreak, but the implication is clear. So, too, is the dehumanising effect of the rhetoric as seen in the online comments section: 'This is not human behaviour,' wrote one commenter. 'But it is Chinese behaviour,' replied another.

Except that it's not—bats are not commonly eaten in China. Indeed, many of the circulating videos actually depict Chinese travel bloggers sampling what is, to them, an exotic food. They are as representative of the average Chinese person as Bear Grylls was of the average Briton when he caught, killed, and ate bats on *Man vs Wild.* Though bats are not commonly eaten in China, they are used in traditional medicine, and there is a difference between dehumanising chauvinism and valid criticism. When the causes of Covid-19 are better understood, it may well be that changes are required in the way animals are treated in China. There are precedents for such change. The outbreak of BSE in the 1980s in the UK, for example, led to the banning of meat and bone meal feed for cows. Such change should, of course, be empirically based, and not on irrational chauvinism. Dehumanising prejudice has, after all, very real consequences. The Gallic Wars—in part legitimised through Caesar's use of ethnocentric culinary chauvinism—cost hundreds of thousands of lives and the enslavement of equal numbers. The examples pertaining to Covid-19 are less dramatic, but no less real. In March in the US, the FBI warned of a surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans as a result of the pandemic's association with China. Clearly, we are as prone to dehumanising psychological biases now as they were in Roman and Greek times. If these biases are biologically rooted, it may be impossible to rid ourselves of them completely. But we can understand them, and with that understanding comes the power to reject them.

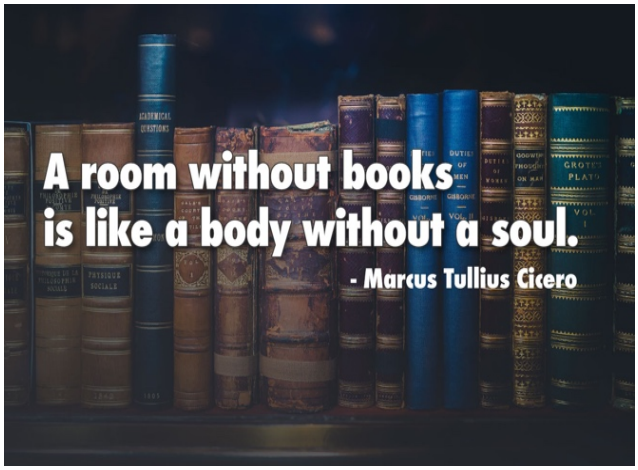
Lorenzo Valla in the Time of Social Media

A modern case of digital forgery and transmission

by Francesca Guido

Social media rewards a kind of communication that favours images and immediacy. It seeks a fast, emotional impact, full of immediate references, in which a visual component often plays the central role. In this unequal struggle on the web, only two possible ways remain for a written text to emerge victorious. It can ally with an image or it can become the image itself.

And what better for this purpose than a pithy quotation? A quote lends itself well to the task with its aura of timeless absolutism, giving an added—and in some way universal—value to an otherwise strictly personal image or thought. In short, we feel the need to add a famous quotation by an authoritative character as a caption or as a calligraphic script in our feed, and to fill the web with selfies, landscapes, dogs, and cats, ennobled by the authority of Einstein, Gandhi, and Oscar Wilde.



From a post by u/carolsquared on reddit.com

There is no need to look solely at twenty-first century to understand that we humans *really* do enjoy quotes. I will provide just one example from my research: Latin grammarians used to quote verses and sentences from famous literary works to enrich their works and to support grammatical discussions. More broadly speaking, anyone who has worked with either Greek or Latin authors will know what I am talking about; *nihil sub sole novum*, we might say.

Returning to our main discussion, I will leave professional and serious considerations on social media issues to one

side and restrict myself to pub-talk spiced up with some reasonable philological nerdiness.

The other day—it happens to everyone sooner or later—I found myself in need of a catchy phrase for a birthday card. In the unlikely event that you have never yet found yourself in this unfortunate situation, you should know that the web promptly offers a rather remarkable proliferation of *ad hoc* sites. They collect, catalogue, and organise hundreds of thousands of citations: authors of every type, age, and taste for every kind of need.

As I searched for "quotes about books," several websites offered a wide range of enticing quotations. Among the very first results was something that no one—at least no philologist, fifteenth century humanist, or Latin grammarian—would have been able to refuse: quotations by Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Soon, the entire search page began to shout out through images and texts: "A room without books is like a body without a soul". Did Cicero really write this? Brilliant!

Precisely at that moment the voice of conscience—here in the form of the fifteenth century Italian humanist, Lorenzo Valla—coughs from behind my desk and looks at me with a frown. "Excuse me, but precisely *when* did Cicero say this?" I stop, pen suspended. "I have no idea, Lorenzo, do you? But maybe we may, just for once, turn a blind eye to..." The Italian humanist stares at me with his severe, interrogative gaze. We study each other, both knowing how the story will end. "Okay, you've won. Where do we start looking for the reference?"

And Lorenzo was right; the extant works of Cicero did not contain the quote. All of my research attempts—the *Library of Latin Texts* (LLT, Series A and B), the electronic *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (eMGH), the *Archive of Celtic-Latin Literature* (ACLL), and the *Aristoteles Latinus Database* (ALD)—turned up no results. And not only does it appear that Cicero never wrote this sentence, but nothing similar is found in the work of any other Latin speaker found in these databases.

Of course, we might be facing an unusual example of indirect tradition: a unique finding revealing itself through the web pages. However, considering this improbable, Lorenzo and I agree: it appears to be a modern forgery and a successful one at that.

Indeed, what is most interesting is the enormous spread and fortune that this quote has found throughout the world. A quick search shows that it is almost unanimously attributed to Cicero by the global population.

Here are some examples that display exceptionally well the diffusion of our pseudo-Ciceronian sentence:

IT	*Una stanza senza libri è come un corpo senz'anima.*
FR	*Une pièce sans livres, c'est comme un corps sans âme.*
SP	*Una habitación sin libros es como un cuerpo sin alm.*
PORT	*Uma casa sem livros é como um corpo sem alma.*
GERM	*Ein Raum ohne Bücher ist ein Körper ohne Seele.*
NOR	*Et hjem uten bøker er som en kropp uten sjel.*
ISL	*Herbergi án bóka er einsog líkami án sálar.*
JAP	本のない部屋とは、魂のない身体のようなものだ
CHIN	房间里没有书，就像身体失去了灵魂

In some cases, those quoting with the most precision even include—crazy, but true—the original Ciceronian phrase in Latin. The tradition at this point—here the plot thickens!—offers the text of the Arpinum writer in two different variations:

a. *Sine libris cella sine anima corpus est*

b. *Ut conclave sine libris ita corpus sine anima*

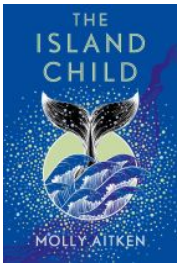
Alas, both Latin *sententiae* are equally false. We find instead a translation into Latin likely from English, Italian, or French (personally, I suspect that the translation took place on the Continent).

The second quote is vaguely more Ciceronian in taste than the first and contains a slightly more appropriate lexicon. Indeed, this quote surprisingly managed to earn its own place in the textual tradition. In 2014, it exited its digital transmission and made an appearance in the title of a book chapter in a work that was published by Brepols.

What remains to be said? Such forgeries work in mysterious ways, yet even in our visual and digital age Mrs Philology still has something to say. I end with a short, but significant quote from Valla's *Donation of Constantine*, "The problem with quotes found on the internet is that they are often untrue."

The Island Child

Noémi Farkas in conversation with NUIG Classics alumna (2014), Molly Aitken, on her recent book, The Island Child (2020), published by Canongate



First of all, congratulations on your debut novel, *The Island Child*! How do you feel about the reception of your first book? Press reviews are terrifying. I always felt a sense of huge trepidation opening each newspaper sent by my publicist. But I was lucky that they've been really positive...so far. Even better was meeting readers at events pre-Covid (do you remember those days?) and hearing their personal responses. They were often much more intelligent and deeply felt than those of the journalists.

Classical mythology, in particular the Abduction of Persephone, has a strong influence on your work. Can you tell us why it left an impression on you, and which elements of the myth inspired you the most? I was struggling with my early drafts of *The Island Child*. Like most first-time writers, I couldn't find a focus, I kept getting distracted by side stories. Then gradually, I realised the parallels with the story of Persephone and then I used this as my focus to stop me wandering off track. Some people use Bach or coffee to stay focused, I use myths.

The Abduction of Persephone wasn't actually the part of the story that interested me most. I was more interested in Demeter, the mother losing her daughter to adulthood. That was a story I hadn't read before so that was the one I wrote.

The reader follows Oona, the protagonist, returning home to the fictional island of Inis, to resolve conflict and trauma in her life. How did you find the process of creating an unconventional narrative that depicts a heroine's journey home, as opposed to the hero's journey home? Personally, I wasn't trying to act out against a tradition of male narrative. The first idea I had for *The Island Child* was of an Odysseus-type character washing up on an Irish island, instead of the land of the Phaeacians. But I quickly became bored by him (perhaps because that story is so familiar) and focused instead of the princess who found him. Of course there are lots of novels about women returning home, but possibly fewer that are inspired by myths. I love that now female authors are rewriting male-centric narratives like Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*.

You have chosen the opening lines of Eavan Boland's poem, *The Pomegranate*, as your epigraph. What captivated you about Boland's interpretation of the myth of Persephone? I love how Boland overlaps myth with contemporary life and motherhood. It gave me permission to set my story in 50s and 60s Ireland. It showed me that the trappings of contemporary life, the 'can of coke' and 'teen magazines' could have their place in myths for contemporary readers. Instead of detracting from those ancient stories, these elements made them relevant again. One of my favourite lines is 'and the best thing about the legend is I can enter it anywhere.' Myths and legends are told over and over, shaped to new cultures and times. They're incredibly elastic and endlessly relevant, and if not we can tweak them to make them relevant. We can turn them into a poem or a novel or a film (although let's all try to forget the Brad Pitt *Troy*).

What advice would you give to our students with an interest in Creative Writing, who are planning to work with themes of Classical mythology in the future? Don't be afraid to make myths your own. Adaptation is about finding what's relevant to our time but also what resonates with you. Also there's absolutely no rush to get there now. All the study and research you do now and over the next years of studying Classics, it's all compost for the stories that will eventually grow from everything you have gathered.

Do you see yourself returning to Classical themes in future works? I don't think I could avoid Classical themes, even if I wanted to. Those stories are just in me. Taking myths and legends apart at NUIG taught me by osmosis what makes a successful story. Sometimes I will write a story and discover it has echoes of a tale from Ovid. I don't really believe there are any new ideas. Creating and writing is all about borrowing and reworking what's already out there.

Unsurprisingly, I'm working on a story that reworks a little known Greek myth and also a novel that is set in Rome in the late Empire. Both of these should be hitting bookshelves in the next few years.

All Roads Lead to Rome

Charles Doyle

Exaudi, regina tui pulcherrima mundi,
inter sidereos, Roma, recepta polos;
exaudi, genetrix hominum genetrixque deorum
'Listen, most beautiful queen of your world,
Rome, among the constellations, welcome at the poles,
Listen, mother of mortals and mother of the gods.'

Rutilius Namatianus, *De Redito Suo*

I am drawn back to Rutilius Namatianus' poem documenting his journey from Rome to his home in the early fifth century, commenting on the decline of the city not long after the death of Alaric, the Visigoth king. Of course, Romans complaining about the decline of Rome is a tradition which predates the end of the Roman Republic, let alone collapse of the Western Empire. That the city itself still stands, some sixteen centuries on, offers some consolation; the world continues to spin beneath the same stars, even in the face of political turmoil, war, and plague.

Panini, *Fantasy View with the Pantheon and other Monuments of Ancient Rome.* 1737, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

I have previously reflected on the connections between my hometown and the *caput mundi*, but since moving here I have come to appreciate those connections more and more: Hugh O'Neill's grave in San Pietro in Montorio, the mystery of Daniel O'Connell's missing heart, and the beautiful murals of SS Patrick and Brigid in the Irish Franciscan college, San Isidoro—early statements of Irish nationhood on the Continent. Wandering around the city, amid the ancient redbrick and marble ruins, winding narrow medieval streets, and broad Renaissance plazas, it is striking just how deeply interconnected this city is and, perhaps more importantly, how connected it has always been with the wider world.

Nothing, as Lucretius tell us, will come from nothing. You do not gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, and you do not get a city like Rome springing up like some autochthon from the Italian countryside.

Over time, between the Etruscan north and Greek South, the city grew from along the trade routes. As they saying goes, not built in a day. Cities grow out of these connections, trade, and settlement, rather than from god-descended mythic founders. When such connections are disrupted, things fall apart, often slowly and without the drama and suddenness of an apocalypse. Catastrophes are often slower than we are inclined to believe.

In the old Roman port town of Ostia Antica, now closed due to the second wave of the coronavirus, you will find *Piazzale delle Corporazione* behind the theatre, lined with black and white mosaics depicting the sailors' destinations around the Mediterranean Sea. There are *amphorae* of wine, which bring your thoughts north to senatorial estates in Gaul, while elephants and the lighthouse of Alexandria take one south to Africa and Egypt, already ancient in the Roman mind. Vast trade networks spanned from the Nile to the North of England, and indeed much further afield. Just as Greco-Buddhist art flourished after Alexander of Macedon's conquests in the East, historians of philosophy have speculated the existence of links between Buddhist and Hellenistic philosophy. Further east still, Rome or *Daqin* (大秦) was known to Han China through the reports passed from one merchant caravan to another, the ultimate destination of much of their silk exports, before the exploits of two Roman monks brought silk production to Europe. The Romans, for their part potentially called their suppliers, or what they knew of them, the silk-land *Seres*.

All roads, we are told, lead to Rome, with goods, people, and ideas moving along them. The political power of the city and its influence migrated east, to Ravenna and Constantinople. And the city slowly diminished in importance, just as the Tiber silt deposited over the years and cut off Ostia Antica from the city. Just as its inhabitants did not know the long-term effects of the end of river dredging until they could no longer send goods inland to Rome, so too will we not know how our current crises will change our world until it has been changed. Everything changes, and nothing remains. As I walked around the deserted major attractions of Rome at the end of our first quarantine, I confess that I felt the anxieties of the city's inhabitants who lived through its many calamities, and like Rutilius, my thoughts turned to the journey home and that metaphysical shadow of coming-to-be; passing away.

Intentional Obscurity and "Divine Speech" in Early English Texts

Ciaran Arthur

I am absolutely delighted to have joined the research community in Classics at NUIG. My new project, 'Intentional Obscurity and "Divine Speech" in Early English Texts', is funded by the Irish Research Council's Individual Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. It follows on from my first postdoctoral project, 'Obscurity and Textual Concealment in Early Medieval England' (2017-2020), which was funded by The Leverhulme Trust and was hosted by Queen's University Belfast.

This second project addresses a vast proportion of enigmatic texts from early medieval England (c. 800-1150), which have been consistently dismissed as nonsensical because of their use of highly obscure language. Traditional scholarship maintains that such texts originally contained heathen formulas before Christian scribes substituted these with misunderstood sources, rendering them meaningless and 'gibberish'. This project will apply an alternative and original interpretative framework to case studies of these obscure texts to 'decode' them and demonstrate that they are far from meaningless when they are situated in the wider historical and intellectual contexts of classical and medieval understandings of obscurity, hermeneutics, secrecy, language manipulation, cosmology, and 'divine speech'. Patristic, Irish, Carolingian, and early English exegetical works assigned great cosmological significance to languages and individual letters; they debated distinctions between divine and human language, as well as the capability of the latter to transmit, communicate, and translate spiritual mysteries; and they were used by ecclesiastics for training in hermeneutics and as guides for concealing meaning.

Many of these texts appear in manuscripts that also contain a wealth of material concerned with biblical interpretation (exegesis), the decoding of astronomical 'data' (computistics), and predictions of cosmological events (prognostications), and in some cases they are also said to be written in the language of angels. Furthermore, their often impenetrably obscure content bears striking similarities to methods of encryption that were well-known and developed by early medieval Continental and Insular scribes from the seventh century onwards.

Indeed, methods of encryption expounded by Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, as well as various contemporary unconventional philosophical engagements with language and writing, indicate that understandings of obscurity, language, and the divine were being radically experimented with in Ireland in the seventh century. There is also evidence that the ideas emerging from Irish circles directly influenced some of the more enigmatic materials from England, which have been traditionally seen as somewhat anomalous. Such obscure writings (from riddles to remedies to 'charms' and amulets) rather indicate that the Christian scribes who wrote texts with various languages and alphabets (inclusive of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Irish, runic, 'Chaldaic', and so on) had also studied or read ancient philosophies of language that often closely engaged with issues of 'divine speech' and its cosmological significance throughout salvation history. Interpreting highly obscure early medieval texts according to older and contemporary practices of discovering and concealing knowledge places them in an overtly intellectual context.

The project's main objective is to demonstrate that scribes and ecclesiastics deliberately obfuscated various texts for different purposes. It will utilise previous research on ancient and medieval theories of language and linguistic obscurity in order to analyse some of the most obscure materials of the period. The project will produce several outputs including a book that provides an alternative philosophical framework in which to study linguistically opaque texts so that new interpretations of their obscure content can be generated. And there is no better place in which to be situated than NUIG with the linguistic and interdisciplinary expertise of its community.

Charlotte M. Younge, *The last hours of Archimedes*, in *A Pictorial History of the World's Great Nations from the Earliest Dates to the Present Time*, New York, 1882: 256.

Mathematica Romana

Richard Marshall

The Roman contribution to mathematics is usually dismissed as nugatory. In the delicious phrasing of the *History of Roman Literature* by Teuffel and Schwarbe (1891: 87), 'with the exception of a few amateurs ... they confined themselves to the lower kinds of computation and measuring'. The murder of Archimedes during the storming of Syracuse is emblematic of the Romans' utter contempt for the Greek mathematical sciences: disturbed by a Roman soldier while drawing geometrical figures in the sand, Archimedes is said to have made the famous, but futile plea *noli, obsecro, istum disturbare* ('Do not, I pray, disturb those'). As the soldier advanced for the killing stroke, Greek mathematics was literally trampled by the hobnails of the Roman conqueror.

Putting aside the counting poem of Catullus ('Give me a thousand kisses, Lesbia, then a hundred, then yet another thousand...'), examples of the 'lower kinds of computation and measuring' are chiefly preserved among the collected works of the Roman land surveyors. Here, the subjugation of mathematics to the Roman imperial project is made even more explicit. In the dedicatory preface of *The Description and Analysis of all Geometrical Figures,* an elementary textbook based on Euclid, the author Balbus fondly recalls that 'after we had first entered enemy territory ... the undertakings of our emperor began to require surveying skill. Two parallel lines had to be established, with a definite width for the roadway in between ... As regards the surveys for bridges, we were able to find the width of rivers from the nearest bank, even if the enemy wished to disturb us. The skill revered by the gods, moreover, showed us how we could find out the heights of mountains that needed to be stormed ...' (ed. Campbell, p. 204. 20–26). Besides the treatise of Balbus, there are also several collections of mathematical problems of a more peaceful nature, many of which are presented as simple surveyors' problems:

> A field that tapers along its length (i.e. a trapezium) is 200 feet long, on one side 130 feet wide, on the other 70 feet. I want to know the area in *iugera* (a *iugerum* is 28,800 square Roman feet).
>
> Let us find it like this. I add the smaller and larger side together, this comes to 200 feet; I take off a half, this comes to 100 feet; I multiply this by the length, that is 100 by 200, this comes to 20,000; I divide by the hundredth part, this comes to 200, I divide by the twenty-fourth and then by the twelfth part of the same sum: this comes to 3/4 plus 1/36 (i.e. 25/36); there are this many *iugera.*

The approach to solving problems is algorithmic, i.e. the reader is expected to learn by rote a sequence of simple arithmetical operations to find an unknown quantity. Algorithms are provided for triangular fields, rectangular fields, and various kinds of trapezium: exactly what one would expect to find in a collection of surveying manuals.

However, one of the collections contains something rather different:

> There is a field, which has a length of 900 feet, but I have raised however many *iugera* it covers to the sixth power and found the width. I want to know the width or area in *iugera.**

The problem $A = \frac{900A^6}{28{,}800}$ is hardly likely to be encountered in the day-to-day work of a surveyor! This is an arithmetical exercise disguised in the language of surveying. Other problems from the same collection include cubes, the fourth and fifth powers, and a class of mathematical objects known as polygonal numbers.

Though reliant on Greek mathematics, these are profoundly Roman problems: their whole number solutions require the use of Roman units of measurement.

The existence of such problems, which are completely devoid of any practical application, leads to a startling conclusion. As a group, the Roman land surveyors hardly belonged to the most elevated strata of society (many, like Balbus, served in the army), yet some of them evidently engaged with recreational mathematics: they created and solved arithmetical puzzles as a form of 'edutainment'. These are not the amateurs of Teuffel and Schwarbe, but practical people with a fascination for the deeper truths of their profession: it is agreeable to speculate that some may have heeded the plea of Archimedes.

*Area = 2 *iugera*; width = 64 feet.*

Ireland and Carolingian Brittany: Texts and Transmission

Jacopo Bisagni, Sarah Corrigan, Paula Harrison

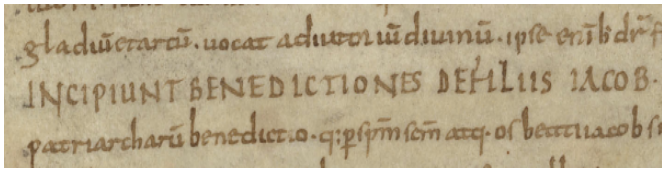
The project *Ireland and Carolingian Brittany: Texts and Transmission* (IrCaBriTT), funded by the Laureate programme of the Irish Research Council and based at Classics in NUI Galway, reached its mid-point in September 2020. This is therefore a good time to think back on some of the project's achievements so far, and to consider where it will be going next.

IrCaBriTT is an attempt to understand the cultural position of Brittany during the Carolingian age, by exploring in particular its possible intellectual links with Ireland. Two specific domains of early medieval scholarship are especially in focus, namely *computus* (the study of time-reckoning) and Biblical exegesis, but in fact the whole manuscript production of Brittany c. AD 780–1100 is being assessed. For this purpose, a monograph-sized *Handlist of Breton Manuscripts, c. AD 780–1100* (*HBM*) has recently been completed by **Jacopo Bisagni** (with contributions by Sarah Corrigan) and will be published in early 2021 as an open-access online database (with the invaluable technical assistance of David Kelly of the Moore Institute).

Preliminary results obtained from the *HBM* indicate that the degree of Irish influence on early medieval Breton written culture was indeed considerable, and this seems to suggest that direct routes of textual transmission from Ireland to Brittany *did* exist. However, work carried out by Bisagni over the past year on two tenth-century Breton computistical manuscripts—Paris, BNF, Lat. 6400B and Angers, Bibliothèque Municipale, 476—shows that things may be significantly more complex than they look. While both manuscripts contain abundant computistical materials of clear Irish origin, systematic comparison with over one hundred early medieval codices has revealed an intricate network of textual connections with many regions of the Carolingian empire: the most significant of these is undoubtedly the broad area of Northern Francia comprised between the rivers Seine and Rhine, an area well-known to Carolingianists for its numerous and prominent ecclesiastical foundations—places such as Amiens, Laon, Péronne, Corbie, Rheims, and further to the east, Echternach and Cologne

This newly discovered wealth of textual links suggests that a ninth-century route of manuscript transmission *from* Northern Francia *to* Brittany could account for at least some of the Irish features that characterise the intellectual output of the latter country. Indeed, it is well known that the monastic foundations of Northern Francia had been a favourite destination for the Irish *peregrini* since the seventh century: one only needs to think of the Latin name of the monastery of Péronne in the Early Middle Ages: *Peronna Scottorum*, 'Péronne of the Irish'!

These discoveries fully vindicate the decision to include a manuscript produced in that area as one of the main case-studies of the IrCaBriTT project: namely, the early ninth-century codex Laon, Bibliothèque Municipale, 422, which is being examined by **Paula Harrison**. A comparative analysis of this manuscript's palaeographical features locates the *scriptorium* of origin in the Cambrai/Corbie region. This study initially focussed only on the astronomical and computistical compilation entitled *De astronomia*, but the investigation has now broadened to encompass the numerous diagrams that accompany it. Underlying *De astronomia* is a tract frequently found in Carolingian computistical florilegia, known as *De divisionibus temporum* ('Concerning the divisions of time'). The version preserved in Laon 422 has been greatly expanded upon with the addition of grammatical and exegetical materials, and it features three Old Irish words embedded in the main text. Along with this, the 'augmented version' shares significant textual parallels with other Irish computistical texts, including those which have a uniquely Breton manuscript transmission.



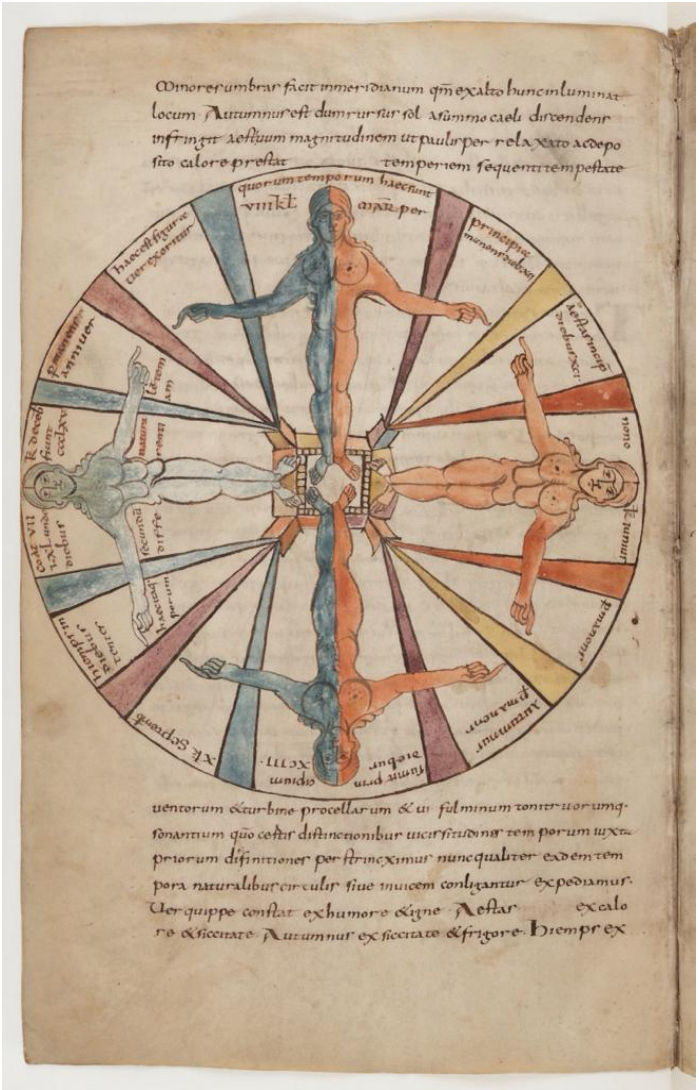
Title for Adrevald of Fleury's commentary on Genesis 49, Orléans, Mediathèque, 182, p. 273

But *computus* is not the only genre enabling us to verify the existence of close intellectual links between Brittany and the great ecclesiastical schools and *scriptoria* of Carolingian Francia. As well as its Breton aspects, the exegetical compilation in the manuscript that **Sarah Corrigan** is studying, Orléans, Mediathèque, 182, also evidences its relationship to neighbouring Frankish intellectual centres:

in addition to concise borrowings from works originating in places like Tours and Auxerre, these Biblical *Glossae* also include the entirety of a ninth-century work by Adrevald of Fleury. Exciting further evidence of the networks of transmission that medieval Brittany was part of is a manuscript newly incorporated into this component of the project: a second copy of the *Glossae* appearing in the twelfth-century codex Rheims, Bibliothèque Municipale, 395 (278).

The two versions do not share a single exemplar, but Rheims 395 does preserve the in-text Old Breton and Old English glosses, exemplifying the ongoing and outward impact of Breton scholarship.

Going forward, IrCaBriTT continues to map the connections between Brittany and the wider Carolingian world—interrelationships that, clearly, were by no means one-way.



The diagram of the seasons, Laon, Bibliothèque Municipale, 422, fol. 6v

Res Gestae

Reports from staff on recent work

MICHAEL CLARKE A year's research sabbatical is a privilege, and in this of all years I counted my blessings, because my working days in the attic at home went on more-or-less as they would have done without the crisis unfolding in the world outside. Like everyone else, however, I had questions to face, above all the worry over those whose research I supervise: How on earth could anyone think and write creatively in such isolation? For me personally, the strangest thing was the loss of certainty and clarity that came when the artificial supports of this profession were removed—the office, the lecture-room, the seminars and conferences abroad. Sometimes this felt like the mental habits of lazy middle-age, but maybe it is something more as well. Just like teaching and learning, research and scholarship are fundamentally social activities, and the essence of our humanity lies in being a social species. I wrote a lot of articles and footnotes this year, but the spark of something bigger and brighter was very hard to kindle. It is time now to learn lessons from that experience, and to be wiser in the future.

EDWARD HERRING Since the last issue of *Western Classics*, three further journal articles written during my sabbatical have come out. One ("She's can be heroes: female status and the Daunian stelae") was published last year in *Accordia Research Papers*, another ("Impact kraters: the role of wine-mixing vessels in the production of Apulian red-figure pottery") appeared in the 2020 issue of *BABESCH* and the third ("Emblems of Identity revisited: gender and the Messapian trozzella") is hot off the presses in the latest issue of *Ancient West and East*. The work that I have been doing since my return from leave should appear in the next year or two.

The scholar's life has many rewards, like watching students engage deeply with a complex topic or receiving a warm reaction from one's peers upon presenting a new paper. Although we have been deprived of face-to-face interactions recently, in the last couple of months I have enjoyed two such moments. The first was giving a paper in the annual Accordia lecture series. The Accordia Lectures are normally held in London, but the 32nd series is currently running via Zoom. I gave a paper, entitled "Can I Be Now? Creating community identities in pre-Roman Italy",

on 20th October. The session was well-attended and the discussion lively with colleagues tuning in from across Europe. The second is a matter of great pleasure as my doctoral student, Micheál Geoghegan, successfully navigated his PhD viva at the start of October. His thesis is entitled "Man the Tamer: Masculine Ideology, Power and the Domestication of the Wild in Ancient Greece". Micheál is my third doctoral student to complete and, while the success is rightfully his, I cannot but feel a little pride in his achievement.

Messapian trozzella vase with horseman in "brown-figure" style (922.47.7), c. 480-450 BC, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada.

RICHARD MARSHALL It is still not quite a year since my family and I packed up our lives in Scotland and came to live in Galway. In the short time I have been here, I have developed two new modules (on Ancient Biography and Ancient Religions) and written content for a third (the 'Written Words' portion of Written Words and Spoken languages), launched a new 'lighting' seminar series for the Department's research community, and generally tried to settle in as best I can *in tempore pestis*.

Over the Summer, my plan was to finish an edition of the Latin mathematical treatises preserved among the collected works of the Roman land surveyors, but circumstances forced a rethink. Instead, I have finished a couple of articles on a new fragment of an illustrated commentary on the *Phaenomena* of Aratus that was translated (very badly!) into Latin in the late fifth century. Importantly, this fragment allows us to identify for the first time the birthplace of Euclid, the famous geometer: he was a Sicilian.

Sadly, in two months' time we will move again, this time to England. A team of colleagues with whom I have been planning an edition of the fragments of the Roman Republican Antiquarians has secured European Research Council funding for a four year project. I will thus be joining University College London in February to begin work on the new edition, but I'll be taking very fond memories of Galway and many new friendships with me.

PÁDRAIC MORAN What a remarkable year. Pre-pandemic days seem a distant memory now, as I hope the current restrictions will be, eventually. The emergency transition to online teaching in March was quite a shock and the learning curve was steep for staff and students alike.

However, I am very proud of the professionalism of my colleagues, who adapted quickly, effectively, and without fuss, and of our excellent students, whose engagement and positivity was motivating as always. There was considerable uncertainty around the re-commencement of the new academic year, and while the continuation of remote learning seemed inevitable now in retrospect, it was disappointing at the time. We are working hard to give our students the best experience possible in the circumstances, but we look forward to when we can meet them again in person, and the feedback I have had is that students feel the same. Education is about human exchange. Technology can be a wonderful asset, but it cannot recreate the feeling of being part of a learning community.

Teaching aside, I was able to make some reasonable progress on some research projects. There was little scope for travelling, obviously, though in January I did have the opportunity to go to Rome to talk at the University of Notre Dame's Winter School in Latin Palaeography and Codicology. Even so, it was still refreshing to see and hear international colleagues at some online conferences during the year. I finished a few pieces of writing, including a survey of Hiberno-Latin literature and a technical piece on the functions of manuscript glossing. I am currently preparing a study of the Old Latin fragments in Priscian's Latin grammar and trying to identify what his ninth-century Irish readers made of them.

I was delighted to see the appearance this winter of *Classics and Irish Politics, 1916–2016*, edited by Isabelle Torrance and Donncha O'Rourke. The book includes my own contribution 'Classics through Irish at University College, Galway, 1931–78', evaluating the teaching careers of George Thomson and Margaret Heavey. It's a fine collection overall and a timely reflection on the relevance and role of Classics in modern Irish culture.

Current PhD Research

Current PhD topics, with some reports on work in progress

GRACE ATTWOOD 'Obscurity in Hiberno-Latin texts' My research is currently examining whether Patristic ideas about biblical style, such those found in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* and Cassiodorus's *Expositio Psalmorum*, might have influenced the development of 'obscure' features in Hiberno-Latin texts.

MICHAEL DOHERTY 'The use and representation of Classics themes and imagery in Victorian art as part of a colonial discourse on Empire'

IOANNIS DOUKAS 'A Trojan Cycle for Late Antiquity: Intertextuality in Late Epic and its Digital Representation' Not unlike everyone else, I spend these days housebound, more or less. I find myself at the final stages of my doctoral project, as I revisit my past academic self and try to amend his shortcomings. At the moment, I am re-working a chapter on the construction of the Trojan Horse, as described in passages from the *Posthomerica* by Quintus of Smyrna and *The Sack of Troy* by Triphiodorus; and since this ploy involved a temporary voluntary confinement of Greeks, the irony, I guess, is not missed on me.

NOÉMI FARKAS 'Intertextuality and Ideology in Sedulius Scottus, *De rectoribus christianis*'

FRANCESCA GUIDO '*De Analogia, ut ait Romanus*: Recovering an embedded text in Charisius' Latin grammar' About AD 360, somewhere in the East, possibly in Constantinople, Charisius wrote a Latin grammar for his Greek-speaking son. This text travelled widely around Europe and is preserved in a palimpsest from Columbanus' monastery in Bobbio. My project focuses on Chapter I.17, *De Analogia*, excerpted from a text of Iulius Romanus otherwise lost, in which we recognize the Latin grammarian Caper and considerations ultimately attributable to Pliny's *Dubius Sermo*. My research highlights the connections between this text and the surviving ancient scholastic literature, in both its sources and its reception.

ANN HURLEY The anonymous *Excidium Troiae* is a sixth-century version of the Troy story, which, alongside the better-known versions of Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, was a source for later tales on the fall of Troy. My project examines the *Excidium Troiae* as a didactic text and explores its transmission in the historiographical tradition surrounding the Trojan narrative. I have recently completed work on the introduction to the *Excidium Troiae* found in a 9th century manuscript housed in the Biblioteca Reale in Turin and am now engaged in writing up my thesis for submission.

MARIA CHIARA MARZOLLA 'Music and the Early Irish Church' I am currently carrying out a systematic analysis of all available Early Medieval Hiberno-Latin sources (c. AD 600–900). This year, in particular, I am working on the topic "voice and sound", in order to understand: (1) whether the Hiberno-Latin grammatical tradition, which dealt with the subject of voices and sounds, took into consideration musical sounds, and whether it was able to define them; (2) how the various typologies of sounds—instrumental, vocal or purely symbolic—were described and perceived by Early Medieval Irish scholars; (3) how Hiberno-Latin literature elaborated the concept of 'ineffability' in relation to the 'expression of joy' (*iubilus* and *gaudium*) in the context of God's worship.

ÉRIN MCKINNEY 'Linguistic code-switching in *Bethu Brigte*, the Old Irish Life of St Brigit'

ELENA NORDIO 'Regionalism and Diversification in Seventh-Century Visigothic Latinity: A Sociolinguistic Approach' Currently, I am in the process of analysing the manuscripts that constitute the corpus of my research, which includes recording all linguistic phenomena that deviate from what we know as 'Classical Latin'. Next, I will proceed with the analysis of the linguistic features identified, by means of internal (i.e. within the Iberian Peninsula) and external (i.e. outside the Iberian Peninsula) comparison with contemporary evidence for Early Medieval regional varieties of Latin.

MARY SWEENEY 'Judean Identity in Second Century BCE Alexandria' I am currently undertaking a philological examination of the fragmentary *Exagoge*, a Hellenistic Judean tragedy. By using *comparanda* from pagan Greek literature while simultaneously examining Hellenistic educational practices, my work highlights how Hellenistic Judean authors saw Greek texts as malleable tools, which they could call upon to display their own ideas and identities.

HARRY TANNER 'Greek Lexical Semantics'

Left to right: Kate Quinn (Head of School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, NUIG), Michael Clarke, Jacopo Bisagni, Edward Herring, Pádraic Moran, John Carey (UCC).

Events

Book Launch for Jacopo Bisagni, Michael Clarke, Edward Herring, and Pádraic Moran

On the 31st of January 2020, four members of the Classics Department launched six new books:

- Jacopo Bisagni, *Amrae Coluimb Chille: a Critical Edition* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2019).

- Michael Clarke, *Achilles Beside Gilgamesh: Mortality and Wisdom in Early Epic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

- Edward Herring, *Patterns in the Production of Apulian Red-Figure Pottery* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).

- Edward Herring & Eóin O'Donoghue (eds.), *The Archaeology of Death. Proceedings of the Seventh Conference* (Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2018).

- Pádraic Moran, *De Origine Scoticae Linguae* (*O'Mulconry's Glossary*): *An early Irish linguistic tract, edited with a related glossary, Irsan* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019).

- Chris Stray, Michael Clarke & Joshua Katz (eds.), *Liddell and Scott: The History, Methodology and Languages of the World's Leading Lexicon of Ancient Greek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Events

PhD Completion for Micheál Geoghegan

Congratulations to Micheál Geoghegan, who on the 1st of October 2020 successfully passed the viva for his Irish Research Council funded project: 'Man the Tamer: Masculine Ideology, Power and the Domestication of the Wild in Ancient Greece'

Giambologna, *Hercules and the Centaur Nessus.* 1599, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence.

Editorial Board for this Edition:
Grace Attwood (Editor-in-Chief)
Michael Clarke
Sarah Corrigan
Pádraic Moran
Mary Sweeney

Keep in touch

You can keep in touch in several ways:

(1) To keep an eye on recent activities, see our website: **http://www.nuigalway.ie/classics**

(2) If you would like to receive occasional e-mails about news and upcoming events, send a blank e-mail to: **nuig-classics+subscribe@groups.google.com**

(3) Social media junkies can also follow us on **Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/ClassicsNUIGalway)** and on **Twitter (@NUIGClassics)**