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Introduction

Edith Hall and Henry Stead

‘Bœotia, choose reform or civil war!’ thunders the oracle reported to the Thebes of Shelley’s satirical *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant* (1820, Act I.113). Shelley’s Bronze-Age Thebes is blighted by famine, a failing economy, despotic rule and by corruption in the government, army, and state religion: it transparently represents Britain in 1820. Yet in the period covered by our book, from the French revolution until the 1960s, Britain did always choose reform rather than civil war. And this was despite terrifying moments when some feared that the entire nation would indeed descend into violence, not only in the aftermath of such upsurges of popular radicalism as those provoking the brutal ‘Peterloo Massacre’, which took place in Manchester the year before Shelley penned *Swellfoot*, but also during the Continental revolutions of 1848, and the run-up to the General Strike of 1926.

This collection of essays explores the presence of ancient Greece and Rome in some episodes during the struggle for reform in Britain—the struggle not only for parliamentary and electoral reform, but for reform in diverse areas of economic, social, and cultural life. Some reforms are manifested in legislation, such as laws which protect the rights of workers, or make full-time education compulsory for all children; others are shifts in sensibility or aesthetic taste which reflect and consolidate the democratisation of culture, the spread of literacy, or increasing sympathy with the poor or the ethnically different. Other reforms take the form of schemes which promote improvements and modernising initiatives, in mass healthcare, for example, or housing.

The volume began life at a conference entitled ‘Classics and Class’ organised at the British Academy by Edith Hall in 2010, where earlier drafts of some of the essays (those by Roberts, Richardson, Stray, Butler, Alston, and one of those by Hall) were delivered as papers. The

additional papers have been commissioned since the award in 2013 of a major research grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for Hall's project 'Classics and Class in Britain 1789-1939' (classicsandclass.info) at King's College, London, and the appointment of Henry Stead as Post-Doctoral Researcher on the project. Most of the contributors, including the authors of some of the newly commissioned essays (Hardwick, McConnell, Goff, and Simpson) are members of the project's Advisory Board.

The reader of this book will benefit from a short account of the wider scholarly context which has produced it. For it makes available just one part of the results of the research we are undertaking as part of the 'Classics and Class project', which has a wider scope going well beyond the relationship between classical culture and reform. The aim of the project is fundamentally to challenge the limited existing model of the relationship between classical culture and social class in Britain. The conventional model assumes that the social function of knowledge of the languages and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, restricted to a small minority, was primarily to maintain barriers between social classes. This model has been developed in the (themselves few) studies which address the role played by classics in social exclusion, notably F. Waquet's *Le latin, ou L'empire d'un signe* (1998), although the major focus of that study was the European Continent in the Early Modern period. Christopher Stray's fine *Classics Transformed* and two articles by Phiroze Vasunia use elite sources on educational policy and the British Civil Service exams to show how youths who had acquired knowledge of Latin and Greek were privileged in the later nineteenth century.¹ Recent research completed by Hall on classics-informed responses to the 1857 Indian uprising against British rule, to the campaigns for the abolition of slavery 1770-1865, and on female classical scholars from the Renaissance to the twentieth century,² revealed that the prevalent perception of the historical relationship between classics and the divisions between citizens on the criterion of social class is likely to be distorted because the crucial voices—those of the working class—have yet to be heard.

This hypothesis has also been informed by the provocative approaches to literary communities developed in J. Boreil's *Les Sauvages dans la cité: auto-émancipation du peuple et instruction des prolétaires au XIXe siècle* (1985), and Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), who was the Keynote speaker at the 2010 'Classics and Class' conference. Although neither of these studies focuses specifically on the classics, they suggest that Greek and Roman authors may have had a greater presence in the lives and therefore memoirs and cultural output of working-class writers than is usually supposed. Although the exclusionist model is almost universally taken for granted, and conventionally supported by a few passages in canonical nineteenth-century authors such as Dickens (on whom see Hall's chapter six in this volume), Thackeray, Eliot, and Hardy, this is because scholars have hitherto almost completely ignored the evidence for contact with classics produced by working-class people themselves (often unpublished autobiographies, memoirs, letters, records of recreational activities, political banners, leaflets), which our project is investigating.

The period we are examining is that when class identity and conflict in Britain was at its most acute and self-conscious. The chronological scope is determined at the earlier end by the emergence of social 'class' as a category used in the modern sense after the French revolution, as defined by E.P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).³ The term 'classics' has, since the early eighteenth century, been used in English to designate the ancient Greek and Roman authors, their languages, and civilisations, and the institutional study of them. In this volume we have found it important to distinguish between 'Classics' as educational discipline, and 'classics' as the cultural products of ancient Greece and Rome, because – although the two often overlap and inform one another – they can and often do exist quite apart from one another. Sometimes the richest encounters with classical culture, appear to have had very little to do with the academic field of 'Classics', which understanding has helped us push the exclusionist model through its breaking point. For whilst being excluded from Classics (and thence sometimes from

more self-consciously ‘high-brow’ versions of classics), a great many of the working and middle classes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain have been very much *included* in the cultural practice of engaging with classical culture. In the earlier decades of our period the practice of bypassing the exclusive classical education and engaging with classical culture anyway—or, if you like, the separation of classics from Classics—occasionally resulted in such pitched battles in the ideological sphere (e.g. Stead’s chapter four), which somewhat counter-intuitively both refute and reinforce the exclusionist model, depending on whether or not we look past the ideology and down to its material roots.

It is also worth noting at this point that within the present volume’s period of study the picture is complicated by the fact that not only were classics going on beyond the reach of Classics, but formerly-excluded demographics were also consistently ‘infiltrating’ higher social realms partially through obtaining a classical education. There were, for example, the extraordinarily industrious working-class men, and many more middle-class men (and women) who were—by pure diligence and/or changes in economic fortune (or both)—able to gain access to a classical education. Some of them used the type of publication exemplified by the *Encyclopaedia Perthensis* (1816), aimed at the ambitious Scottish self-educator who could see himself mirrored in the frontispiece, receiving private instruction from the goddess of wisdom, Minerva ([figure 1.1](#)). These self-education narratives include the highly visible but rare ‘rags-to-riches’ stories, telling the rise of illiterate manual labourers to lofty appointments at universities, many of which can be seen in the Classics and Class archive (classicsandclass.info). If these formally excluded groups did not encounter classics via the leading schools and Oxbridge, then they may have done so by way of the increasingly diverse array of those educational institutions which are less accustomed to the academic spotlight. These encompassed not only the ‘minor public schools’, which sprang up throughout the nineteenth century, reproducing to some extent the syllabus of their more established forebears, but also institutions such as numerous dissenting academies (from the later

seventeenth century, including the influential Warrington Academy est. 1756), the University of London (established in 1836 as an examining body for dissenters), and countless more affordable (if not free) schools up and down the country. In the classical education of the dissenting academies a special emphasis was laid the study of Greek, which was important for the Biblical study.⁴ A far more colourful and varied picture of British classics emerges from the canvas when the model of exclusion is lifted. We must again stress that this does not mean that the model is not true, but merely shows that much else is also true, including that which may appear to be contradictory. The dominant classes may have had the master key to the Classics, but this means neither that others could not gain entrance to the classics (a room in the same building, holding many of the same objects), nor that some did not make it their life's work to cut and distribute new keys, promoting access to all areas.

The term 'class' in the social sense begins in around 1770, the period of the industrial revolution and its decisive reorganization of society, when it began to replace the feudal terminology of 'rank' and 'order'. Our theoretical model, derived from the Sociological studies by Anthony Giddens,⁵ uses the term 'class' in a way that assumes that class was often the most important determinant characteristic in shaping people's lives. What is meant by 'class' in this volume and our wider study is the cluster of factors identified by Max Weber as creating class divisions—the objective criteria of property, income, and occupation, combined with the subjective criterion of a collective sense of identity defined in class terms.⁶ The focus on class also requires engaging with alternative conceptual and analytical categories such as 'Mass' or 'Popular' Culture, associated with Communication Studies, which mask the actual social position, workload and opportunities of specific historical subjects. The model proposed by M. Schiach in *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the present* (1989), for example, obscures the real class divisions underlying the exponential growth in cultural output and accessible 'popular' publications during this era.

Although the experience of working-class Britons underpins our wider investigations, the results of which will be published later in a substantial co-authored companion volume *Classics and Class in Britain*, in the course of our researches it has become apparent that when it comes to campaigns for reform, the leaders were frequently from the middle class rather than the working class. Their sympathy with the members of classes lower than theirs has diverse causes. Some of them are only one or two generations removed from ancestors who were in service, or agricultural or industrial labourers. Several came from religious backgrounds, and were attracted to support Chartism, the labour movement, socialism and communism because of their experience of Christianity, often of a non-conformist brand. Others, despite ‘good breeding’ and education, which at least until the First World War and in the case of men almost inevitably involved some engagement with Greek and Latin authors, had experienced acute poverty at some period of their lives (Dickens and Caudwell are important examples). For the classically educated women of the Independent Labour Party and for C.L.R. James in the 1930s, discussed in chapters 12 and 15, their primary route into commitment to reform was via feminism or anti-racism.

To use the word ‘reform’ in the title of any historical study is to leap recklessly into a conceptual and political minefield. There exists widespread and often bitter contestation of the significations of the ‘r’ words—reform, Reformation, resistance, revolt, rebellion, revolution, radicalism—as well as some within the same cluster of signification in political history and theory which do *not* begin with ‘r’, such as gradualism, progressivism, and modernisation. This has been the case since long before Friedrich Engels first controversially proposed that the religious ‘Reformation’ of the sixteenth century was in fact the ideological mask of what was the early bourgeois economic and political *revolution*.⁷

In the period we are discussing, both the verb and noun ‘reform’ could be used of any process where a practice or system was consciously modernised, simplified, streamlined or improved, such as calendar reform, spelling reform, dress reform,⁸ or reform in the techniques of

financial book-keeping.⁹ Yet in Britain, since the mid-eighteenth century, the noun ‘reform’, used without qualification, has historically most often designated parliamentary ‘reform’, as in William Ford Stanley’s *Proposition for a new reform bill, to fairly represent the interests of the people*, published in London in 1768.¹⁰ But even parliamentary and electoral reform was originally called ‘reformation’, as is shown by the meeting in the Thatched House Tavern on 16 May 1782 of ‘Members of Parliament friendly to a Constitutional Reformation, etc.’¹¹ The title and subtitle of William Cobbett’s *Elements of Reform, or, An Account of the Motives and Intentions of the Advocates for Parliamentary Reformation* (1809) shows that nearly thirty years later people still heard the close relationship between the idea of ‘Reform’ and ‘reformation’, with all the ideological baggage which the latter word had acquired in its usage, since the sixteenth century, specifically to designate *the* Reformation—that is, the Protestant Reformation of Christianity.

The ‘re-’ prefix in English words with Latin roots, such as ‘reform’ and ‘reformation’, can imply other shades of meaning. There is often a sense that the alteration in the system in question corrects abuses of some kind. Take the ‘great’ Reform Act of 1832, to which several essays in this volume refer. Although it was generally called the Reform Act for short in its own time, its true title was the ‘Representation of the People Act 1832’, and its purpose was to ‘take effectual Measures for correcting divers Abuses that have long prevailed in the Choice of Members to serve in the Commons House of Parliament’. If measures are ‘correcting divers abuses’, then a moral undertow to the terms *reform* and *reformation* becomes inevitable, and most of the people studied in this volume did indeed have a moral commitment, usually informed by Christianity, to altering society for the better. The notion of moral betterment is also central to the use of the word ‘reform’ in relation to ‘curing’ individuals or classes of bad habits or behaviours—criminals can be reformed into honest men, prostitutes into chaste matrons, alcoholics into abstemious teetotallers. It is in this sense that William Cowper asked in his 1785 poem ‘The Task’ whether literary satire

could actually improve people's morals (2.320-1): 'What vice has it subdued? whose heart reclaimed/By rigour, or whom laughed into reform?'

A third implication of the 're-' prefix in *reform* and *reformation* can be that the improvement, amendment and alteration is somehow *returning* the institution or practice in question to its authentic roots—it is less a modernisation than a flight from decadence, a restoration, re-establishment or revival of a former, now neglected set of practices. This sense is most usually apparent in the description of religious orders founded or amended in the principle that their members need to return to original, stricter observances, such as the Benedictine Reform of the tenth century, or the Augustinian reform. Occasionally this is apparent in the discussion of parliamentary and constitutional reform, because many British democrats—at least in the eighteenth century—genuinely believed that before the Norman invasions, the Anglo-Saxons had enjoyed the equivalent of full male suffrage, since executive power had been held by the parliament known as the *myclegemot*, a convention or legislative body consisting of representatives chosen by *all* the people. When Joseph Gerrald, a republican campaigner for universal suffrage, was tried for (and convicted of) sedition in 1794, he said in his defence speech that he and his fellow radicals were trying to *restore* the ancestral right of the British to one-man-one-vote. But Gerrald was one of the earliest Britons also to idealize the classical Athenian democracy, which he saw (despite the Athenians' tolerance of slavery) as equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon *myclegemot*.¹² Parliamentary reform, for Gerrald and his colleagues, really did mean *reviving* an ancient system as well as radically amending the current one.

After the 1832 Reform Act, the dominance of parliament in the popular conception of 'reform' began to lessen as economic theory developed rapidly, under the influence of political and social reform,¹³ and as the impact was felt of the pioneering work of Robert Owen and others who resisted the social and economic evils to which the industrial revolution had given rise. This philanthropic industrialist had been disappointed in most of his attempts in 1819 to persuade the

government to introduce radical reforms of employment laws, and so devoted himself to nurturing voluntary associations and cooperatives which could create humane housing and working conditions, as well as encouraging worker education.¹⁴ In the 1830s he started to use the word ‘socialism’ to describe the ideal model of society, in which profits were shared, and producers and consumers cooperated on friendly principles of mutual assistance. His ideas were later taken up by the Fabians, who wanted to achieve socialism, but unlike Owen believed that it could be achieved incrementally by gradual reforms of the economy and social conditions, as well as the extension of the franchise, introduced by state legislation.¹⁵ The Fabian gradualist model was then officially espoused by the Labour Party in 1918; ‘incrementally and by degrees, the party would gain support and pass legislation in an inexorable progress towards the socialist millennium.’¹⁶

The precise connotations of the term ‘reform’, whether as a noun or a verb, are often best understood within a particular context by looking at the terms to which it is opposed. In the context of abolitionism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, commitment to reform—the abolition of slavery by a series of legislative measures—was often opposed to ‘immediatism’, the demand that all slaves be emancipated completely without further delay, which was explicitly formulated by American Methodist followers of John Wesley.¹⁷ It is conventional to question whether the most effective route to a fairer society is radicalism or reform, and the issue is often discussed, as it was already in Karl Marx’s day,¹⁸ as though radicalism and commitment to reform are abstract conceptions which can guide political behavior in urgent circumstances and near-emergency contexts. But in practice, in Britain during the period covered in this book, the choice was usually a practical response to the immediate situation. Some of the individuals in this book had joined the Fabians at some point in their lives, but—at others—found themselves engaged in violent confrontations between the police and the unemployed. Where reform is possible through statutory means, there is little need for extra-legal measures; where individuals have no vote nor

power, they become far more quickly radicalized and will use force, at least in self-defense, as a matter of course.¹⁹

Again, reform is often understood as a process of political change which deliberately and as a matter of principle avoids violence, unlike revolution. In his *Philosophical View of Reform*, written in 1819-1820, despite the violence which had been inflicted on the peaceful demonstrators at Peterloo, Shelley explicitly said he was opposed to violent revolution; he advocated achieving the five reforms he recommended, in the spheres of finance, the army, the church and the judiciary, through simultaneous moral reform within the individual and institutional reform implemented through the law.²⁰ The mental opposition of ‘reform’ and ‘revolution’ also underlies the conventional scholarly view of the 1832 Reform Act, for example, as a legislative concession designed to avoid a violent confrontation between classes, with reform functioning ‘as an elite response to a revolutionary threat.’²¹ But this dichotomy is often unhelpful when trying to understand changes in any society. Specialists in the anti-slavery movement in America of the 1850s point out that there were groups who advocated non-violent revolution, and others who advocated using reform through legislation but allowing the use of violence in the pursuit of getting reformist legislation passed: Frederick Douglass himself moved espousal of the former position to the latter.²²

In Britain, many advocates of reform, like Joseph Gerrald, were accused by their enemies of having used physical violence, or being prepared to use it, in order to wrest power from those who held it. But the accusation that they were advocates of violent revolution does not constitute proof that they were. When terrified by the popularity of Chartism, the British middle classes made much of what they tried to portray as a strategic split amongst the advocates of universal male suffrage, dividing those who advocated physical force from those who did not. They lionized Samuel Bamford, who began life as an ardent radical, because they could use his stated objections to Chartism, and especially his autobiography (1839-42), to discredit the campaign for the Charter

and imply that it jeopardized peace and social stability. After his death, Bamford was used to define the acceptable limits of political action in a working man, which allowed him to argue for reform but to partake in no political action beyond restrained verbal argument, and above all to put patriotism before any desire for change.²³ James Fraser, the bishop of Manchester, wrote in 1872 that Bamford was to be praised for believing that that ‘instead of wishing to create sudden changes and to overthrow institutions, it were better that ignorance alone were pulled down’ and for maintaining that self-control and self-amendment of the individual was the only solid ‘basis of all public reform’.²⁴ Yet the propaganda used against the Chartists, which alleged that they were almost universally prepared to use physical force, was certainly exaggerated: the Chartist poet Thomas Cooper, discussed in Hardwick’s chapter, who was imprisoned after riots in the Staffordshire potteries in 1842, always insisted that he had never either advocated or utilized physical violence. On the other hand, Enid Stacy, a passionate campaigner in the early years of the Independent Labour Party, who was adamantly anti-war, was involved in regular scuffles with the police, and made no attempt to avoid them. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), unlike many communist parties in other countries, never explicitly advocated violent revolution, and often asked its members to vote Labour and to work to promote its socialist agenda through legislation. Christopher Caudwell, the communist writer studied in chapter fourteen, who volunteered to fight Fascism in Spain, was driven to join the CPGB partly out of his horror at Oswald Mosley’s encouragement of his fascist Blackshirts to use violence against the Jewish population of East London in the mid-1930s.

The primary aim of the team of researchers who have collaborated with us on the present volume is to explore several overlapping cultural arenas in which people struggling to promote reform within British society engaged with the cultural property broadly defined as ‘classical culture’, that is, the texts, artefacts and history of the people of the ancient Mediterranean who spoke and left records written in the ancient Greek and Latin languages. The fifteen exploratory

studies are arranged chronologically, spanning nearly two centuries from the French revolution until the 1960s. Hardwick opens up the debate by stressing the complexity of the relationship between classical culture and British reform. She asks whether it is possible to write a history of the way that any cultural property was experienced by campaigners and activists at the ‘grass roots’ of movements for reform (interestingly, the figurative, political sense of the term ‘grass roots’ seems not to have been used until the early twentieth century, which itself may say something about how the political and cultural experiences of the lowest classes of society were ignored or even denied altogether). She stresses that classical ideas, texts and images can of course be appropriated by advocates of violent revolution and non-violent, gradualist reform. The very susceptibility of ancient Greek and Roman materials to re-interpretation from diverse political vantage points has been one of the most important guarantees of their cultural stamina and repeated rediscovery. But, as Habermas argued, the ways in which people learn affects their political agency. Hardwick draws on Habermas to ask whether social and cultural experiences that come within the framework of ‘informal’ education involved the raising of consciousness. She concludes that the relationship between Greek and Roman culture and the nature and directions of political consciousness, at least at the ‘grass roots’ of the body politic, is often messy. Not only were there often as many differences between different radical perspectives as between radicals and gradualists, but ‘proletarian conservatism was never far from the surface, whether in aspiration for access to a literary canon or in acceptance of the norms of gender discrimination or of empire’.

The next four chapters analyse some of the classical presences—and absences—in literary media which played a role in promoting reform in the first six decades of the nineteenth century. Roberts tackles the problem of Coleridge’s political views head-on. Like Wordsworth and Southey, Coleridge exchanged the revolutionary ardour of his youth for a Church-and-State Toryism in his later years. Yet he always denied that there had been any fundamental change in his underlying views. By examining classical presences in two of Coleridge’s neglected texts from the

pivotal years of 1816-1817, especially the *Lay Sermons* and *The Statesman's Manual*, Roberts argues that he sensed the potential of classics both to stimulate the imagination and thus animate tradition, and of 'Classics' to deaden culture and stifle progress. Coleridge is writing in a context where the need for reform—but also the danger of violent rebellion—were both sensed to be pressing: a disastrous famine had afflicted the north and west of England and Ireland in the wake of the 1813 Corn Laws and the end of the Napoleonic Wars.²⁵ The success of the landmark industrial action of the colliers of Bilston in 1816 suggested to many members of the ruling classes that proletarian revolution might be imminent, and the long shadow cast by the Terror which followed the French revolution was never far from their thoughts. Adams shows how Coleridge realised that while things must change, and injustice provokes the drive for reform, war and revolution create their own injustices and tragedies and 'provoke the urge to restore order'. The tension between these drives is expressed, in Coleridge's polemical literary prose, in a tension between classical Greece and Rome, and more specifically between the 'radical' early Greek thinker Heraclitus and the 'conservative' Augustan poet Horace.

Stead's chapter addresses the same period of political and ideological conflict as Roberts, but opens out the argument to include several different writers, asking what part the Greek and Roman classics played in the cultural war between British reformists and conservatives in the periodical press of the late 1810s and early 1820s. His particular focus is the conservative critical assaults upon those predominantly professional writers, artists and thinkers associated with the 'Cockney school', most of whom, although not working-class, had attended neither university nor elite schools, and who clustered around the reformist poet and journalist, Leigh Hunt. The Greek and Latin classics are powerfully present in these culture wars, both as a feature of the provocative style of the Cockneys at the time, and as a vehicle for Tory critics to display the superiority of their own classical learning. But the Reactionary critics of the output of the reformist 'Cockney school' could not prevent the growing public perception that Hunt's careful and conscious exhibitions of

classical erudition—but in accessible, lively translations—proved that people who were not ‘scholars’ could indeed navigate, as Keats put it in his famous poem ‘On first looking into Chapman’s Homer’, the ‘realms of gold’. Cockney classicism was instrumental in dispelling the post-revolutionary gloom felt in progressive and reformist circles in the 1810s, sending out a message that ancient Greeks and Romans, and their exquisite myths and poetry, belonged to everybody with a love of beauty, nature, and the ability to appreciate literature in their mother tongue.

Richardson’s chapter addresses one of the most striking of the nineteenth-century arenas in which the public accessed Greek and Latin classics, the type of musical and comic theatre known as burlesque. Burlesques of classical plays and episodes in Ovid were extremely popular from the 1830s to the 1870s, and assessing the extent to which their insouciant appropriation of antiquity had a political undertow is of crucial importance. As a subversion of the classical education, the cheeky Greeks and Romans of burlesque may have appealed strongly to cross-class audiences including many people who had no access to the privileges such an education conferred. But such a ‘familiar’ treatment paradoxically implies a form of cultural ownership. An important factor in the ideological workings of classical burlesque is the social and educational background of the genre’s authors. The majority were somewhat rebellious or disaffected members of the middle class. But in a detailed study of perhaps the most brilliant as well as the most politically radical of all of them, Robert Brough, Richardson argues that there was a moment of opportunity when burlesque very nearly rewrote antiquity to turn members of the working classes into heroic figures, and thus reshape contemporary politics. The moment on which he focuses is 1855 to 1856, when the pain of the Crimean War was most acute—‘a bad time to be an aristocrat in Britain’. In his transparently republican *Songs of the Governing Classes* and his burlesque, *Medea, or The Best of Mothers, with a Brute of Husband*, Brough created an imaginary world of theatre in which to foster cynicism about the class system and champion greater egalitarianism. Yet as Richardson poignantly

documents, Brough's own chaotic lifestyle, poverty and debts compromised his ability to make any real difference to Victorian society whatsoever.

Brough's *Medea* burlesque, at least as realised by the incomparable transvestite actor Frederick Robson, was admired by Charles Dickens, the subject of the next chapter by Edith Hall. Dickens is central to any discussion of reform in nineteenth-century Britain, because his exposure of the hardships endured by the poor during the industrial revolution, as Karl Marx himself noticed, was instrumental in pricking the conscience of the well-to-do and even in the passing of specific and major pieces of legislation. But Dickens' relationship with the Greek and Latin classics, which has usually been dismissed as wholly negative, needs careful analysis. The essay distinguishes between on the one hand Dickens' systematic and bitter critique of the classical education on offer in mediocre private schools, and its role in social exclusion, and on the other hand the diverse manifestations of classical material in his journalism, short stories and fiction. While an uncritical adulation of ancient authors is in his fictional characters often associated with hypocrisy and snobbery, there are interesting exceptions, especially in *Dombey and Son*, and the influence of the myth of Euripides' Ion may inform, at least in a subterranean way, Dickens' famous *Bildungsroman* novels *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*. But the essay concludes that it was in his desire to listen to and reproduce in language the brand new rhythms and sounds of the mechanised, industrial world around him that Dickens' rejection of classicism is actually most palpable—the relationship between aesthetic and social reform is fundamental to understanding the presences and absences of the classics in Dickens.

At the heart of our volume, in chapter seven, Chris Stray uses the concept of social closure developed by the classically educated sociologist Max Weber in order to stress how classical education was instrumental in maintaining the pernicious class structure of nineteenth-century British society. But he also shows how the role of school and university classics in social exclusion was challenged by educational reforms and an expanding new market in inexpensive books for lay

readers and autodidacts. Central to his argument is that the Greek and Latin classics have long constituted particularly valuable cultural and intellectual capital, to use the helpful concept of French Marxist Pierre Bourdieu. Fleshing out his broad argument with the recorded experiences of colourful individuals, including some of his own working-class ancestors, Stray locates the struggle between on the one hand the social uses of the exclusive classical curriculum, and on the other hand the classics of the self-helpers and autodidacts of Britain, within the context of the new nineteenth-century world of mechanization—of railways, steam presses, stereotyping and lithography. The struggle for girls and women to access education in the classics is part of this account, as is the distinction, long treasured by the privileged, between elite training in the original ancient languages and the increasing familiarity of ancient texts amongst the less privileged public through inexpensive English-language translations.

The next pair of chapters shifts the emphasis from texts to visual art, with explorations of how a classical hero and a classical god made their presences felt in the visual environment inhabited by the working classes as they struggled to improve their situation in the long nineteenth century. Paula James shows how Hercules, the half-divine hero of superhuman strength, was irresistible to organised Labour, having ‘changed sides’ from symbolically representing European imperialism and aristocratic superiority before the French revolution. Hercules came into his own in British reformist politics with the same wave of political unrest in 1815-1819 discussed in the chapters by Roberts and Stead. The bulk of her chapter is an analysis of a famous banner featuring Hercules used by the export branch of the Dockers Union during and after their pivotal 1889 strike. This Hercules is a hero ‘of and for the working people in their struggle for a regular and minimum wage, and for a dignity of labour. The single snake is not the many-headed hydra of Lerna but still embodies the multiple evils of exploitation, destitution and prostitution prolonged by the profit-making capitalists’. James shows how the design of the poster draws on numerous iconographic traditions, including photographs of contemporary body-builders, the elite art of Frederic Leighton,

and possibly the designs of the socialist designer Walter Crane. In doing so, the image is not unproblematic, since the Hercules who is strangling the enemies of the working class is not altogether free from the triumphalism about the British imperial project which was shared by many of the poorest people in Britain.

Vulcan, the Roman version of the Greek craftsman-god Hephaestus, also enjoyed a high profile in the industrial art of the later nineteenth century, as Annie Ravenhill-Johnson's essay demonstrates. The lame divine foundry worker, sweating over his tongs and bellows, was a favoured figure in art from the Renaissance onwards, but it was with the industrial revolution that his importance as a symbol of the power of human labour to transform the material environment, by practising metallurgy on an epic scale, that Vulcan became omnipresent. Like Hercules, he can be a hero of and for the working class, and inspire and support them in their campaigns for reform. Reformist novels were written about working-class industrial heroes called 'sons of Vulcan'.²⁶ When the ingenious Lemuel Wellman Wright patented his amazing machines for sweeping chimneys in 1840, they were marketed as instruments in the campaign to prevent children being forced into the dangerous, terrifying work of cleaning chimneys: 'Wright's Patent Vulcan Chimney Sweeping Machines: the only efficient supporters of the law against climbing boys'.²⁷ Despite the Chimney Sweeps Act 1834 and 1840, which had outlawed the engagement of any child under sixteen as apprentice to a chimney sweep, forcing children up chimneys by lighting coals at their feet was still a nearly universal practice on account of the impossibility of enforcing such legislation and the lack of alternative methods. But Vulcan, too, is an ambivalent figure, as much a representative of the factory owners and industrialists in whose financial interests the iron and steel workers laboured. Classical gods and heroes—the inherited mythical forms of societies based on slave labour—will always sit in a slightly uneasy relationship with modernisation, progress and reform.

A few years before the dock-workers' strike of 1889, there had been signs of a profound awakening of concern amongst the British middle classes in response to publicity about the shocking conditions still prevalent amongst the working classes, especially in relation to health and housing. From about 1883 until the First World War there was a 'massive outpouring of best-selling literature on the subject in the thirty years before the First World War'.²⁸ The earlier wave of these included the Reverend Andrew Mearns' *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1883), the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Class (1885), Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889), Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree's *Poverty, A Study of Town Life* (1901), and novels depicting the horrors of urban slum life, especially Arthur Morrison's *Child of the Jago* (1896). The two chapters by Sarah Butler and Richard Alston ask how classical antiquity featured in the ideas and writings of middle-class reformers of this period in relation to health and urban planning respectively. Butler shows how prevalent was the comparison between the urban poor of Britain and the proletariat of ancient Rome. She illustrates how the different views and theories of the scientific community were infused, supported and given public resonance by reference to classical sources during the period when the perceived need to reverse degeneration became ever more urgent towards the end of the nineteenth century. Greek and Roman historical and philosophical sources, especially ancient images of Sparta and Plato's socially prescriptive *Republic* and *Laws* surface in the discussion of insanity, eugenics, hygiene, fitness programmes, and pauperism, morality, and marriage.

Reform of the human body was felt to require reform of the human habitat, and Alston's chapter traces the relationship between the understanding of the classical city and British discourses about reformed city building. He traces the evolution of the idea of the 'new city' from the neo-classicism of the nineteenth century through the anarchist and neo-medievalist roots of the garden city movement, to the role of classicism in both communitarian thought and architectural representations. He suggests that the 'new towns' of the early- and mid-twentieth century define

themselves by their opposition to the industrial city. Moreover, the more radical manifestations of the garden city movement offered a conceptual non-city, a Nowhere, which turned away from urbanism, Victorian and Classical. It was in 1898 that Ebenezer Howard published *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, reissued in 1902 as *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. But Alston also argues that contribution of classical urbanism to the utopian dreams of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was made easier by a long history of the idealisation of Greek culture, rationality, architecture and urbanism. But in the focus on the polis utopia, there was a requirement to look away, to avoid confronting the stasis-riven history of classical Athens, the perennial problem of inter-class violence and the hierarchical structure of ancient society. Only by disregarding these dimensions of the ancient city did it become possible to imagine modern cities, in which class did not matter, and people would live side-by-side in unified and ordered communities. As the Swiss-French architect and city planner succinctly put it in a single terse sentence, ‘Revolution can be avoided.’²⁹ The engagement with the classical model worked as a distraction from the task of understanding cities with all their virtues and sins, from seeing those cities in their socio-economic context, and of imagining wholly new utopias through which we might make our cities better.

As pressure to reform health and the urban environment grew from the 1880s, so did the need for a new, national working-class political party. The concept was supported across a range of progressive organisations, from the gradual-reformists of the Fabian Society to the most revolutionary Trade Unionists. Led by Keir Hardie, the new Independent Labour Party (ILP) was inaugurated in Bradford in January 1893. In chapter twelve, Hall explores the background and education of several of the women who were influential in the early days of the ILP, and discovers that the opening up to women of university education and the teaching profession produced a new generation of articulate young feminists who saw the emancipation of all women as just one part of their humanist, egalitarian goals of socialism. The discussion centres on Katharine Conway, later Katharine Bruce Glasier, a Newnham-educated Classics mistress who became radicalised in

Bristol during a wave of strikes and was the only woman amongst the fifteen members of the ILP's initial National Administrative Council. Other classically trained socialist women discussed in the chapter include Enid Stacy, Mary Jane Bridges Adams, and Mary Agnes Hamilton (formerly Adamson, 1882–1966). The first three made their mark on the politics of reform through education, oratory, and journalism; Hamilton wrote several respected books on ancient myth and history before being elected Member of Parliament for the Labour Party in Blackburn at the 1929 General Election.

Education is also the central theme of Barbara Goff's study of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), which from 1903 onwards campaigned for the rights of working-class people to higher education. While some of the more radical Trade Unionists and members of the ILP, including Mary Jane Bridges Adams, regarded the WEA as far too conciliatory towards the ruling class and as teaching a syllabus which made workers docile and uncritical of the establishment, its achievements were considerable. It consolidated and augmented the achievement of earlier bodies such as the Working Men's College, the Mechanics' Institutes and the University Settlements, as well as the initiatives put in place at the universities of Oxford, London and Cambridge to provide University Extension lectures. Goff shows that classics was a persistent if minor part of the WEA's activities in its first two decades, and that reference to classical authors and ideas were felt to carry considerable persuasive force in discussions within and about the WEA, especially in its magazine *The Highway*. Students encountered the ancient Greeks and Romans primarily through one-off lectures on the Greek 'heritage' or through courses on the history of world civilisation, of drama, of Europe, or of political thought, although some dedicated courses on antiquity do appear on the programmes of some branches. Exposure to the ancient world frequently came via philosophy classes and the works of Plato. The WEA's importance in the rise of the working class in the first half of the twentieth century is demonstrated emphatically by the number of Members of

Parliament after the Labour victory of 1945 who were or had been active in the organisation: no fewer than fifty-six of them.

After the Russian revolution of 1917, British socialists became divided. Some members of the ILP left to join the new Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. The CPGB became an important force on the British political scene in the 1930s, when it became attractive to a whole generation of progressive young thinkers and intellectuals. In chapter fourteen, Hall discusses the remarkable although tragically short life of Christopher Caudwell, a CPGB activist and intellectual, who lived and worked amongst the dockworkers of Poplar, East London. His poetry and novels, as well as his famous work of literary criticism, *Illusion and Reality*, are the products of deep engagement with ancient poetry and thought, especially Aristotle's *Poetics*. Caudwell is in some ways typical of the individual activists represented in this volume: he was middle-class in culture and education, but did not attend university, and was radicalised by early experiences of poverty. He wrote prolifically in several genres, and although he was killed fighting for the International Brigade in Spain, has left a large *oeuvre* in which his engagement with a large variety of classical authors is apparent. Above all, he attempted to forge a new Marxist aesthetic theory which welded a materialist understanding of culture as the product of economic and social relations of production to an Aristotelian theory of the mimetic—and therapeutic—nature of art.

While Christopher Caudwell was working for the CPGB in London, another committed communist, of a more Trotskyite and revolutionary tendency, C.L.R. James, arrived from Trinidad and became closely involved with the campaign against European imperialism in both the Caribbean and Africa. In the penultimate essay, McConnell explores an important play James wrote entitled *Toussaint Louverture*, the text of which has only recently been rediscovered. It centres on the hero of the Saint-Domingue (Haiti) slave revolt, 'the Black Spartacus', a famous biography of whom James was later to publish under the title *The Black Jacobins*. But the play, which is heavily influenced by the form and serious, didactic purpose of ancient Greek tragedy,

was produced in London in 1936 with the world-famous American actor Paul Robeson in the starring role. It urges both economic reform and racial equality. James had been classically educated, and his play's relationship with classics is multi-layered. Toussaint reads Caesar's *Commentaries*, is configured as a tragic hero like Prometheus, and is supported by a chorus. James thus uses classics to help him give dramatic shape to the inspirational revolt, thus offering his own intervention into global politics, the struggle for social reform, and the need to combat imperialism, racism, and social injustice.

Amongst the many other committed communists in Britain in the 1930s was Denis Healey, later to become a prominent member of Harold Wilson's Labour cabinet. Like most members of the CPGB, Healey was never in favour of violent revolution, but wanted to achieve socialism through legislation and moral pressure. The final chapter in the volume brings the story of the relationship between classics and reform in Britain right up to the second half of the twentieth century. Michael Simpson asks how the classical academic background of five members of Harold Wilson's modernising Labour cabinet in the 1960s affected that government's policies, if at all. The very existence of these progressive politicians of course undermines any simplistic assumption that classical education tends to be associated with right-of-centre political views. These men were also all senior members of the government that commissioned the Fulton Report (1968), which recommended that the top level of the Civil Service should increasingly recruit professionals who were specialists in, for example, Economics, rather than graduates in the Humanities, and the especially Classics graduates, indeed specifically Oxford *Literae Humaniores* graduates, who had traditionally dominated Whitehall. Simpson suggests that his subjects' shared experience of an elite classical education may have levelled them with one another, even though their social backgrounds were different, and that their undergraduate engagement in politics in the political ferment of the 1930s would inevitably have placed them in dialogue with communists; they will have known, for example, Robert Browning, who went on to become a prominent academic, and

had joined the CPGB while studying Classics at Oxford in the 1930s.³⁰ By examining some of the ex-classicist politicians' writings, Simpson concludes that their education did indeed condition their ideas and their commitment to modernisation, even if this conditioning was subterranean and psychologically unconscious.

In Britain in the early twenty-first-century, the modernising zeal of the 1960s and the foundation of the Open University (1968) seem like distant memories. So do the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Race Relations Acts (1965 and 1976). Free university education has been phased out, sentiment against immigrants has rarely been so hostile, and the rights of landlords and employers—rather than tenants and employees—have recently been strengthened. Food banks have recently become a familiar sight in British cities. Young people are frequently expected to work for nothing on internships, and many low-paid workers have little economic security due to the prevalence of 'zero-hour' contracts. Under the much-debated finalised provisions of the Terrorism Act 2006, suspects can be held for 28 days without charge, and there is pressure for a much longer period to be introduced: This has jeopardised an essential and hard-won civil liberty, originating in article 39 of Magna Carta back in the 13th century. Even the National Health Service is under persistent threat of privatization. Yet do we hear 'reform' in the mouths of politicians? No. And ironically the very language and terminology of social progress which has inspired generations is actively avoided for fear of appearing politically atavistic, and harking back to some rusted Age of Iron, coloured by best-forgotten class conflict and toxic propaganda battles and vilification of socialism during the Cold War. Could we really have misplaced our power to dream, to generate the utopias and Golden Ages so prevalent in human thought since antiquity? It would be giving in to the cynicism of the age, perhaps, to believe so. So, we will not, any more than those WEA students who (as Goff's chapters shows) took a course on ancient and modern utopias back at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The present volume is just the first chapter in our struggle with the relationship between classics and social class which aims to provoke a shift in the perception of the history of British classics, away from a conservative tradition of institutionalized elitism towards a brighter history of broadly inclusive cultural practice and inspired creativity. In it the contributors have beamed some light into the deep shadow which the predominant exclusionist model has inadvertently cast over working- and middle-class experience of classical culture. Through their focus on social reform and its middle- and upper-class campaigners, a vibrant but overlooked diversity of engagements with the classical world is revealed. In times when the need for Shelley’s ‘unacknowledged legislators of the world’ (the poets) is greatest, when they have encouraged people to see what is hidden, to dream of what they do not yet have, and to struggle to get it, historically—as this volume shows—the British (and not only the poets) have tended to look back and seek out ancient Greek and Roman precedent. It is not always pretty, and it seldom appears to have any direct impact at all on actual events. Be that as it may: ‘The person who is ignorant of the past can never grow up fully to realise the potential of the future, since it is impossible to understand one’s place in the historical sequence without understanding what has gone before.’ Cicero said that (*Orator* 120). ‘A people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history. John Berger said that.³¹ “‘I’ll let you be in my dream if I can be in yours”/ I said that’.³²

¹ Stray 1998; Vasunia 2009a and 2009b.

² Hall and Vasunia (2010); Hall, Alston and McConnell (2012); Wyles and Hall (2016).

³ Revised edition: Thompson 1968.

⁴ On Dissenting academies see <http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/academies.html> and Rivers, Wykes & Burden (eds.) *A History of the Dissenting Academies in the British Isles, 1660-1860* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press), especially the chapter by Penelope Wilson on classical languages and literature in the academies.

⁵ Especially Giddens 1981.

⁶ These ideas were developed across Weber’s *oeuvre*, but especially in *Economy and Society*, first published in German in 1922 and not in complete English-language translation until Weber 1968.

⁷ Marx and Engels 1970: 300.

⁸ On which see Newton 1974.

⁹ Vautró 1828.

¹⁰ See for a succinct account of parliamentary reform in Britain until 1832, Cannon 1972.

¹¹ Anon. 1782 (political handbill).

¹² Gerrald 1794: 188–9. See Hall and Macintosh 2005: 224-8.

¹³ Dillard 1978. On the swiftly evolving ‘reformist’ sensibility of the 1830s and this tumultuous decade’s aftermath see Llewellyn 1972 and Brantlinger 1977.

¹⁴ The best introduction to Owen’s life and ideas remains Morton 1962.

¹⁵ Yalem 1963: 36.

¹⁶ Thorpe 1996: 84.

¹⁷ Matlack 1849: 15-20; see Davis 1962.

¹⁸ Dinwiddy 1992.

¹⁹ Marks, Mbaye & Kim 2009.

²⁰ The treatise was not published until 1920. On Shelley’s suggestions for financial reform, see Cameron 1943.

²¹ For an excellent refutation of this conventional view, see Morrison 2011, who argues that the Act resulted, rather, from a long process of state reform that had gradually reducing the power of the monarchy.

²² Goldstein 1984: 610.

²³ Hewitt 1991.

²⁴ Quoted from Dronsfield 1872: 46-7. The bishop was himself quoting from Bamford 1839-1842: vol. 1, 279.

²⁵ See Hall and Wyles 2015.

²⁶ E.g. Besant and Rice 1876.

²⁷ Hobson 1849.

²⁸ Cannadine 1984: 133.

²⁹ Le Corbusier 1986: 289.

³⁰ Hall & Stead, forthcoming, 2015, ‘Between the Party and the Ivory Tower: Classics and Communism in 1930s Britain’, in *Classics and Communism*, D. Movrin, E. Olechowska et al. eds (Ljubljana University Press).

³¹ Berger 1972: 33.

³² Bob Dylan (1963) *Talkin' World War III Blues*.