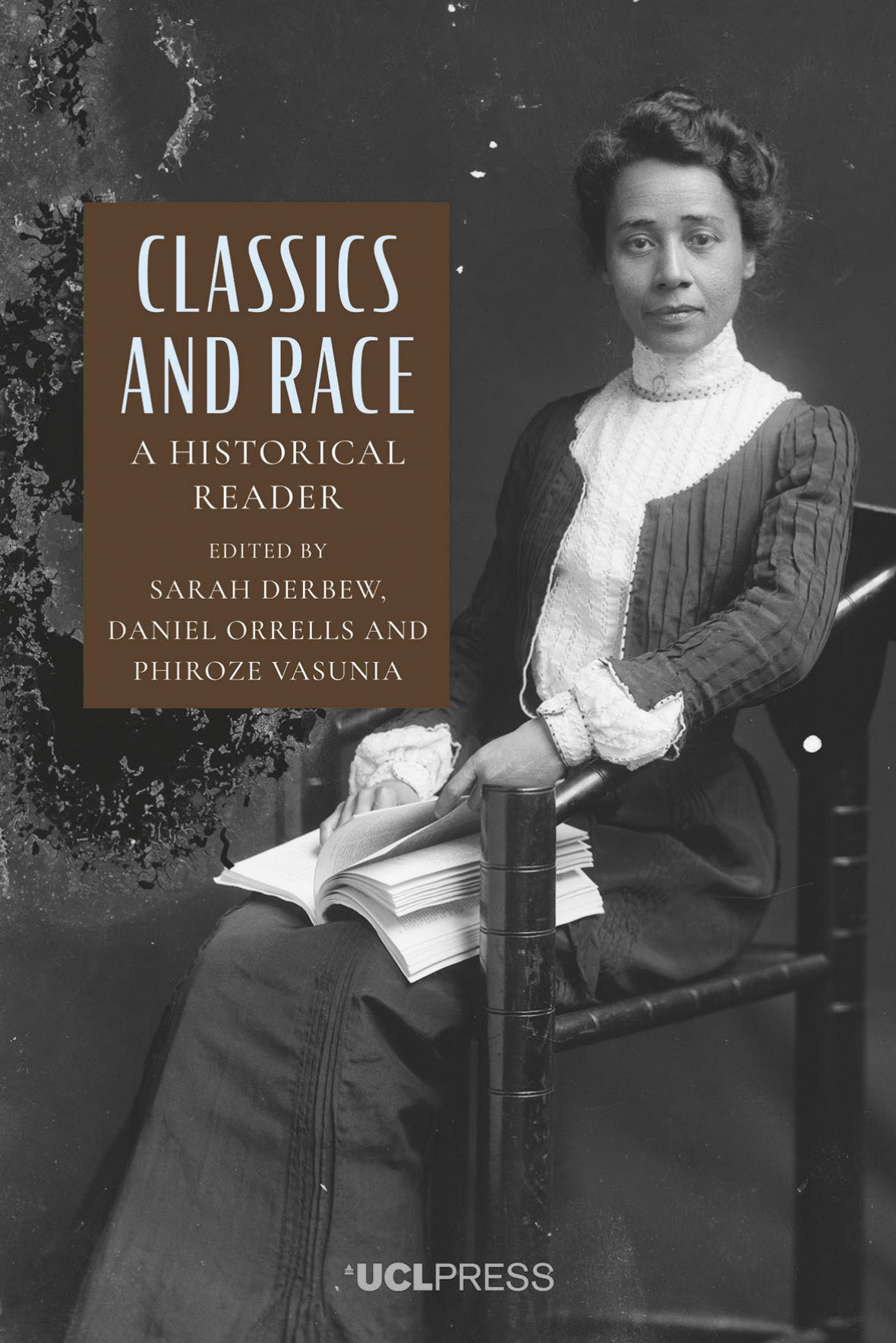


A black and white photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a high-collared, long-sleeved dress with a white lace or ruffled bodice and dark, ribbed sleeves. She is seated in a dark wooden chair, holding an open book on her lap with both hands. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wall or a backdrop.

CLASSICS AND RACE

A HISTORICAL
READER

EDITED BY
SARAH DERBEW,
DANIEL ORRELLS AND
PHIROZE VASUNIA

 **UCLPRESS**

Classics and Race

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A historical reader

Edited by Sarah Derbew, Daniel Orrells and
Phiroze Vasunia

 **UCL**PRESS

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Introduction

Sarah Derbew, Daniel Orrells and
Phiroze Vasunia

I put Cicero 'Pro Archia Poeta' into the simplest English with local applications, and usually convinced [my students' parents of the value of ancient texts] – for a week or so.¹

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), William Edward Burghardt Du Bois describes his experiences of teaching fellow Black Americans in the American South during the Reconstruction, a time rife with segregation laws and racism following the Civil War. Here Du Bois refers to the Roman orator Cicero's speech 'In Defence of Archias the Poet' (*Pro Archia Poeta*), which he uses to persuade the parents of his students of the value of ancient Roman texts. Although Archias, who was a Graeco-Syrian poet, had gained Roman citizenship, he was accused of assuming it illegally. Cicero, who learnt rhetoric from Archias, spoke successfully in defence of his former teacher. Cicero argued that good poetry knows no borders; rather, he asserted, great literature educates and belongs to all people regardless of their place of origin. Du Bois's reference to Cicero's famous speech, celebrated by Renaissance humanists, made a clear political point: a Classical education is only truly universal if it also includes Black people who had been excluded from such privileges.

However, Du Bois also says that he could only usually convince his students' parents 'for a week or so', registering their suspicion of his lessons. Du Bois's students were all too aware that this vision of a Classical education risked complicity with structures of power designed to oppress them. Elsewhere in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Greek and Roman antiquity were associated with the racialised capitalism of the United States, which continued to disenfranchise African Americans. Du Bois called the 'Black Belt' of the American South, where African Americans lived and worked in appalling conditions, the 'Egypt of the Confederacy', comparing it

to the ancient Roman exploitation of Egypt. Although the historical contexts differ, ancient Egypt's provision of grain to the imperial Rome of Augustus bears mention alongside the immense amount of African American labour that was instrumental in building the wealth of modern American imperialism.² Unsurprisingly, in subsequent writings Du Bois increasingly turned to ancient African history in search of a more positive Black heritage for his readers.

Trained in the fields of Classics and sociology, Du Bois was steeped in nineteenth-century philhellenism and engaged with the political peculiarities of 'race' in the twentieth century.³ This moment in *The Souls of Black Folk* eloquently sums up his complex relationship with the history of the Classical tradition.⁴ The complexity of Du Bois's historical writings echoes earlier African American voices and pre-empts subsequent traditions of African American scholarship. His pan-African writings looked back to nineteenth-century American abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, Hosea Easton and David Leroy Nickens. Du Bois's work also looked ahead to pioneering twentieth-century scholars in America, such as Anna Julia Cooper (whose portrait graces the cover of this volume), Drusilla Dunjee Houston and John Wesley Gilbert, and in Africa, such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Engelbert Mveng and Ali Mazrui.⁵ Du Bois's hopes for a genuinely universal Classical education that is open to all reflected other scholars' attempts to look back at antiquity as a time when 'Black' and 'White' could co-exist before the emergence of 'colour prejudice', as reflected in the scholarship of Frank Snowden Jr and Lloyd Thompson.⁶ Conversely, Du Bois's rhetorical comparisons of Roman and American imperialism also anticipate other writers' arguments that the ancient Greek and Roman worlds really did subscribe to ethnic or racialising categories and that the origins of modern racist discourses could be linked to, or even traced back to, Graeco-Roman antiquity.⁷

Classics and Race: revisiting the landscape

In our current historical moment, Du Bois's reflections compel us to revisit the relationship between antiquity and modernity through the lens of racist and anti-racist thought. It is in the spirit of constructing and deconstructing race that we welcome readers to this volume. In other words, we invite our readers to consider the relationship between Classics and race and to explore why this relationship matters.⁸ In its early iterations, Classics (with a capital C) was the name of the study of ancient Greek and Roman cultures; the term has come to encompass the study of

the ancient Mediterranean.⁹ Depending on the university and/or country, Classics can also include the study of ancient Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Ethiopia and India. Indeed, what counts as Classics or Classical studies is continuously under debate.

As for the concept of race, we define this as an ideological structure that categorises perceived human difference and constructs power hierarchies based on said perceptions. We draw inspiration from the scholarship of Karen and Barbara Fields, who write that race ‘stands for the conception or the doctrine that nature produced mankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from members of other distinct groups of the same kind but of unequal rank’.¹⁰ From antiquity to the present day, scientists, philosophers and thinkers have relied on the prestige of biological theories to bolster their conceptualisations of race. Fields and Fields point out that race is the principal unit of racism, which can be understood as discriminatory or prejudicial actions, behaviours and structures, both conscious and unconscious, against people based on their race. Racism is a brutal and coercive social practice which applies a double standard, ‘the missing step between one’s physical appearance and an invidious outcome’.¹¹ Despite the often widespread belief that race is a biological category – a belief that underpins racism – Robert Wald Sussman notes that research in biology, anthropology and genetics has more recently demonstrated that ‘biological races do not exist among humans today, and they have never existed in the past’. But while ‘biological races do not exist, the concept race obviously still is a reality’ – a reality produced by cultural and ideological systems.¹²

Many minds have considered the category of race in Classical antiquity, some even integrating modern ideas of race into their publications. In 1929, Grace Hadley Beardsley published the first book-length study of Black people in Graeco-Roman antiquity (*The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization*), in which she projected racist views from the early twentieth century onto the ancient world, to argue that Black people occupied servile positions under White people. This perspective was challenged by the African American classicist Frank Snowden Jr, in a series of publications which defended ancient Greek and Roman cultures from any claims of prejudice against Black people. Both Beardsley and Snowden applied modern notions of Blackness, especially associated with skin colour, to the Greek and Roman worlds.¹³ We have already seen how Du Bois could both admire antiquity’s lack of racial prejudice, as he saw it, and abhor the rampant racialised enslavement in the ancient world. More recently, however, scholars have sought to *historicise* ancient conceptualisations of race.

Work by Sarah Derbew, and the essays collected in a volume edited by Denise Eileen McCoskey, demonstrate different ways that ancient Greek and Roman societies constructed and instrumentalised race.¹⁴ Skin colour was not always important in ancient Greek and Roman conceptualisations of racial difference; rather, behaviours and practices often framed and underpinned Greek and Roman ideas of racial identity. Even still, Greek and Roman constructions of racial identity did not straightforwardly result in racist prejudice.

Classics and Race: A historical reader offers a modern complement to this ancient archive. This volume explores connections between the modern study of the ancient world and the development of modern categories of race used to label people. The emergence of scientific racism in eighteenth-century Europe offers a useful snapshot of the ongoing relationship between Classics as an intellectual discipline and modern constructions of race. Scientific racism developed with the publication of works such as *De generis humani varietate nativa* (*On the natural variety of humankind*, 1775) by the German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840). Blumenbach's text was composed in Latin, which remained one of the languages of scholarly and scientific communication in Europe at this time.¹⁵

In fact, 8 of the 16 essays submitted to the prize competition of the Académie Royale des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts de Bordeaux in 1741 were written in Latin. The essayists were responding to the topic proposed for the competition in that year: *Quelle est la cause physique de la couleur des nègres, de la qualité de leur cheveux, et de la dégénération de l'un et de l'autre?* (What is the physical cause of the Negro's colour, the quality of hair, and the degeneration of both?).¹⁶ Far more noteworthy than the choice of language, however, was the attempt by these European hopefuls to refer their racial analyses back to antiquity, including Egypt, Ethiopia and the world of the Bible. Ancient examples and evidence continued to proliferate in European writers' scientific arguments about race as they published their work over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this way, antiquity became part of an 'intellectual infrastructure allowing Europeans (and their descendants in the New World) to pass on centuries of misinformation and propaganda about Africans and people of African descent in a much more structured and understandable way'.¹⁷

The discipline of Classics has also played a central role in the emergence and proliferation of modern constructions of race. In the first volume of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic roots of Classical civilization*, published in 1987, Martin Bernal argued that the nineteenth-century fascination with ancient Greece emerged in dialogue with the racialisation

of the ancient world. This racialisation increasingly portrayed the Greeks and the Romans as ‘Aryan’ or ‘White’ and the Egyptians and the Phoenicians as ‘Semitic’ or ‘Black’. Many Classicists lambasted Bernal’s thesis and sought ways to exonerate their scholarly tradition from any accusations of racism. Others, however, sought to build on and add nuance to Bernal’s intellectual history of the discipline.¹⁸

In more recent years, a new strand of Classical reception studies has explored, firstly, how Black authors, intellectuals and artists from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean have re-visioned Greek and Roman texts and, secondly, how imperialist, racist and White-supremacist ideologues have appropriated Graeco-Roman antiquity. Some important questions have fuelled the debates and scholarship engendered in the wake of *Black Athena*: Does the ancient past belong to anyone? What does it mean for modern people to stake a claim on antiquity? Have modern iterations of race affected people’s ability and desire to identify with people in the ancient world? *Classics and Race: A historical reader* traces the history of some of these questions. Our volume also brings new questions to the fore, such as: How has race been at the heart of the various figurations of the relationship between antiquity and modernity in the last seven hundred years? And how, in turn, have our understandings of the relationship between antiquity and modernity been important for conceptualisations of race?

Classics and Race: presenting a contested terrain

Classics and Race: A historical reader presents Graeco-Roman antiquity as a contested terrain for writers from the fourteenth century onwards. Graeco-Roman antiquity provided models of racialising discipline, control, surveillance and enslavement that were (and are) exploited by colonial and imperial powers. Early-modern and modern readers also made use of ancient culture to combat racism and turned back to antiquity for empowering vocabularies and images of racial identity. Antiquity offered visions of revolution, protest and dissent for those who questioned and revolted against racialised subjugation. This history of racist and anti-racist engagements with antiquity is made up of a global cast of voices, which is attested by the number of languages and countries in this volume: our primary sources include translations from Ge’ez (Classical Ethiopic), Brazilian Portuguese, Gujarati and French; the geographic scope of these sources encompasses Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and North America. In addition to our broad range of sources, the volume assembles

a global team of interlocutors: the contributors who chose and analysed the primary sources in this volume have spent formative time in places as varied as Malawi, South Africa, Vietnam, India, Brazil and Singapore.

The diversity of our texts and contributors illustrates the global reach and significance of racial thinking. Scientists and intellectuals today may understand race as a social construct, but that understanding of race has not erased racism worldwide; racism continues to flourish internationally and warrants investigation in global as well as local contexts. This is not to say that modern Western or European categories of racism can simply be exported to other times and places. Some of the texts in this volume pay no heed to European notions of scientific racism as it unfolded over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Racism does not always and everywhere cast White against Black, settler against native, free against enslaved, though it most assuredly does so in numerous instances. Furthermore, racism can consist of more than skin colour or physiognomy; it works in many ways and has multiple histories. In addition, racism is pliable and can be firmly linked to other forms of prejudice, including those based on such factors as ethnicity, nation, caste, religion and the environment. Finally, racism regularly flourishes in societies in which race plays a marginal role in the national conversation or remains a barely recognised social category. Even so, despite the different modes of race-based thinking presented in this volume, it is striking to note that many of our primary sources choose to engage with Greek and Roman antiquity – whether to subjugate or to emancipate others.

Classics and Race: A historical reader resists hegemonic narratives that posit the Global North as superior to the Global South. Our volume presents a broad overview of the centrality of race within the study of antiquity and recognises plurality within unequal landscapes. To be sure, the field of Classics stands at a crossroads. Scholarship that has focused solely on the perspectives of the powerful is under threat, as scholars committed to anti-racist and anti-sexist work continue to come to the fore.

Building on the momentum of liberatory open-access publications such as Samantha Masters, Imkhitha Nzungu and Grant Parker's (*u*) *Mzantsi Classics: Dialogues in decolonisation from southern Africa* and Matthieu Chapman and Anna Wainwright's *Teaching Race in the European Renaissance: A classroom guide*, we offer an intellectual history of Classics that presents the discipline as a site of racist thought, anti-racist thought, and the areas in-between. In addition, channelling the editorial work of Emily Greenwood, and Sasha-Mae Eccleston and Patrice Rankine, we are eager to work in community with scholars who centre non-dominant

voices (enslaved people, people of colour, immigrants, indigenous groups, women in all these categories).¹⁹ In this vein, we aim to celebrate a diverse range of intellectuals whose names may be unfamiliar to students and scholars of Classics. Most of the primary sources presented in this volume may not appear to be Classical scholars in the conventional sense; the writers of these excerpts come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and religious traditions. Their insights, observations and analyses are remarkable nonetheless, and their inclusion in the volume reflects the richness, diversity and complexity of the expansive Classical tradition.

The intellectual history of race and/in Classics encompasses more than this volume can possibly hold. Opting for an illustrative rather than a comprehensive approach, we continue our introduction with a brief summary of each chapter, followed by a user guide to help readers navigate the book productively.

Classics and Race: an overview of the chapters

Classics and Race comprises a series of historical primary sources arranged chronologically, from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century. Each chapter concludes with an essay, written by a modern specialist who analyses the primary source. We have given the contributors the freedom to apply their own preferences in terms of stylistic choices, such as capitalising 'Black', 'White' and 'Indigenous', in their commentaries. The volume consists of four parts. 'Contestations of race' (Part I) presents contesting ideas about race, ethnicity and difference that were at the heart of Renaissance and early-modern humanism. 'Race and the Enlightenment' (Part II) explores the importance of race in the mid- to late eighteenth century, when Classical studies was emerging as an intellectual discipline. 'Naming histories of race' (Part III) and 'Colonial and postcolonial meditations' (Part IV) highlight the ways that antiquity became a battleground for debates over European and American practices of empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Part I: Contestations of race (chapters 1 to 6)

In Chapter 1, '*Kebrä Nagast* (Glory of the Kings, c. fourteenth century CE)', Sarah Derbew broadens the category of Classics to include the epic tradition of Ethiopia, which recounts a charged meeting between Queen Makeda of Sheba and King Solomon. Chapter 2, '*Petrarch's Africa* (c. 1343)', by Samuel Agbam, examines how Petrarch's epic poem was

central to the humanist construction of a binary opposition between Christianity and Islam. In Chapter 3, ‘Leo Africanus’ *Cosmographia de l’Affrica* (*Cosmography of Africa*, 1526)’, Oumelbanine Zhiri offers insight into the concepts of race and ethnicity in early-modern Arab Latin culture through the perspective of Leo Africanus, who lived for many years in North Africa and converted from Islam to Christianity. Chapter 4, ‘Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1552)’, by Christian Høgel, explores the impact of the Classical tradition in sixteenth-century Spain through the work of Spanish clergyman Bartolomé de las Casas. In Chapter 5, ‘Juan Latino’s *Ad Catholicum* and *Austriad* (1573)’, J. Mira Seo draws on Claudia Rankine and investigates the political and cultural complexities of Juan Latino, an enslaved African and later a successful court poet in Granada, who wrote poetry in praise of the Spanish royal family and his local patrons. Chapter 6, ‘The Florentine Codex (sixteenth century), edited by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’, by David Tavárez, highlights how Nahua intellectuals (an indigenous people of Mexico) created an encyclopaedic text that conceptualised ethnicity, difference and belonging among the people of central Mexico.

Part II: Race and the Enlightenment (chapters 7 to 9)

In Chapter 7, ‘Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein’s *De servitute, libertati christianae non contraria* (Is slavery compatible with Christian freedom or not?, 1742)’, Grant Parker examines an essay by a formerly enslaved man from West Africa who looks back to older humanist discourses whilst also responding to contemporary Enlightenment debates. Chapter 8, ‘Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (*History of the art of antiquity*, 1764)’, by Daniel Orrells, reveals the ways that the famed art historian’s admiration of ancient Greece depended upon his racialising disparagement of ancient Egyptians. In Chapter 9, ‘Phillis Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773)’, Tracey Walters points out the ways that Wheatley’s celebratory universalism of Classical humanism also subtly highlighted the exclusion of Black people from institutions of power in the modern West.

Part III: Naming histories of race (chapters 10 to 15)

In Chapter 10, ‘Jules Michelet’s *Histoire romaine* (Roman history, 1831)’, Mathilde Cazeaux confronts Michelet’s perception of the racialised antagonism in Carthage among Semitic and Indo-German (or Indo-Aryan) peoples. Chapter 11, ‘Thomas Staunton St Clair’s *A Soldier’s*

Recollections of the West Indies and America (1834) and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Journal of a West-India Proprietor* (1816–18)', by Margaret Williamson, examines the animalising practice of giving ancient Greek and Roman names to enslaved persons in the British Caribbean in the nineteenth century. In Chapter 12, 'Luiz Gama's *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getulino* (*First burlesque ballads by Gaetulian*, 1861)', Andrea Kouklanakis focuses on the figure of the Afro-Brazilian poet Luiz Gama, a self-identified Black Orpheus whose ballads offer a Lusophonic instance of Black Classicism. Chapter 13, 'Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South* (1892)', by Shelley Haley, foregrounds the ways that an African American scholar and activist critiqued her contemporaries' employment of Classical studies as a tool to bolster racialising hierarchies in the United States. In Chapter 14, 'Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's *Works* (1894–1909)', Phiroze Vasunia shows that Gandhi was one of many modern Socrateses who spoke out against the discriminatory policies of colonial British rule. Chapter 15, 'Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood: Or, the Hidden Self* (1902–3), by Nicole A. Spigner, explores the work of an African American novelist who interrupts White-supremacist appropriation of the Classics with a redefined, majestic notion of Africa.

Part IV: Colonial and postcolonial meditations (chapters 16 to 23)

In Chapter 16, 'Fanny Jackson Coppin's *Reminiscences of School Life, and Hints on Teaching* (1913)', Shelley Haley highlights Coppin's visionary pedagogy. This African American philologist and educator promoted a broad educational curriculum for students of African descent that included Classical and vocational courses. Chapter 17, 'Tenney Frank's "Race mixture in the Roman Empire" (1916)', by Denise Eileen McCoskey, presents the work of a twentieth-century US Classicist whose discussion of the so-called 'mixture of the races' in ancient Rome served as a pretext for discussing racial miscegenation in twentieth-century America. In Chapter 18, 'Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929)', Justine M'Connell interprets these two novels about diasporic Black transnationalism as examples of Classical reception during the Harlem Renaissance. In Chapter 19, 'Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's *Sourires et larmes d'une jeunesse* (*Smiles and tears of youth*, 1937)', Kelly Nguyen highlights colonial engagement with Classical education in French-occupied Vietnam through the meditations of the Vietnamese intellectual Nguyễn Mạnh Tường. In Chapter 20, 'Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939)', Richard Armstrong, Miriam Leonard and Daniel Orrells scrutinize the relationship between philhellenism and anti-semitism during the 1930s.

In Chapter 21, ‘Mary Church Terrell’s *A Colored Woman in a White World* (1940)’, Emily Greenwood draws attention to the politics of American education and the limits of so-called universal Classical humanism, as these appear in the autobiography of an African American scholar. In Chapter 22, C. L. R. James’s *Every Cook can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece, Its Meaning for Today* (1956)’, Matthew Quest asserts that James’s provocative account of Classical Athenian democracy is a product of the Cold War, post-war geopolitics and decolonisation. The volume culminates with Chapter 23, ‘Martin Luther King, Jr’s “Letter from a Birmingham jail” (1963)’, in which Patrice Rankine explores King’s layered legacies of biblical and Classical antiquity, looking back to both the Apostle Paul and the Greek philosopher Socrates.

Classics and Race: making use of the volume

We have organised *Classics and Race: A historical reader* chronologically. Educators and readers can use the volume as the basis for a course syllabus which begins with texts from the fourteenth century and concludes with the twentieth century. We also offer shared themes that can guide class discussions on specific topics, such as the politics of philhellenism (in chapters 8, 14, 18, 22 and 23, on Winckelmann, Gandhi, McKay, James and King respectively), the effects of Roman imperialism (in chapters 2, 5, 9, 10, 11 and 17, on Petrarch, Latino, Wheatley, Michelet, St Clair and Lewis, and Frank), the history of enslavement (in chapters 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 11, on las Casas, Latino, Capitein, Winckelmann, Wheatley, and St Clair and Lewis), the politics of a Classical education (in chapters 4, 6, 13, 16, 19 and 21, on las Casas, the Florentine Codex, Cooper, Coppin, Tùòng and Terrell) and the subversive possibilities for disempowered voices in Classical texts (in chapters 9, 12, 15 and 18, on Wheatley, Gama, Hopkins and McKay). The chapters on Wheatley, Cooper, Hopkins, Coppin and Terrell (chapters 9, 13, 15, 16 and 21) offer the basis for an exploration of the history of Black feminist receptions of the ancient Classical world. The chapters on the *Kebra Nagast*, Petrarch, Leo Africanus, Juan Latino, Freud and King (chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 20 and 23) are case studies for examining the reception of antiquity in connection with race and religion.

Readers of *Classics and Race* will find it helpful to consider the following general questions when engaging with these sources:

- How can the study of the Classical tradition help us understand the modern history of race?

- How can the study of the modern history of race help us understand the Classical tradition?
- What are the consequences of employing ancient Greek and Latin sources for racist purposes? And for anti-racist purposes?
- How might the history presented in this volume change the ways in which we study the ancient world?
- What other texts in the Classical tradition could be studied alongside those in this volume?

Aware that no volume can be exhaustive, we invite our readers to include other texts and artworks to this growing canon of ‘Classics and race’. For our part, *Classics and Race* provides coordinates for thinking about the relationship between the study of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and constructions of race, racism and anti-racism from the late medieval period until the middle of the twentieth century. Throughout this long arc of history, learning Latin and Greek was associated with prestige, elitism and glamour. Graeco-Roman antiquity provided universalising exemplars and models of selfhood and political communities, especially for European and North American imperialising powers. The grip of Graeco-Roman antiquity over the European and North American imagination loosened, however, as twentieth-century independence movements seriously challenged European colonial ideology. At this point, the interrogation of literary texts of ancient Greece and Rome as universal standards of taste and cultural achievement grew, and postcolonial scholars began to produce pluralising canons of literature. At the same time, however, the profound impact of the Classical education imposed by various colonial powers ensured that postcolonial writers would remake and refashion ancient Greek and Latin texts in unimaginably new ways.

From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, Greek and Roman literature has had a global audience in numerous, different local forms. In this way, Classics has become ‘glocal’ (global + local).²⁰ Many chapters in this volume explore how historical debates about antiquity and the modern conception of race continue to frame the work of contemporary writers and artists. *Classics and race* draws to a close in the middle of the twentieth century, at that moment of crossroads when the presumed universalism of the discipline of Classics began to crumble and make way for a new sort of globalisation of ancient Mediterranean antiquity. As the afterword to this volume affirms, *Classics and Race* is only one part of this exploration.

Notes

- 1 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 48.
- 2 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 84.
- 3 We have used quotation marks around the term ‘race’ to indicate that its definition and parameters are contested. This style is applied in each chapter at our first use of the term.
- 4 On Du Bois and Greek/Roman antiquity, see Cowherd, ‘The wings of Atalanta’; Hairston, *The Ebony Column*, 159–92; Fertik and Hanses, ‘Above the veil’; Withun, *Co-workers in the Kingdom of Culture*; Fertik, ‘W. E. B. Du Bois’s universal history in *Black Folk Then and Now* (1939)’; and Hanses, *Black Cicero*.
- 5 Frederick Douglass (c. 1818–95) was a social reformer, orator and writer: see Hairston, *The Ebony Column*, 65–120. Hosea Easton (1798–1837) was an American Congregationalist and Methodist minister who campaigned for abolition. A contemporary of Easton, David Leroy Nickens (1794–1838) was a formerly enslaved person who later became the first African American licensed minister in Ohio: see Malamud, *African Americans and the Classics*, 149–51. Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964) was a scholar and activist who challenged boundaries of race and gender in *A Voice from the South: By a Black woman of the South* (first published 1892): see Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, and Hairston, *The Ebony Column*, 121–58, as well as the chapter with commentary by Shelley Haley in this volume (Chapter 13). Drusilla Dunjee Houston (1876–1941) was a historian and journalist based in Oklahoma who produced many publications about black people in antiquity, including *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empires* Vol. 1; see Brooks-Bertram, *Drusilla Dunjee Houston*. John Wesley Gilbert (1863–1923) was the first African American archaeologist of ancient Greece: see Lee, *The First Black Archaeologist*. Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–86) was a Senegalese anthropologist and historian who wrote, among other books, *L’Afrique noire pré-coloniale* (‘Precolonial Black Africa’) in 1960 and *Antériorité des civilisations nègres: Mythe ou vérité historique?* (‘Anteriority of Black civilisations: Myth or historical truth?’) in 1967: see Moses, *Afrotopia*, and Howe, *Afrocentrism*, on Afrocentrism and Afrocentric historiography. Engelbert Mveng (1930–95) was a scholar and Jesuit priest from Cameroon who published *Les sources grecques de l’histoire négro-africaine depuis Homère jusqu’à Strabon* (‘Greek sources of Black African history from Homer to Strabo’) in 1972. Ali Mazrui (1933–2014) was a Kenyan political scientist who wrote ‘Ancient Greece in African Thought’ in 1978.
- 6 Frank Snowden Jr (1911–2007; landmark publications in 1970, 1983) was an African American scholar and classics professor at Howard University for decades: see Snowden, ‘A lifetime of inquiry’, and Parmenter, ‘A happy coincidence’. Lloyd Thompson (1932–97; landmark publication in 1989) was born in Barbados and settled in Nigeria, where he taught for many years at the University of Ibadan. See also Ronnick, *The Autobiography of William Sanders Scarborough* and *The Works of William Sanders Scarborough* on William Sanders Scarborough (1852–1926), a prominent African American scholar of classics.
- 7 See Barnard, *Empire of Ruin*, on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African American writers such as Phillis Wheatley, William Wells Brown and Charles Chesnutt, who have compared the inequalities of ancient Roman and modern American imperialism. See Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*; Hall, *Hellenicity*; Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*; and McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and its legacy*, for more recent scholarly debates about ancient constructions of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ as well as their relationship with modern racial ideologies.
- 8 See West, *Race Matters*. See also Chew, ‘What does E Pluribus Unum mean?’, and contributions in Blouin and Akrigg, *The Routledge Handbook of Classics, Colonialism, and Postcolonial Theory*.
- 9 On the term ‘classics’ and ‘classical’, see the introduction to Porter, *Classical Pasts*. In *Attic Nights*, a work containing notes on topics ranging from grammar to philosophy and history, Aulus Gellius (who lived in the second century CE) noted that ‘only the men of the first class, who were rated at a hundred and twenty-five thousand asses or more’, could be a member of the *classicus* class (6.13.1).
- 10 Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 16–7.
- 11 Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 27, with discussion in Derbew, ‘Definitions and representations of race’, 26.
- 12 Sussman, *The Myth of Race*, 12, with further discussion in McCoskey, *A Cultural History of Race in Antiquity*, 3–4.
- 13 See further discussion in Derbew, ‘Definitions and representations of race’, 22–4.

- 14 Derbew, *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity*; McCoskey (ed.), *A Cultural History of Race in Antiquity*.
- 15 The expanded edition of 1795 bears a Latin epigraph from the imperial epigrammatist Martial and an earlier one from the Roman philosopher Lucretius.
- 16 See Gates and Curran, *Who's Black and Why?*, ix.
- 17 Gates and Curran, *Who's Black and Why?*, 43.
- 18 See Berlinerblau, *Heresy in the University*, and Orrells, Bhambra, and Roynon, *African Athena*, on *Black Athena* and the ensuing debates. See Padilla Peralta, 'Anti-race', for a more recent discussion about the often unacknowledged centrality of race and racism in modern studies of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.
- 19 Greenwood, 'Diversifying Classical philology, Volume 1' and 'Diversifying Classical philology, Volume 2'; Eccleston and Patrice Rankine, 'Race and racism: Beyond the spectacular'.
- 20 On the 'glocal' and thinking about literary production beyond the categories of 'local' and 'cosmopolitan', see Orsini, 'The multilingual local in world literature', with reference to Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy'.

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***Kebrä Nagast* (Glory of the Kings, c. fourteenth century CE)**

Chapters 26–30 of the *Kebrä Nagast* (ክብረ ነገሥት, *kəbrä nägäst*), translated from Ge'ez by Wendy Laura Belcher and Michael Kleiner (Penguin, forthcoming). Commentary by Sarah Derbew.

Chapter 26: The Queen of Sheba dines with Solomon

Now King Solomon sent a message to the queen, with the following words: ‘After you have come all this way [from Ethiopia to Jerusalem], why leave before you have seen how my government works; how banquets are held for the kingdom’s dignitaries as if they were the righteous ones of God; and how the gentiles are hounded as sinners? By witnessing this, you will acquire wisdom. Come, follow me, and sit amidst my splendor in the tents – in this way I will complete your instruction, and you will come to understand the administration of my kingdom. For you love wisdom, and she will remain with you until your last day, and beyond.’ These were indeed prophetic words by Solomon.

In reaction, the queen sent a reply to him: ‘I was ignorant – now I have become wise through emulating your wisdom. I was disdained by the Lord of Israel – now I have become a chosen one through the Israelite faith in my heart. From now on, I will not worship anyone other than him! As for that which you say you desire – to improve me in wisdom and worth – I will come, just as you wish.’

Solomon was happy when he heard this message. He clothed his dignitaries in finery, doubled the fare on his table, and commanded his entire household to be set in order. For days, King Solomon’s house was being readied. Over that period, he readied it with great

pomp – full of joy, at ease, with wisdom and a mild disposition, as well as perfectly humble and gentle.

Then the king's banquet was arranged according to the custom of the kingdom, and the queen, radiant and splendid, entered through a back way and sat directly behind Solomon, where she could see, have things shown to her, and observe everything while being hidden. She marveled greatly at what she saw and heard. In her heart she praised the Lord of Israel, and, stupefied, she admired the magnificence of the palace. Indeed, she could see everything, but nobody could see her, due to how Solomon had cleverly arranged things for her. He had adorned her chamber, covering it with purple cloth and laying out fine carpets, as well as installing a window of marble and precious stones, sprinkling perfumes, scattering myrrh and cinnamon, and daubing the room with galbanum and frankincense. When one entered this room, its fragrance was delightful, and its sweet smell satiated one even before eating any dishes.

Chapter 27: Solomon invites the queen to spend the night with him

Now Solomon cleverly and cunningly sent the queen thirst-inducing food, such as tart drinks, salty fish, and spicy dishes. He did this, giving it to the queen, so that she would eat from it. After three, or even seven, rounds of the king's dishes had been served, and after the stewards, councilors, male youths, and the servants had gone home, the king stood up, went to the queen in her hidden chamber and, the two of them being alone, said to her, 'Find comfort here, for the sake of love, until the morning.'

She replied to him, 'Swear an oath to me by your Lord, the Lord of Israel, that you will not take me unlawfully by force. If I, a maiden, went astray, as so easily happens to young women, I would fall into hardship, suffering, and misfortune on my way home, especially if visibly pregnant.' The king replied to her, 'I swear to you that I will not take you unlawfully by force. But you, too, swear to me that you will not unlawfully take anything by force that is in my home.'

In reaction to this, the queen laughed and said to Solomon, 'Why do you speak like a fool even though you are wise? Why would I steal or rob the palace of anything that the king has not given me? My lord, do not think that I came here for the love of riches: My kingdom is

also rich, and I lack none of the things I desire. Rather, I came in search of your wisdom!’

Solomon countered, ‘Since you made me swear an oath, you must swear an oath to me too: An oath is appropriate for both parties, so that neither side will be wronged. If you had not made me swear an oath, I would not make you swear an oath either.’ Now the queen said to him, ‘Swear to me again that you will not take me unlawfully by force, then I will also swear that I will not take your possessions unlawfully by force.’ So, Solomon swore this to her again, but also extracted an oath from the queen.

Chapter 28: The queen conceives Solomon’s son

Now the king ascended to his bed on one side of the room, while a bed was also prepared for her on the other side. As this was happening, Solomon said to a servant boy, ‘Rinse out the cups, and set out a pitcher of water as the queen watches. Then, lock the doors, and go to sleep yourself.’ But he said this in another language, one that the queen did not understand. The servant boy did as ordered and then went to sleep. As for the king, he did not yet sleep but rather pretended to do so while observing the queen closely. This was possible because King Solomon’s palace was as bright at night as during the day, since he had ingeniously embedded pearls into the ceilings of his palace, which shone like the sun, moon, and stars. As for the queen, she slept only a little, and when she woke up, her mouth was completely dry from thirst because Solomon, cannily, had had thirst-inducing dishes served to her. Now she was intensely thirsty, with her mouth completely parched.

She sucked her mouth for moisture, but could not find any. Therefore, she thought about drinking the water that she had seen set out. She looked toward King Solomon, observing him closely. It appeared to her that he was fast asleep. Yet he was not asleep, but rather waiting until she would get up to stealthily take the water to quench her thirst. So, the queen got up and, careful not to make any sound with her feet, tiptoed over to the water in the pitcher. She raised the pitcher up to drink the water – but at that moment, and before she had been able to drink any of it, Solomon seized her arm and said to her, ‘Why are you breaking the oath that you swore, that you would not unlawfully take anything by force that is in my home?’ She replied timidly, ‘Does drinking water amount

to breaking my oath?’ The king said, ‘Have you seen anything more precious under the sky than water?’ Then the queen said, ‘I have transgressed against my oath. So, you are free from yours. But let me drink some water to quench my thirst!’ Solomon checked, ‘So then, I happen to be free from the oath that you made me swear to you?’ The queen replied, ‘Be free from the oath – but let me drink some water!’ So, Solomon let her drink the water, and after she had drunk it, he had his way with her, and they slept together.

Chapter 29: Solomon dreams that God abandons Israel

After King Solomon had fallen asleep, a brilliant sun appeared to him, descending from the skies and shining brightly over Israel. Then, after remaining there for a long time, the sun suddenly withdrew and soared away until it came to the land of Ethiopia. It shone brightly there, and will for eternity, because it loved to dwell there.

[. . .]

When King Solomon saw this vision in his sleep, his soul was terrified and, in a flash, his mind was thrown into disarray. He woke up alarmed. Turning to her, Solomon marveled at the queen, for her power was strong, her beauty lovely, and her chastity had been pure. She had ruled in her country for six years, but despite the comforts and glory she enjoyed there, she had kept her body pure, remaining a virgin.

Chapter 30: The queen prepares to return to Ethiopia and Solomon gives her his ring

Soon thereafter the queen awoke and said to Solomon: ‘Grant me leave so that I may go home to my country.’ Therefore, Solomon proceeded to his storehouse and gave her everything required in terms of honor, riches, and beautiful garments that ravish the eye, and that would honor the country of Ethiopia: all in all, 6,000 camels loaded with highly desirable and precious goods; carts capable of carrying loads on dirt roads; a cart that could go on the sea; as well as a cart that Solomon had invented with the wisdom that God had given him, and that could be propelled by the winds.

The queen was happy with these gifts and set out to leave, with Solomon preparing a magnificent farewell. He took her aside so that they were alone, removed a ring from his little finger, and gave it to the queen with these words:

‘Take this ring so that you don’t forget me! Also, if I should happen to receive a child from your womb, this shall be a sign of our connection for that child; and if it is a boy, he should come to me with it. May the peace of God now be with you! By the way, while I slept next to you, I saw a multitude of visions in my dreams, such as the sun, after having risen in Israel, withdrawing and soaring away, and shining for Ethiopia. I don’t know whether your country will be blessed through you – only God knows that. But you should, by all means, heed what I have told you, so that you will worship God with all your heart and do his will. Behold, he punishes the proud and shows mercy to the meek; he tears down the thrones of the powerful and makes the low great! Death and life come from God, wealth and poverty are allotted according to his will. Everything belongs to him, nobody can resist his command or his condemnation, be it in heaven or on earth, in the sea or the deepest valley. May God be with you – now go in peace!’

Then they said farewell to each other, and she departed.

* * *

Commentary by Sarah Derbew

Tracing the *Kebra Nagast*

Crafted by generations of storytellers from the first to the fourteenth centuries CE, the vibrant Ethiopian epic *Kebra Nagast* (ክብረ ነገሥት, *kəbrä nāgäst*, ‘Glory of the Kings’) stands in a category of its own. This Ethiopian masterpiece is written in Ge’ez, a Semitic language that is one of the oldest written languages in Africa. The fate of Ge’ez, also known as classical Ethiopic, parallels that of Latin, in that both languages were once spoken but are now restricted to the liturgical realm.¹ From at least the seventh century CE to the present day, Ge’ez has remained the primary liturgical language among followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo (ተዋሕዶ, *tāwəḥədo*, ‘miaphysitism’/‘unity’), Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo and Ethiopian Beta Israel (ቤተ ክርስቲያን, *betä əsrael*, ‘House of Israel’/Jewish) faiths. An early example of the Ge’ez script appears on the stela

of the Aksumite emperor Ezana in Aksum, northern Ethiopia. Dating to the fourth century CE, this granite column details Ezana's exploits in three languages: Ge'ez, Greek and the South Arabian language of Sabaic. In one fell swoop, this monument highlights the vast extent of multilingualism in Ethiopia while also refuting modern geopolitics that situate Greece far away from Ethiopia.

As early as the sixth century CE, people penned different versions of the *Kebrā Nagast*. In 1322 CE, an Aksumite ecclesiastical officer named Isaac (ደስለቆ, *yəsəḥaq*) collaborated with Ethiopian monks to produce a redacted *Kebrā Nagast* that remains in circulation today. In his preface, Isaac explains that his Ge'ez edition is based on an Arabic translation of the *Kebrā Nagast* from 1225 CE, which itself is based on a Coptic translation which may have derived from a Ge'ez text. More than producing a word-for-word translation, however, Isaac draws from local Ethiopian traditions as well as various Christian, Jewish and Islamic sources. Although the *Kebrā Nagast* has passed through many medieval hands, these layers of mediation do not negate the text's Ethiopian status. Rather, later renditions of the *Kebrā Nagast* bear traces of previous versions without complete usurpation or replication. In this way, Isaac offers a palimpsest of the classical epic.

Eager to destabilise literary hierarchies even further, I deem the *Kebrā Nagast* a 'classical epic'. Unpacking this description one word at a time, I treat 'classical' (with a lower-case 'c') as shorthand for 'the worlds of ancient societies including and beyond the Mediterranean region'. This rendering democratises different literary traditions without privileging ancient Greek and Latin sources as the apex of knowledge production. As for the second word, 'epic' refers to a story that promotes an ancient foundational myth and contributes to a community's national identity. On both fronts, the *Kebrā Nagast* warrants inclusion.²

The journey of this classical epic extends beyond the medieval period. In the early twentieth century, translators prepared versions of the *Kebrā Nagast* in Latin, French, German and Spanish.³ In 1922, British scholar Ernest A. T. Wallis Budge produced the first full-length English translation of the *Kebrā Nagast*. More recently, Wendy Laura Belcher and Michael Kleiner are in the final stages of completing an updated English translation of the *Kebrā Nagast*.⁴ Their forthcoming edition will provide much-needed corrections as well as many substantive notes that will help modern readers orient themselves in the field of early African literature.

The world of the classical epic

To continue this investigation of the *Kebra Nagast*, a summary of the classical epic is in order. Consisting of 117 chapters, the *Kebra Nagast* is a collection of legends about Ethiopian kings who are descendants of Solomon, the biblical king of Jerusalem. Chapters 1 through 19 trace the lineage of numerous monarchs, beginning with the first man, Adam. Chapters 20 through 94 recount the dominance of other various rulers, including powerful Romans who are ranked second in power to their Ethiopian counterparts. Nestled within this discussion of monarchs, chapters 25–32 recounts a diplomatic encounter between the Ethiopian Queen Makeda of Saba (ማኅዲ, *makadda*, also known as the Queen of Sheba) and King Solomon of Israel, which I will return to below.⁵ Two pivotal stories from this meeting remain part of Ethiopians' collective consciousness in the twenty-first century: the union between Queen Makeda and King Solomon, which led to the Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopian emperors, and the transference of Zion from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. The final twenty-two chapters (chapters 95–117) present Christian interpretations of biblical passages, and the *Kebra Nagast* closes with a reiteration of Ethiopia's pre-eminence.

Although the original purpose of the *Kebra Nagast* is unclear, Ethiopian rulers of the Solomonic dynasty (c. 1270–1974 CE) interpreted this narrative as a national saga that provided an illustrious origin story for themselves. In particular, they identified Menelik I (ምኒልክ, *mānilāk*), the child of Queen Makeda and King Solomon, as their progenitor. The story of Menelik's birth is part of an extended narrative about King Solomon that takes up nearly half of the epic (chapters 20–70).

This tale also recounts Queen Makeda's journey to King Solomon's court in Jerusalem. Driven by her insatiable curiosity, the Ethiopian queen travels to the kingdom of King Solomon and learns about the Jewish faith under his tutelage. While in Jerusalem, she also engages in philosophical and religious banter with the king. King Solomon eventually convinces her to convert to Judaism, after which he hosts a lavish banquet in her honour. During a private moment after the decadent feast, both vow not to take anything from the other. Nonetheless, earlier that evening the shrewd king had offered the queen salty, spicy food that later causes her to awaken, desperately thirsty, in the middle of the night. Before she can drink a sip of water, King Solomon appears and reminds her of their pledge. Once she agrees to break their promise so that she can quench her thirst, King Solomon takes this breach as permission to satisfy his lust. After a brief sexual union, Queen Makeda returns to Ethiopia and gives birth to their son, Menelik.

Upon reaching adulthood, Menelik travels to Jerusalem to meet his father. Opting not to inherit his father's kingdom, Menelik returns to Ethiopia with Israelite noblemen who surreptitiously, without Menelik's knowledge or consent, carry with them the Ark of the Covenant (a wooden chest believed to hold the Ten Commandments, which are the list of laws that God gave to Moses). Through this act, the house of God moves from Israel to Ethiopia. King Solomon attempts to bring back the Ark of the Covenant, to no avail. After mourning the loss of this venerable object, King Solomon slowly loses his wisdom and monotheistic faith. In its place, his lust for women and religious idolatry lead to his downfall.

The translated excerpt above (chapters 26–30) details this diplomatic exchange between Queen Makeda and King Solomon. While Queen Makeda's ardent desire for knowledge leads her to King Solomon's palace, she is wary of his sexual appetite. To counter any unwanted advances, the queen initiates a pact with him to prevent him from seizing her by force. Curiously, when King Solomon asks the queen to reciprocate and abstain from taking his property, Queen Makeda playfully mocks him (*ከመ ኣብዱ, kämä abd*, '[King Solomon acts] like a fool').⁶ She remarks that her love for wisdom, not property, led her to his palace. Her dismissal of King Solomon's expansionist presumptions recall shrewd literary figures from other classical sources, including the Aithiopian⁷ king in Herodotus' fifth-century BCE *Histories* (3.17–26). In the historian's recounting of an interaction between an ambitious Persian ruler and a wise Aithiopian king, the Aithiopian king thwarts Persian attempts to subdue his people. The Persian ruler sends spies to Aithiopia under the guise of goodwill, but the Aithiopian king is well aware of the Persians' deceitful plans to conquer his country. As a response to Persian encroachment, the Aithiopian king states, 'If he [the Persian ruler] were just, he would not desire land other than his own' (εἰ γὰρ ἦν δίκαιος, οὐτ' ἂν ἐπεθύμησε χώρας ἄλλης ἢ τῆς ἑωυτοῦ).⁸ In line with this advice, Queen Makeda presents herself as a just ruler who does not seek to seize anything from her host. Similar to the Aithiopian king, she seeks only to protect herself from the voracious appetite of others.

As detailed in the translated excerpt above (chapters 26–30), the perspicacious Queen Makeda nonetheless falls prey to the king's wily plan to have sex with her. That is, after a salty, spicy meal, the queen agrees to break their sworn oath so that she can drink water, a breach which grants the king access to her body. Afterwards, King Solomon dreams that the sun forsakes Israel and shines eternally on Ethiopia. His dream foreshadows the transference of religious power from Israel to Ethiopia via transference of the Ark of the Covenant. The prophetic

nature of dreams fits into a larger dreamscape in classical literature that includes the Persian queen Atossa's vivid dream in Aeschylus' tragedy *The Persians* (472 BCE). In the midst of the Graeco-Persian wars, Queen Atossa dreams about a violent chariot ride that portends the downfall of her son, Xerxes.⁹ In this dream, Xerxes tries to restrain a Persian woman and a Greek woman who are driving his chariot. He is unable to subdue the latter, an inability that foreshadows the fall of Persia at the hands of Greek city-states. In a similar vein, King Solomon's dream reflects the shifting power dynamics that will befall his kingdom after his son's visit to Jerusalem. On Menelik's departure, the prince departs with an entourage carrying the Ark of the Covenant with them. The excerpt above ends with Queen Makeda leaving Jerusalem, laden with many gifts from King Solomon who is not yet privy to her pregnancy or the future theft awaiting his kingdom.

Reverberations of the *Kebrā Nagast*

The *Kebrā Nagast's* description of Queen Makeda and King Solomon's union has reverberated through the centuries. From 1270 to 1974, over a hundred Ethiopian emperors used this tale as a legal foundation for their claims to power and divine kingship. The convergence of history and myth is especially apparent in the revised 1955 Ethiopian Constitution. Article 2 of this legislation states 'the Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line [. . .] [which] descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem'.¹⁰ This national saga morphed into a story of shared exceptionalism and identity among northern Ethiopians and continues to shape the beliefs of Ethiopians in the homeland and the diaspora. In fact, millions of adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith believe that the Ark of the Covenant carried out of Jerusalem still resides in the church of Our Lady Tsion Mariam (Mary of Zion) in Aksum, northern Ethiopia.

In addition to the *Kebrā Nagast's* foundational status in modern Ethiopian history, this classical epic also bears discussion alongside other charter legends such as Virgil's *Aeneid* (first century BCE). Both of these foundational texts offer long-lasting origin stories, as Menelik establishes a new Christian kingdom in Ethiopia and the Trojan captain Aeneas founds a city in Latium that will become Rome. More relevant to this discussion, however, are the female rulers who hold sway over an entire nation in each of these epics: wise Queen Makeda of Ethiopia in the *Kebrā Nagast* and fearless Dido of Carthage (modern-day Tunisia) in the *Aeneid*.

Even though Dido's origin story differs from Queen Makeda's, in that Dido is a refugee from Tyre (modern-day Lebanon) while Queen Makeda is native to her kingdom, both women make valiant attempts to protect themselves from dangers in their midst. To this end, they transform vows into protective mechanisms: Queen Makeda attempts to safeguard her body by making King Solomon promise not to violate her, and Dido tries to avoid heartbreak by vowing to never remarry after the death of her first husband. Despite their vigilance against the threats that men pose, Queen Makeda's and Dido's encounters with men affect them deeply, even after they are no longer in the company of said men. For Queen Makeda, the impact of her visit to Jerusalem is indelible, in that she returns home pregnant with King Solomon's son. As for Dido, once Aeneas visits her bustling city, she is unable to resume the life she had before he arrived. Filled with unreciprocated love for Aeneas and pre-emptively mourning his departure from Carthage, Dido commits suicide.¹¹

Taken together, both of these female leaders navigate politically charged interactions using whatever tools they have at their disposal. Furthermore, both reveal the high stakes associated with a meeting between illustrious people of different genders. When a powerful woman and a powerful man interact, the outcome can lead to a continuation of a lineage, as is the case with Queen Makeda, or its abrupt end, as is the case with Dido. Either way, such interactions greatly affect a kingdom's future, for better or worse.

Africa writing back to itself

On a personal note, as an Ethiopian American child growing up in a multilingual community, I thought of the *Kebra Nagast* as a classical text before I was able to read a word of Latin or ancient Greek. Once I began reading the *Aeneid* in my high school Latin class, I relished learning about Dido, whom I deemed the second-best queen in Africa, after Queen Makeda. In the intervening years, I have scoured Latin and Greek texts to identify any instances of Africa writing back to itself.

I take the language of 'Africa writing back to itself' from Evan Mwangi, who employs this phrase to describe the multidirectional movement of African literature.¹² While many Greek and Latin sources offer mediated access to Africa, texts such as the *Kebra Nagast* allow for the type of self-reflexive writing that Mwangi references. In this vein, I refer to the *Kebra Nagast* as a 'classical epic' for two reasons: to write back to my Ethiopian community, which is well versed in the country's foundation story, and to write across to interlocutors who are more familiar with Greek and Latin

epics than Ethiopian legends. Turning away from a hierarchy of literature in which 'writing back' implies the superiority of the source material, I pair 'writing back' with 'writing across' to promote non-linear movement between literary traditions. In other words, these prepositions that move in directions other than forward nullify any notion of competition between different literary traditions. Altogether, this rhetorical move is part of my larger goal, which is to redraw the parameters of classics to make space for what I deem 'early African studies' – the study of ancient literary sources from Africa.

My impulse to expand classics beyond Greece and Rome also draws inspiration from encounters between African American and African writers. When the African American writer James Baldwin met his Nigerian counterpart Chinua Achebe for the first time, at the African Literature Association's annual meeting in 1980, he remarked to Achebe, 'My brother [. . .] who I have not seen in four hundred years, it was never intended that we should meet.'¹³ Well aware of the historical events that kept their ancestors apart, Baldwin relished the opportunity to meet Achebe and subvert the divisions between two related communities. Upon reflecting on this conversation, Achebe resolved to join his 'brother's' quest to uncover the connections that racism sought to bury.¹⁴ As part of their shared quest of rediscovery, both men delighted in each other's company and found deep resonances in each other's novels.

Channeling Achebe and Baldwin's project of rehabilitation, I aim to liberate classics from racist appropriations of the discipline. Even though the study of antiquity is not inherently racist, some of its pupils (such as Winckelmann; see Chapter 8 in this volume) used their knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome to buttress their biases. Nonetheless, just as Achebe and Baldwin did not allow the histories of their home countries to overdetermine their relationship, I will not permit the bigoted few to decide what constitutes classics for future generations. Instead, I promote an inclusive model of the discipline that benefits from expanded boundaries and languages.

The interaction between Achebe and Baldwin has influenced my understanding of another term that is relevant to this volume: 'race'. These two writers recognise the slipperiness of this term, used by European enslavers to defend their mistreatment of Black people.¹⁵ Yet the concept of a shared 'race' led the two men to develop a newfound brotherhood with each other. Even so, Achebe and Baldwin's meeting highlights the difficulties in uncoupling race from Blackness, since their kinship seems to be based, at least partly, on their shared skin colour. To be sure, there is no fixed, colour-blind definition of race.

That being said, the swift, noncontextualised adoption of ‘race’ into an academic discipline can lead to the adoption of European colonialism and color prejudice.

As a corrective, I situate an Ethiopian epic at the intersection of classics and race. This literary move broadens classics to include an Ethiopian epic steeped in its own oral and literary culture as well as ancient Greek and Latin texts. This reframing also prevents the conflation of race with ‘powerless Africa’. In fact, as a metatheatrical nod of sorts, the *Kebrā Nagast* explicitly decentres ancient Rome from its audiences’ world map. Rather than rely on Roman interventions for legitimacy or legibility, the *Kebrā Nagast* positions the Roman empire as a less powerful foil to its Ethiopian counterpart.¹⁶ This humbling portrayal of Rome undermines any Graeco-Roman hierarchy of antiquity.

In sum, an ethical revamping of classics demands bridges, rather than ladders, to connect various communities. In the future, cross-cultural studies of ancient languages, such as Latin in conjunction with Ge’ez, or Greek with Ajāmī (a writing tradition in West and East Africa), can unsettle the colonial geopolitical distinctions currently embedded in the classical tradition. As future scholars embark on interdisciplinary linguistic projects, it remains important for them to heed Baldwin’s words about disrupting the colonial timeline. That is, even if European colonisers who codified the discipline of classics ‘never intended that we should meet’, there remain ways to jumpstart these encounters. One such method consists of including *Kebrā Nagast*, an epic that presupposes the inherent value and presence of ancient Africa, in the classical canon.

Notes

- 1 Ge’ez is an alpha-syllabary language, which means that each letter of the alphabet consists of a consonant–vowel pairing. The alphabet consists of 202 letters (26 base consonants, each with 7 vowel variations, plus 20 labiovelar consonants). Ge’ez is the linguistic ancestor of several modern Eritrean and Ethiopian languages, including Tigre, Tigrinya and Amharic.
- 2 Akbari, ‘World epics in comparison’, 327–31. Other African epics include the story of Mwindo (from the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and that of Sundiata (from Mali).
- 3 Latin translation by Francis Praetorius, French by M. Hugues Le Roux, German by C. Bezold who also produced an edited version of the Ge’ez text, Spanish by Enrique Cornelio Agrippa (all except Agrippa discussed in Budge, *The Queen of Sheba & Her Only Son Menyelek*, xix–xxii).
- 4 Belcher and Kleiner, *The Kebrā Nagast*.
- 5 I refer to the Queen of Sheba as Queen Makeda of Saba, as she is named in the *Kebrā Nagast*. Saba (ሳባ, *saba*) was the name of an ancient kingdom whose capital was in the southwestern part of the Arabian peninsula. Queen Makeda also appears in the Qur’an and the Hebrew Bible. In accordance with royal nomenclature practices, I consistently refer to her and her host with their royal titles (‘Queen Makeda’, ‘King Solomon’).
- 6 Bezold, *Kebrā Nagast* 30 (this numbering refers to the Ge’ez paragraph numbers in Bezold’s text).

- 7 I define Aithiopia as an ethereal land that ancient Greek sources sometimes conflate with a historical region; its geographical location corresponds with modern Egypt and Sudan (extending approximately from the First to the Sixth Cataract of the Nile). This is not the same as Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa. I discuss the parameters of Aithiopia further in Derbew, *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity*, 11–2.
- 8 Herodotus, *Histories* 3.21. My pairing of a classical Ge'ez source and a classical Greek source aims to democratise different literary traditions without promoting an ancient Greek hegemony.
- 9 Aeschylus, *Persians* 181–96. Cf. note 8 above.
- 10 Worq, 'Ethiopian 1955 Constitution (Excerpt)', Proclamation 149, Article 2.
- 11 Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.630–705.
- 12 Mwangi, *Africa Writes Back to Self*, 1–26.
- 13 Tsuruta, 'James Baldwin and Chinua Achebe', 73; Achebe, 'Spelling our proper name', 66–7.
- 14 Achebe, 'Spelling our proper name'.
- 15 I use uppercase 'Black' to refer to a modern, socially constructed group of people whose melanin is merely one of their distinguishing traits. I elaborate on this in Derbew, *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity*, 14–6.
- 16 Bezold, *Kebra Nagast* 72–3, 93 (this numbering refers to the Ge'ez paragraph numbers in Bezold's text).

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2

Petrarch's *Africa* (c. 1343)

Extract from Book II (lines 1–326), translated from the Latin by Samuel Agbamu.¹ Commentary by Samuel Agbamu. Line numbers in the translation and commentary are for practical purposes and do not correspond to the Latin original.

In the first book of Petrarch's Africa, the Roman military commander Scipio Africanus has a dream in which he is visited by the spirits of his dead father and uncle. In this dream, they assure Scipio of his coming victory over Carthage. They take Scipio up into the heavens and explain to him the eternal rewards of those who die for their homeland. The dream continues in the second book.

- 1 Scipio's father brought his son's mind back from such thoughts [of death] and said, in a kindly way, 'It's time to descend from the heavens. The grace to come to this place is granted only to a few: you should graciously leave now.'
- 5 'Don't hurry off, dear father, I beg of you', said Scipio, 'don't disappear while I remain uncertain about some things. Send me back once I am certain about the future.'
- 'My son, you ask for the solace of a passing moment,' replied his father. 'The dream you are having tonight and everything you see
- 10 now in a confusing and ambiguous way will vanish suddenly from before your eyes. If, by chance, some vestige of the memory of this dream remains in your mind, you will nevertheless think it to be a meaningless vision and that your mind has been wandering. But I don't want to refuse your request. Tell me, my son, what it is that
- 15 bothers you most, but be concise, given the short time that remains before Phoebus Apollo brings the dawn.'

‘Father, if the divine will is known to you, and if the time that is to come is visible to your eyes, I would like to know what fate has in store. Now we see harsh war shaking Latium with violent force.
20 Perfidious Hannibal stands at the gates. Every effort against him is repelled and fails. The fields grow sodden with our blood. So many of our distinguished leaders are dying. You two – such bright lights of so great an empire – fell at the same time. The sun has been snatched from Italian lands and great Rome falls to ruin under this
25 twin disaster of your deaths. What is left? What death now awaits the supreme city? Will it fall or stand? Because, if it is in vain that we take up arms, relieve me of all these worries and lift this heavy burden from my mind: let me go back to sleep and rest my limbs. For if I and the homeland are destined to fall by God’s will, what use is
30 it to resist fate and to lift human hands against the inevitable? Let us die without the need for weapons! Let savage Hannibal live and rule the whole world!’

Scipio’s great father did not allow his son to have such unworthy thoughts in his mind: ‘No! No! It will be by arms that the one-eyed brigand will be expelled from the borders of Ausonia [Italy]. Then he will go away with hateful thoughts, afraid to leave a land foreign to him, thirsty for blood and for plunder. His mournful mob, fearing war and greatly disturbed by its approach, will summon him back to his home. Afterwards, he will reach the shore of Africa and there,
40 fearing a deadly clash on the field of battle, he will seek a meeting with you. Beware of the tricks and the guile of that man. Let both of our terrible deaths, savagely brought about by that barbarian city, teach you a lesson. But go and look carefully at the cruel face of the enemy and strain your ear to his words. Staying cautious and vigilant, take note of the insidious words of that old trickster. If
45 you refuse or draw back from meeting, believe me, you will be seen throughout the world as timid or perhaps arrogant. He will try to twist your mind in different ways and using new tricks, each time repeating the sweet word ‘peace, peace’ and hiding deceit under the name of peace. He alone is the destroyer of peace. Be firm, hold fast and keep your word. Do not act in a way unworthy of your dignity or that of our homeland. When he is forced to confront his sad fate, he will rage. He will utter words of humility and submission with a lying mouth. He will warn you, a great young man, accustomed to
50 things always turning out well, to weigh up the different possible outcomes. He will enumerate for you, in a duplicitous speech, the

many frightening things that have happened to leaders in the past,
and their fates. When he sees that none of his words move your
great spirit, then, boiling with sorrow and with rage, he will return
60 to his camp.

‘There will be a battle which fate will watch over with uncertain
favour and whose outcome will be feared by the whole world. A
holier man will command this camp, and a more impious man than
one. Here, Virtue, opponent of evil, and the cultivation of Modesty,
65 and Devotion, well-guided Faith, Piety and her companion Justice,
along with the rest of her sisters, brandish their weapons. On the
other side, Fury, Trickery, Madness, hearts ignorant of Truth,
Contempt of God, burning Lust, and blind Anger rising under
constant disputes – horrible sights and crimes by many names.
70 At last, you will be victorious in war, but you will not get carried
away by your victory. Adverse fortune will suddenly lay Hannibal
low. Defeated, he will flee and reach a foreign shore, where the
tide of the Hellespont Sea separates Greek lands from Asia. He
will try everything and will grasp the knees of unworthy kings as a
75 suppliant. He will plead for mercenary arms, burning to bring ruin
to Italian shores once again, if Fortune allows. But Fortune is more
friendly towards us. Now, sated by long-lasting evils, she will turn
his deadly plans upside down.

‘What more should I say? He will wander, a pitiful exile, and spread
80 venom in every land, attacking Romans even in death. Just like
when, by chance, a rain of stones falls on a snake at a crossroads, it
rages, and dying, spits out threats and poison, twisting its tail and
scaly body into a thousand knots, a uniquely horrible sight, and at
last lets out a bloody hiss and raises its dying eyes before attacking
85 the perpetrator in vain – so Hannibal, disturbed, will try a thousand
tactics, all in vain. At that time, by chance, while you are fulfilling
your public obligations, you will, quite safely, see him unarmed.
You will see the face that terrorised the world. That happy day will
witness a friendly talk and lucky Ephesus will see a conversation
90 between two great men. Indeed, dishonest fame equates the wicked
with the good, using false praise. It finds great crime, things terrible,
horrible to say, and sings its praises throughout the world, and it
does not discriminate between motives. One man helps his dying
country and is praised; the other man, amidst great bloodshed,
95 seizes power amidst bloodied spoils, so that he can recline upon
a heap of gold – this man too is praised. Hannibal and Scipio will

be praised. All of posterity will admire them both. But alas! Each
of them was brought to earth under different and opposed stars!
And the common people do not know how to tell how great the
100 difference is between a magnificent deed and a foul crime. Look
at what sudden and astounding flattery that man will use to try to
bend your will with his words! Either Punic hearts are always like
this, or virtue deserves praise even from an enemy, however rare
this may be. But maybe his attempts will give you a bit of a laugh
105 and nothing more. When he surrenders to death and looks back at
the serious events of his life, driven mad by false hope, he will at
last rush, totally without fear, to the palace of Bithynia. There, that
awful leader will rid our city and the whole world of fear. You will
see the fate of the enemy, whom the Ausonian land endured for
110 so long.

‘But if you still want to know a bit more about Roman affairs,
carefully study from the source what the Fates have in store. This
particular victory over Hannibal will create a straight and easy route
to what comes next, and no one will be ashamed to take the port
115 that mighty Carthage once held. This victory will teach people to
bear the Roman yoke and bring tribute. Suddenly, the vain Aetolian
will rise in arms, Antiochus will rush into the fray; under the
auspices of your brother, you will win.² The eastern world will know
you, as before the west and the rainy south had known you. Then,
120 other wars will give rise to further wars still, but Rome will defeat
all threats and trample the whole world underfoot. Conquered
kingdoms will take up the yoke: soon Galatia and the Macedonian
madness will come under Rome’s laws.³ Neither the royal names
of Macedon nor the outstanding achievements of its ancestors will
125 be able to save it. Even if Alexander the Great, called back from
his funerary urn, should return, you know what my opinion is: the
whole world of Greece, in a very short time, will fall, defeated, and
will pay a terrible price for our fallen ancestors. Here, let Glabrius
and Memmius, with his much-admired sense of modesty, and
130 spirited Flaminius begin to achieve great deeds and to rival you in
fame. There will be different events and a long series of labours. A
flourishing age is coming for men powerful in arms. Here now, the
Scauri, the Drusi and the Metelli, distinguished in honour. Now the
Nerones, of famous name, are brought forth before my eyes. At one
135 point, a pestilential branch will sprout from this tree and will harm
people with its wicked shade. Now, with their rigid sense of virtue,

the Catones rise gradually. If only that house were less hostile to our own! The Aemilii rise, and from this family, you will choose an heir who will deserve our ancestral name with his great deeds. He will
140 complete what you left unfinished, with fire and sword, inflamed by a righteous anger and harsher to those who deserve it.

‘I will go on further. Before my eyes now I have fierce Sulla, the solemn Pompeys, and noble-hearted Brutus. I am astounded by where he directs his dagger! From here, we come to the culmination
145 of everything; I see the Caesarean clan dominating the entire world. Why am I telling you all of this? The city will never be richer in outstanding spirits or supreme leaders. Would anyone believe this? There will be someone who, taken away from his Campanian plough, will be distinguished in war. He will bring our standards
150 to the south and again oppress Libya. As victor, he will break the necks of noble kings under a triumphal arch. Twice he will release Latium from a terrible siege beset by extreme fear. Turned back from hot shores and suddenly ordered to cross the snowy Alps by Aquae Sextiae – so they call this valley – let him halt the German
155 madness with glorious bloodshed. Next, let him lay low the fanatical Cimbrians with similar blows.⁴

‘In the hidden places at the ends of the earth, where you placed your camp, a young man who will be remembered through the ages for his unprecedented deeds, a young man of similar greatness,
160 will arrive. Indeed, there will be no other more deserving of the name “the Great”. This man will force the Tagus, Baetis and Ebro to bear the yoke and recognise the Tiber as their master.⁵ This same man will subdue a rebellious spirit with excessive force. Let no envy contaminate his honest soul; let others also fly high. There
165 has never been and never will be anyone to whom all glory falls. Glory, always whole, gives a part of itself to different people. Life is short, but the order of things goes on for a very long time. What will happen if each of those ages to come does not bring forth those who meet their fate willingly? If one man were enough for the whole
170 span of time, the republic would be content with you as its leader. If only you could happily stay here with me while wars are waged, and praise the outstanding young man from on high. I remind you of a few of his innumerable deeds: the greatest of his deeds live on and will be sung by others with greater songs. For this man, rapid in
175 his victories – if I can say such a thing – will arrive again as a victor, marching from the place where the sun rises to where it sets and will

raise the name of Italy above the stars. All will succumb: generous
 fortune will want to enrich this leader with many triumphs.
 However, he will be more moderate in his soul and will be satisfied
 180 with little. He will go away happy with his head encircled by laurel
 three times, and with his Rome seeing him standing in that revered
 triumphal chariot three times. This man will drive the pirates out
 from the whole sea. Stubborn Judea will be conquered, the two
 185 Armenias, Cappadocians, Arabs, and the wide-bodied Ganges,
 along with the Persians and the Parthians: conquering all of them,
 we will come from the shores of the Red Sea to the frozen Arctic
 sea. We will arrive at icy lands, Tanais, harsh Maeotis, and come
 close to the Rhiphaean mountains, high in the sky.⁶ Worn down by
 harsh war their kings will flee, despising their lives, their kingship,
 190 and war. Our conquerors will trample underfoot Caspian gates and
 the homes of the incense-burning people of Sheba.⁷ They will cross
 the thresholds of undefiled temples and peer into the most secret
 parts of their shrines. Royal purple will not move our victors, nor
 will gems and gold. With unsheathed sword, Roman austerity will
 195 come amongst treasures and not be moved by them.

‘No island in the whole sea will retain its freedom – no land,
 whether washed by the waves or situated under the unmoving stars.
 The rich palace of Cyprus will come under our empire, and Crete,
 200 the monstrous home and origin of superstitious practices, then
 the shore of Euboea, and Rhodes, famous for its sun and sea, the
 Cyclades, scattered in the middle of the salty Aegean like stars in the
 serene sky, the shield of mighty Sicily, and wealthy Sardinia with its
 heavy sky and Corsica, poorer in soil but with its sunny rocks, and
 whatever else lies in the Tuscan Sea, the Iberian or Adriatic.

205 ‘But who will lead a fleet into the raging sea? There will be one,
 the bravest of all our descendants, who will always be the subject
 of song in this wide world. He will fill the fields of Gaul with a
 variety of terrors and will violate their rivers with streams of black
 blood. From there, in a swift war, he will trample the golden-haired
 210 Britons, situated in a faraway land in a faraway sea under a faraway
 sky. He will span the unruly Rhine with bridges and, taking hold
 of hostile frontiers, with military might, will bring sad war to the
 blue-eyed Germans. Oh, how happy things would have been if he
 had known where to put a limit to his fighting! But, alas, he will
 215 not know how to do this. Nor will the wretched man even want to.
 Instead, with a disturbed mind he turns his hand, victorious against

everything else, against the guts of the Republic, befouling his
external conquest with civil bloodshed, his deserved triumphs with
unworthy war. It shames me to associate infamous madness with so
many glorious achievements. How shamefully ambition tramples
220 upon everything, just so that one man can win total power for
himself, the first one to do so and an example for others to follow.
The proud man will despoil the state treasury and choose poor
senators from a new order! This, and Pharsalian death and Ephirean
225 arms, Thapsus, Munda, and the Capitol stained with blood – I pass
over all of this.⁸

‘Next, his great nephew will succeed, coming from the glorious
branch of his sister’s family. This one will bring the distant Indians
under our laws, will seize fierce Egypt and the wife of the Latin
230 leader, shaking her barbarian rattles. His gleaming sword will flash
throughout his life and he will trample other kings underfoot. He
will teach the wild Ister and the land that lies beneath the twin
bears to obey the Roman fasces. Carried into Rome in a triple
triumph, according to custom, he will give laws, hitherto unknown,
235 to the entire world. Raised upon his high throne, he will see sceptres
submitted to him, leaders and crowds of common people bringing
him gifts, everyone burning with the desire to please him. Now
older, he will crush the stubborn Iberians in war. That will be his
last labour. From this, peaceful ages will follow. Then the mournful
240 threshold of two-faced Janus will be closed and the bronze posts
joined at the hinge. Then venerable old age will send him, now
weighed down by age, to his tomb, taking him from the loving
embrace of his wife’s arms.

‘After the funeral of this man, I see Roman fate take a backwards
245 turn and its beautiful morals fall into shameful practice. Alas, why
did you have to die? The progeny of our name will die with you. But
you, after you have obtained what is owed to you, will reach the
high dome of heaven. But what about the remaining crowd, a joke
to the world and a shame to their earlier forebears? They will get
250 what they deserve: Tartarus and the Stygian caves.

‘But I’m going too fast. I see a father and son, equal in nobility, in a
twin triumph on the happy Capitoline. The hill is verdant with their
twin laurels. I also see two sets of the purple triumphal toga. But I
255 don’t seem to be able to see two triumphal chariots. Piety goes along,
happy with one chariot: a new sight and, indeed, most deservedly
famous. Jerusalem will fall to these leaders and its famous religion

conquered by the sword. It will be right for swords to break into
its sacred places and this people to reap what their sins deserve.
I am ashamed to go on. Foreigners belonging to the Spanish and
260 African race will seize the glorious sceptre of empire, built upon the
foundations of so much of our work. Who can bear the idea that this
scum of humankind, the shameful survivors of our sword, should
reach the apex of government?’

Since he was not able to restrain his grief, Scipio, with a tearful voice,
265 interrupted his father, who was about to continue his narrative:
‘What terrible things you speak of, father! Surely fortune will not
allow such things! Let the stars, shaken from their places, fall into
the Stygian swamp! Let the keeper of the underworld conquer the
heavens and thunder from the celestial citadel rather than Africa, as
270 conqueror, steal the justice and eternal name of Rome.’

He did not grieve for long before his father spoke: ‘I beg you, put
aside your tears and your fears: Latin honour stands, and will always
be called by the name of the Roman Empire. But it will not always be
a Roman driver who holds the reins. Soft Syria will stretch out her
275 hand, soon harsh Gaul, loquacious Greece, and Illyricum. At last,
that power will fall to the North: thus fate turns human affairs. By
chance, in the distant future and at the end of the world, fortune
will return to her proper home. But look deeper and find out what
else lies in store for our city. This one thing out of many, God in
280 heaven hides in cloud; but as far as can be said for what the soul is
allowed to know in advance, Rome will not fall, conquered by an
enemy. This glory is not given to any other nation, nor so great an
honour to another people. Rome will be worn down by the years
and tired from the cracks in her foundations, will fall to pieces.
285 There will never be a time, no age free from war. And there will
come a time when scarcely a real Roman citizen is to be found in
the city, but instead the dregs of humanity, gathered from across the
world; however, this mob, barely sane, will harm itself with bloody
swords, and unless a very strong man, someone worthy of being
290 born in better times, puts himself in the middle of the fighting,
and shows his face and reveals his hand, this mob will bleed out
whatever blood remains in their miserable hearts. But take solace:
Rome, once born under powerful stars, although harmed by the
plans of gangs of evil men, will endure for a long time. In the midst
295 of these plagues Rome will be queen of the world, if only in name.
This sacred title will never desert her. Just as when strength and

spirit drain away from an aged lion, even though the prior majesty of his appearance and terrifying roar still remain, he is slow to do anything. He may be a shadow of his former self but the whole forest still obeys this toothless old man. But who would presume to know things for certain or to predict the end of such things? Do you want me to go on? In the end, although ruined, your Rome will live out her days and will come to her end only when the entire world perishes.'

* * *

Commentary by Samuel Agbamu

Francesco Petrarca (1304–74), known in English as Petrarch, was an Italian poet and humanist scholar. Although most of what he wrote was in Latin, he is best known today for his Italian lyric poetry, the *Canzoniere*. Petrarch was born in Arezzo, Tuscany, in 1304. In 1311, his family moved to Avignon in France, where the papacy was at that time located. In 1316, Petrarch began to study law in Montpellier, France, and then moved to continue his studies in Bologna, Italy, in 1323.

He returned to Avignon after the death of his father, in 1326. It was during this stint back in Avignon that Petrarch discovered his love for Roman antiquity. While working for Cardinal Giovanni Colonna in the 1330s, he travelled all over France, Belgium and Germany on official business. He also used this as an opportunity to scour monastery libraries for manuscripts of classical texts, recovering and reconstructing numerous Latin texts previously lost or fragmented. In 1337, he visited Rome for the first time and described, in a letter to a friend, being amazed by what he encountered. It was this experience, Petrarch claims, that moved him to write two of his major Latin works: the anthology of biographies of men from biblical and classical antiquity, *On Famous Men* (*De viris illustribus*), and his nine-book Latin epic about the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE), fought between Rome and the North African city of Carthage. The latter is titled *Africa*.

Petrarch often confounds neat placement into a historical period, being neither 'medieval' nor 'Renaissance', in his own mind sitting somewhere between Roman antiquity and the Christianity of his own day. For related reasons, constructions of 'race' in Petrarch's texts are frequently missing in current scholarship on race in the Middle Ages and on race in the Renaissance. Today race is frequently bound up, in

everyday contexts, with skin colour, but in the context of Petrarch's texts, it is more constructive to think in terms of racial formation, a process whereby Petrarch applies labels to Others in order to bolster identities – such as Roman, Italian or Catholic – with which he identified.⁹

Africa, begun in 1337 and incomplete at the time of Petrarch's death, is an important text for interpreting how Petrarch saw himself and others, historically. This Latin epic represents Petrarch's attempts to reconcile the Christian beliefs prevalent during his time with his admiration for pre-Christian Roman antiquity. His Scipio Africanus resembles a Christianised, saint-like Roman conqueror – a figure too good to be convincing, according to Thomas Bergin and Alice Wilson, the translators of the only published English translation of the poem.¹⁰ Yet, despite modern scholars' unsympathetic view of the epic, this was the poem, still then unfinished, for which Petrarch was awarded a laurel crown by the city of Rome in 1341. The poem remained unpublished until 1397, however, and was seen as a poetic failure in the following centuries. The epic began to receive attention again in the middle of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century, in the context of Italian liberal and later Fascist imperial ideology. During this time it was praised as an early attempt to revive the spirit of the Roman Empire.

Africa tells the story of Scipio Africanus' campaigns against Hannibal during the Second Punic War, culminating with Scipio's victory at the Battle of Zama (202 BCE). The action begins with Scipio about to embark on campaign in Africa while Hannibal is ravaging the Italian peninsula. In the first two books of the nine-book epic, Scipio has a dream in which he is visited by the spirits of his father and his uncle, both of whom had been killed in battle earlier on in the Second Punic War. In this dream, a reframing of the 'Dream of Scipio' from the last book of Cicero's *De Republica*, Scipio's father and uncle assure Scipio of the value of waging war on Carthage, a conflict in which Rome is destined to prevail and which will initiate a series of triumphs for future Romans. This sequence of imperial triumphs is modelled on Book Six of the *Aeneid*, in which the spirit of Anchises, the father of Aeneas, shows to his son the coming glories of Rome, reaching a zenith with Augustus' reign.

In the extract, Scipio's father, Publius Cornelius Scipio, tells his son about the significance of the inevitable defeat of Hannibal in terms of Rome's imperial mission. Publius Cornelius' prophecy is significant in expressing Petrarch's imperial ideal based on the sense of an Italian identity, formulated in opposition to non-Italians and non-Christians. Rome is represented as a brutal, civilising force, visiting violence upon other populations. Roman identity is constructed along bloodlines:

those who spill blood are Roman and those who have their blood spilt are not. This is why Sulla is characterised in un-Roman terms (line 142) and the memory of Caesar's role in civil war suppressed (lines 205–26). This consanguinity built through bloodshed is inherited by Italy. A preoccupation of Petrarch's literary project as a whole – and of *Africa* in particular, and especially the dream of Scipio – is, therefore, the construction of an Italian identity based on a triumphant narrative of Roman history, a history that the Italy of Petrarch's day must recover. Every Italian triumph rests on the defeat of perceived enemies of Italy, and the glory of Rome is transferred to Petrarch's Italy so long as this dynamic continues. The extract therefore demonstrates how Petrarch uses models drawn from Roman history as an expression of his politics of empire, built at the expense of non-Italian Others. Petrarch's Christianised ancient Rome also draws into question the role of religion in developing conceptions of racial otherness.

The war against Carthage is set up by Petrarch as a clash of civilisations. Scipio's father represents the coming Battle of Zama as a conflict between good and evil. The absolute evilness of Hannibal is emphasised through frequent reference to his dishonesty and perfidy, adapted from Livy's description of the Carthaginian commander as possessing a 'more-than-Punic perfidy'.¹¹ *Perfidia* was a word that had highly charged meaning in the fourteenth century. In 1348, the decade of the first phase of the composition of *Africa*, a papal bull was promulgated, entitled 'Quamvis Iudaeorum perfidiam' ('although the perfidy of the Jews . . .'). The bull addresses Christian suspicions that the Black Death was being spread by Jewish communities in Europe, a suspicion that the bull aims to dispel while acknowledging the legitimate Christian hatred for the 'perfidy of the Jews'.¹² In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous scholars and writers viewed Carthage as a Semitic city due to the Near Eastern origins of its Phoenician settlers. For example, the nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet (see Chapter 10 in this volume) referred to Carthaginians as an 'impure race' and spoke of the Punic Wars as determining which civilisation would prevail, the 'Indo-Germanic' Romans, or 'Semitic' Carthage.¹³ *Africa* plays an important role in the burgeoning racialisation of Carthage as Semitic, representing the Punic city as not only hostile to ancient Rome, but, in Book Seven, hostile also to the Catholic Church, which would later be centred on the Eternal City.

Later in Scipio's dream, Petrarch makes more explicit his anti-Jewish commitments, which were closely related to Petrarch's hopes for a renewed crusade to the Holy Land. When Publius Cornelius tells his

son about the coming conquests of Pompey the Great (106–48 BCE), he begins by enumerating Pompey's victories in Spain before turning to his conquests in the Mediterranean and in the East. Pompey, Publius Cornelius says, will drive the pirates from the sea and conquer Judea, Armenia, Cappadocia (Turkey), Arabia, the Ganges and Persia. In Petrarch's mind, all of these regions are associated with the crusades to the Holy Land, save the Ganges, which instead represents the eastern extent of Pompey's triumphs (lines 183–5). In this way, Pompey is represented as a proto-crusader against the East.

Such links between Roman antiquity and the non-Christian world are made explicit in another of Petrarch's Latin texts, *De vita solitaria*, translated as *The Life of Solitude*. Here, Petrarch explains Islamic antipathy towards Rome by claiming that the Prophet Mohammed bore a grudge against Romans, 'recalling the great number of defeats and serious misfortunes that had been inflicted by Rome at different times on the Persians, the Medes, Egyptians, Chaldeans, and his Arab ancestors'.¹⁴ Notably, Carthage is absent here, associated more with Judaism than Islam. Petrarch's explanation of the conflicts between the Latin West and the world beyond through reference to Roman antiquity can therefore be seen as a unifying feature of his historical imaginary that runs through *Africa*. Petrarch's epic framing of this binary opposition between the Latin West and the East – since he was almost as antipathetic towards the Greek Orthodox Church as he was towards Islam and Judaism – contributed to later humanists' views of the Islamic East, particularly after the Ottoman capture of Constantinople, as the mortal enemy of both the Church and of classicism.¹⁵ Such conceptions of the relationship between humanism and the Muslim world shaped ideas of the Renaissance as a self-enclosed European phenomenon, eliding the contribution of scholars in the Islamic world to the transmission of ancient Greek texts.

As in the *Aeneid*, Publius Cornelius represents Augustus' civil wars as wars of external conquest. He will bring the Indus under Roman laws and will capture fierce Egypt (*Egiptumque ferox*, line 229) and the wife of the Latin leader, who shakes the barbarian sistra, the rattles used by worshippers of Isis. Cleopatra is shown, rattling her sistra, in the shield of Aeneas in Book Eight of the *Aeneid*,¹⁶ where India also features among the allies of Egypt, contributing to a generalised picture of East versus West. *Ferox*, meaning fierce and describing Egypt, is a word used by Petrarch in *Africa* to refer exclusively to non-Italians, except when he refers to the tyrannical antagonist of civil war, Sulla, whose fratricidal conflicts make him un-Roman.

The only specific example of Roman imperial triumph drawn from the period of the principate is the sack of Jerusalem (70 CE) during Vespasian and Titus' Jewish War, which allows Petrarch to restate his anti-Jewish commitments (lines 256–8). The plundering of the Temple of Jerusalem, as divine retribution against the Jewish people, also has clear crusading connotations, with Jerusalem rightfully belonging to Christendom rather than to Judaism (or Islam). Elsewhere, Petrarch explicitly points to the execution of Christ as the sin of the Jewish people and positions Vespasian and Titus as Christ's avengers. Petrarch wishes to call them back to avenge Christ once more, presumably again against Judaism.¹⁷

The grandeur of Roman imperialism declines when power passes into the hands of foreigners, especially 'foreigners belonging to the Spanish and African race' (lines 259–60), 'this scum of humankind, the shameful survivors of our sword' (lines 261–3). These representatives of the filth of mankind must be the emperors Trajan (53–117 CE), Hadrian (76–138 CE) and Septimius Severus (145–211 CE). *Stirps* – root, stock, or 'race' – used to refer to the African and Spanish emperors here, carries racialising connotations; for example, Jewish people are referred to as *Iudaica stirps* – the Jewish race – in the 1348 papal bull mentioned earlier. Geraldine Heng argues that the Crusades to the Holy Land beginning at the end of the eleventh century, and coinciding with the growth of anti-Jewish violence in Europe, contributed to the congealing of an identity of *homo europeus* – European man. In the context of Holy Wars overseas and holy violence against Europe's Jewish populations, blood – that of Christian martyrs spilt in the Middle East and that of persecuted Jews shed in Europe – was central to the formation of racial identities structured along religious lines.¹⁸ Petrarch applies such proto-biological racial thinking to Publius Scipio's words about Africans and Spaniards. For these races, these survivors of Roman aggression, to grasp the levers of power is especially shocking. Publius' horror is amplified by Petrarch's own context of foreigners occupying seats of power traditionally centred on Romans: a French pope had taken the papacy to France, and the closest approximation to a Roman emperor was not an Italian. Secondly, Septimius Severus is characterised as a persecutor of Christians by Church historians such as Eusebius.¹⁹ Furthermore, his son Caracalla promulgated an edict in 212 CE which granted Roman citizenship to all free men of the empire, uncoupling the idea of Rome from Italian nationhood. This would, much later, be cited in Italian Fascist historiography of the 1930s as the beginning of the decline of the empire.

Despite the degraded state of Rome since the Spanish and African 'scum of humankind' (line 262) had grasped Rome's imperial sceptre, 'Latin honour stands, and will always be called by the name of the Roman Empire. But it will not always be a Roman driver who holds the reins' (lines 272–4). Instead, 'soft Syria' (*Siria mollis*), 'harsh Gaul, loquacious Greece, and Illyricum' will take turns ruling Rome, until at last, power falls to Boreas, the North, by which Petrarch means Germany. The characterisation of Syria as soft falls within Petrarch's wider anti-Arabic rhetoric. For example, in a letter to a Paduan doctor friend, Petrarch rails against Arabic poetry, saying that there is 'nothing more fawning, softer [*mollius*], more annoying'.²⁰ Petrarch would no doubt have received such characterisations of Arabs as 'soft' from Latin authors such as Catullus, who also described Arabs as *molles* (soft).²¹

The result of this foreign power over Rome is that there will come a time when scarcely a single, true Roman citizen will be found in the city; rather, 'the dregs of humanity' (line 287) from every land will fill Rome. Once again, Petrarch's perception of Rome in his own time shines through in this characterisation. In a letter to Giovanni Colonna, he bemoans the fact that 'nowhere is Rome less known than in Rome'. However, 'who can doubt that Rome would rise again instantly if she began to know herself?'²² *Africa* stood to serve as precisely that education in empire so sorely needed by Romans, in order for them to restore the imperial dream of their progenitors.

Petrarch's vision of Roman history as a sequence of triumphs over non-Romans and non-Italians contributes to narratives of history as civilisational progress. For Petrarch, such progress can be resumed with the recovery of Rome's imperial mission. Such narratives of progress contribute to the construction of the fiction of 'Western civilisation'. Western civilisation is frequently seen as being built on a particular view of Greek and Roman antiquity, the spirit of which was recovered during the Renaissance by figures such as Petrarch.²³ It was the rediscovery of antiquity, according to such narratives, that ushered in the idea of modernity. The restoration of Rome and its empire formed an important part of the early humanist project of modernity. In Scipio's dream in *Africa*, the bloody conquests of Rome are justified by the idea that the Roman Empire became the vehicle for the Christianisation of much of the Mediterranean.

However, this dream of a Christian empire falls apart when non-Italians take imperial power, and when the Arab conquests see Islam sweep into North Africa (the arena of Scipio's triumphs), the Middle East and even into Spain. Thus, in his treatise *The Life of Solitude*,

Petrarch imagines the anger that ancient Roman conquerors would feel if they returned as Christians and saw the regions of their conquests no longer under the sign of the cross. This goes beyond religious prejudice since, for example, the Carthaginians were not Jewish, nor were the ancient Persians and Egyptians Muslim. Instead, the narrative of a millennia-long struggle between a Christianised ancient Rome and Rome's enemies – who can variously be represented as Jewish, Muslim or, indeed, German and French barbarians – requires the transference of negative characteristics across different peoples and time periods through the technology of race. Only in this way could Carthaginians and early modern Jewish communities, for example, be lumped together as Semitic.

Such racialisations of Carthage as found in *Africa* have had more recent manifestations. Twentieth-century Italian Fascism and German Nazism saw the Second World War as a Fourth Punic War, between the Aryan heirs of ancient Rome – Italy and Germany – and the external 'modern Carthaginians', represented by Islam or the British Empire, or the internal Carthaginians, represented by Europe's Jewish populations. Even before then, Rome's destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE was claimed to be the beginning of the millennial Semitic hatred for Rome. Italian scholars and ideologues of empire and nation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries specifically referred to Petrarch's *Africa* in the promotion of such antisemitic and imperial ideologies, for example reading it for inspiration in Fascist Italy's war in North Africa against the New Carthaginians of Britain or as inspiration against the Muslim Ottoman Empire during the 1911 Italian invasion of Libya.²⁴

The vision of history put forward by Scipio's dream in Petrarch's *Africa* presents a teleological sequence of Roman imperial triumphs which, despite the degraded present of the city in Petrarch's own day, secures for it the perpetual title of queen of the world. Each of these triumphs requires the defeat of the non-Roman, non-Italian Other. The work of the contemporary South African artist William Kentridge (b. 1955) reflects upon such triumphal narratives of history. On 21 April 2016, the anniversary of the mythical founding of Rome, William Kentridge inaugurated his monumental frieze *Triumphs and Laments* on the embankment wall along the Tiber in Rome.²⁵ This series of images subverts the triumphal narrative of the city of Rome, itself taking the form of a triumphal procession. It tells the story of the city from its foundations up to the present day, emphasising the laments of those oppressed by the empires of ancient and modern Rome.

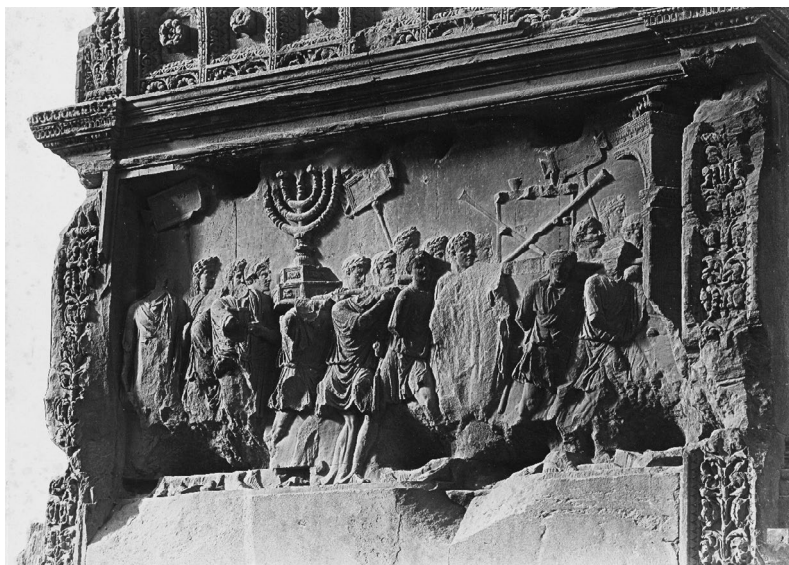


Figure 2.1 Interior of the Arch of Titus, Rome. (Photo: Tommaso Cuccioni/Getty Museum. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program)

Among these moments is the sack of Jerusalem, as monumentalised on the Arch of Titus (see [Figure 2.1](#)) in the Roman Forum, replicated in Kentridge's frieze and celebrated by Petrarch. In *Triumphs and Laments* ([Figure 2.2](#)), it is juxtaposed with depictions of Jewish inhabitants of Rome being humiliated in the Renaissance carnival and rounded up by the Nazis during the German occupation of the city during the Second World War. For Kentridge, himself of Jewish heritage, the triumphs of Rome are tightly bound up with histories of imperial violence enacted upon the Other, including Rome's own Jewish population.²⁶

This is an intertwined history in which Petrarch's triumphal vision of Roman imperial revival, at the expense of the religious and racial Other, takes a central place. Yet, it was after confronting the ruins of ancient Rome's empire – the undeniability of its collapse – that Petrarch was inspired to compose his poem of Roman triumph. Petrarch's hope must then have been for a restored Roman empire that would not fall, that would heed the lessons of the past and keep Roman power in Roman hands, excluding those who had caused the collapse of the Empire of antiquity. This too has been a source of anxiety for all powers that have positioned themselves as Rome's heir – how to emulate Rome without following it in its eventual fall. Frequently, such anxieties manifest as a

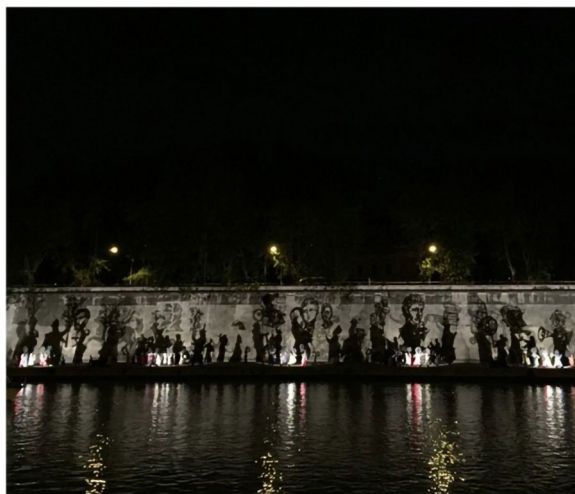


Figure 2.2 *Triumphs and Laments*, by William Kentridge. Opening night, Rome, 21 April 2016. (Photo: Sophie Hay)

fear of the barbarian at the door, often the racialised Other. *Triumphs and Laments* offers a model to read against the anxiety-ridden triumphalism of texts such as Petrarch's *Africa*, and to probe how the idea of ancient Roman imperialism has been used to promote racial and religious prejudices in the post-classical world.

Notes

- 1 To date, there is only one full English translation of *Africa*: Thomas Bergin and Alice Wilson's 1977 *Petrarch's Africa*, now out of print. The standard text for the Latin is Nicola Festa's 1926 edition. More recent editions have been produced by Pierre Laurens, with facing French translation and commentary (in 2006 and 2018), and by Bernhard Huss and Gerhard Regn, with German translation and commentary (in 2007).
- 2 Also called the Roman–Seleucid War, the Aetolian War (192–188 BCE), after the Aetolian League of central Greece, was fought between Rome and the Seleucid King Antiochus III. Hannibal fought under Antiochus against Scipio's brother, Lucius Cornelius Scipio, who was given the agnomen Asiaticus after his victory.
- 3 Galatia refers to the Celts of Anatolia.
- 4 The Cimbrians were a Germanic people.
- 5 Rivers of the Iberian peninsula.
- 6 Tanais refers to the River Don, Russia; Maeotis refers to the area around the Sea of Azov, Ukraine and Russia.
- 7 Sheba refers to southern Arabia, today Yemen.
- 8 These are sites associated with the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.
- 9 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.
- 10 Bergin and Wilson, *Petrarch's Africa*, xv.
- 11 *Perfidia plus quam Punica*; Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 21.4; author's translation.
- 12 Martinez, 'The oblique glance of the muse', 18.
- 13 Michelet, 'L'histoire Romaine', 2:440.

- 14 Petrarch, *Le vie solitaire*, 2.9.16, author's translation.
- 15 Bishaha, *Creating East and West*, 43–93.
- 16 Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.696.
- 17 Petrarca, *Le Familiari: Epystole Familiares* 23.1.
- 18 Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 122–4.
- 19 Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.1.1.
- 20 Petrarca, *Res Seniles: Epystole Seniles* 12.2.
- 21 Catullus, *Carmina*, poem 11.
- 22 Petrarca, *Le Familiari: Epystole Familiares* 6.2.
- 23 Kim, 'The politics of the medieval preracial', 3.
- 24 Agbamu, 'The reception of Petrarch's Africa in Fascist Italy'.
- 25 Kentridge, *Triumphs and Laments*.
- 26 Agbamu, 'Smash the thing', 270–4.

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Leo Africanus' *Cosmographia de l'Africa* (*Cosmography of Africa*, 1526)

Extracts from *La Cosmographia de l'Africa* (1526), by Leo Africanus (born al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzân al-Fâsî, later known as Giovanni Leone de Medici), edited and annotated by Andrea Donnini (Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 2023) under the title *Africa*, volume 2. Translated from the Italian by Oumelbanine Zhiri. Commentary by Oumelbanine Zhiri.

Africa and its divisions

- ¶ 1 According to the Arabs, Africa is only the region of Carthage, and they call the whole of Africa the Western Part.¹
- ¶ 2 According to our scholars and cosmographers, Africa is divided into four parts, Barbary (*Barbaria*), Numidia (*Numedia*), Libya (*Libia*) and the Black Land (*Terra Negresca*). Barbary begins to the east at the Mount Meïes, the last part of the Atlas located around 300 miles from Alexandria. To the north, Barbary ends at the Mediterranean Sea, extending from Mount Meïes to the Straits of the Columns of Hercules. Its western limit is the ocean, from the straits to the town called Massa [. . .] And it is the most noble part of Africa, in which there are cities and White reasonable men. The second part is called Numidia in Latin, and the Arabs call it the *Bilâd al-Jarîd*, the Lands of the Dates. It begins in the east at al-Wahât (*Eloacat*), a town situated about 100 miles from Egypt, and extends in the west [. . .] to the ocean, and in the north it ends at the Atlas mountain range [. . .] In the south it ends when begin the sands of the desert of Libya [. . .] The third part is called Libya. The Arabs just call it *Sahra*, which means desert. It begins to the east at the Nile River [. . .] and extends until the ocean. In the north, it borders on Numidia [. . .] and in the south with the Black Land [. . .] And the fourth part is the Black Land.²

The inhabitants of Africa and their origins

- ¶ 3 According to the cosmographers and the historiographers, Africa used to be uninhabited except for the Black Land. Barbary and Numidia remained empty for many centuries. All the inhabitants, meaning the Whites, are called *el Barbar*. Many scholars think that this name is derived from the Latin verb *barbara*, which means ‘to mumble’. That is because the African language, to the ears of the Arabs, was deprived of meaning and resembled the sounds made by animals, or nothing more than a meaningless mumble. They were thus called *el Barbar*. Others say that the word *barbar* is formed by the replication of the Arabic word *bar*, which means desert. They say that a long time ago King Ifricus was routed by the Assyrians or the Ethiopians and fled toward Egypt. The enemy pursued him. Unable to defend himself, the king consulted his people about the best way to save themselves. And all shouted ‘El barbar!’, meaning ‘To the desert, the desert!’ They meant that the only remedy was to cross the river Nile toward the desert of Africa. This explanation accords with those who say that the origin of Africans is in Arabia Felix.³
- ¶ 4 Historians have different opinions concerning the origins of Africans. Some say that Africans originated from the Philistines and were a long time ago pursued by the Assyrians. They fled to Africa, found it to be a good and fertile land, and thus settled there. Others say that the Africans originated from the Sabaeans, a people from Arabia Felix. As said earlier, these people were driven away by the Assyrians or by the Ethiopians. Others say that the Africans used to inhabit some part of Asia and were at war with enemies. They had to flee toward Greece, which was not inhabited at that time. Their enemies pursued them, so they had to cross the sea of Morea⁴ and arrived in Africa, where they settled, and their enemies settled in Greece. This only pertains to the white Africans, who live in Barbary and Numidia. As for the Africans of the Black Land, they are all descendants of Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah. Thus, at any rate, white and black Africans have almost the same origin. Even if they descended from the Philistines, the Philistines also originate from Mizraim, son of Cush. If they come from Sheba, Sheba was the son of Raamah and Raamah was the son of Cush.⁵
- ¶ 5 The Egyptians, according to the scripture of Moses, descend from Mizraim, son of Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah. The Hebrews call their lineage and their inhabitants by the same word, Mizraim. The Arabs similarly call the whole country *Misr*.⁶

The division of the White Africans into several peoples (*populi*)

- ¶ 6 The peoples living in Africa are divided into five peoples: Sanhâja (*Sanhagia*), Masmûda (*Masmuda*), Zanâta (*Zeneta*), Huwâra (*Haoara*), and Ghumâra (*Gumera*). [. . .] Many authors say that these five peoples used to live in tents in rural areas. However, a long time ago, they waged wars against each other. Those who lost built walls around cities and villages and became the vassals of those who remained in the rural areas [. . .] Some of these peoples, or rather their princes, dominated the whole of Africa [. . .] These peoples ruled after they had become Muslims. Before, each group lived on its own in the countryside. Those who lived in the desert favoured their brethren who lived in the valleys. Those who lived in the countryside raised cattle, and the inhabitants of the valleys practised some crafts and plowed the land. These five people are subdivided into about 600 lineages, as one can read in the tree of the generations of Africans by Ibn Raḡiq [c. 972 to after 1028], chronicler of Africa. Furthermore, many historians contend that the present king of Timbuktu, and the former kings of Mali and of Agadez, are descended from the people of Zanaga, who live in the desert.⁷

The African languages

- ¶ 7 All these peoples are divided into hundreds of lineages and thousands of settlements. They all speak a language they call *agual amazig*, which means the noble language. The Arabs of Africa call it the *barbar* language (*la lingua barbaresca*), which is the natural African language. This language is distinct and different from others. However, it contains some words from the Arabic language. Some see this fact as proof that the Africans descend from the Sabaeans, people of Arabia Felix. Others hold a different view and say that these Arabic words found in the African language were borrowed after the Arabs entered and dominated Africa. These people used to be ignorant and illiterate; thus there is no author who could help either party make a judgement or a case. There are some variations in the pronunciation or the meaning of words. Those who live closer and have more interactions with Arabs use a great number of Arabic words. Most of the people of Ghumâra speak a corrupted Arabic. Many lineages of Huwâra also speak corrupted Arabic, since they have long lived alongside Arabs. The people of the Black Land speak different languages. One is called Songhay, which is spoken in many regions [. . .]

Another is the Guber language [. . .] Another is spoken in the kingdom of Borno, and it resembles the one spoken in Gaogao. Another language, spoken in the kingdom of Nubia, is mixed with Arabic, Chaldean and Egyptian. All inhabitants of the cities of Africa, meaning the cities on the Mediterranean coast up to the Atlas Mountains, speak corrupted Arabic, except in the towns of the kingdom of Marrakesh, where the true *barbar* language (*lingua barbaresca*) is spoken.⁸

Of the Arabs who settled in Africa, and who are called *Arabi Barbarati*

- ¶ 8 Three Arab peoples came to live in Africa: the first is called Chachim, the second Hilâl, the third Ma'qîl.⁹
- ¶ 9 The Arabs who went to live in Africa are called Musta'jam (*Mustehgeme*) Arabs, which means Barbarised Arab (*Arabi imbarabarati* [*sic*]), because they went to live among foreigners, until their language was corrupted and their customs changed and they became Barbar (*Barbari*). It would be better if one could read the Histories of the Arabs by Ibn Khaldûn [1332–1406], who has written a huge tome on the genealogies and the peoples of the *Arabi imbarabarati* [*sic*] which this present work has quoted based on the feeble memory of its author. It has been 10 years since the author has seen any history of the Arabs. He has met and interacted with almost all the mentioned peoples, so he remembers some of their histories.¹⁰

Of the virtues and laudable qualities of the Africans

- ¶ 10 The Africans who live in the cities of Barbary, especially those located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, are very devoted to studies and to the pursuit of knowledge, especially the humanities and their theology and that which concerns religion and law. They used to study the sciences of the Ancients, such as mathematics, astrology and philosophy. However, in the past 400 years, many sciences were prohibited by [religious] scholars and by lords, such as philosophy and judicial [predictive] astrology. Also, the people who live in the cities of Africa are very fastidious in their religious practice and they obey their doctors and priests. They take great care to learn what is necessary for their religious practice, and they constantly go to do their ordinary prayers in their temples. Sometimes they wash the whole body, as will be explained in the second book of the religious practice and law of Muhammad.¹¹ Besides, the people who live in the cities of Barbary and

in Africa are ingenious men and produce well-conceived and elegant artefacts. They make beautiful buildings and works, demonstrating their great intelligence. They are men of integrity, who do not harbour much malice. They are honorable (*virili*) and will confirm in your presence what they have said in your absence. They are courageous and spirited, especially the mountaineers and the people who live in rural areas. They keep their promises. They are jealous and despise their own life if they are dishonoured in any way, especially when it comes to their women. They have a great desire to acquire goods and honour. They go all over the world for trade, and as teachers and masters in the sciences. Africans can be found in Egypt, in Ethiopia, in Arabia, in Persia, in India and in Turkey. Wherever they travel, they are welcome and honoured because they are all proficient in their trade and art. The inhabitants of the cities of Barbary are moral and bashful. They never publicly say immoral things. The young respect their elders, especially in discussions. The son would never speak of love or women in the presence of his father or of his uncle. People would not sing love songs in the presence of their elders. If some friend of the father or any other man begins to discuss women or love, all the children leave the room. These are the good customs of the city dwellers of Barbary. As for those who live in tents – the [Bedouin] Arabs and the shepherds – they are spirited and generous. They are compassionate, generous and patient, affable, gentle and righteous. They have a sense of duty and they keep their word. They are pleasant and happy. They do not care much about amassing riches. The mountaineers are generous and courageous. They show bashfulness and morality in their public life. The inhabitants of Numidia are more ingenious and more skilled than the inhabitants of the mountains, and the Numidians devote themselves to virtue and study law and religion, but they are not very learned in the natural sciences. They are trained in using weaponry. They are very courageous and pleasant to deal with. The inhabitants of Libya, both the Africans and the Arabs, are very generous and nice, and very helpful to their friends. They enjoy meeting foreigners. They are courageous and honest, very sincere and trustworthy. The inhabitants of the Lands of the Blacks are very honest and trustworthy men; they are very nice to foreigners. They all enjoy having fun; they are happy and enjoy dancing and giving banquets. They harbour no malice whatsoever. They greatly honour scholars and holy men. They are the people in Africa who are the happiest, more than any other Africans, or any people that the author has seen anywhere in the world.¹²

Of the vices and nefarious aspects of the Africans

¶ 11 The inhabitants of the cities of Barbary are like fleas in garbage: poor, arrogant and terrible. They are disdainful men; when they have the slightest grievance toward someone, they hold permanent enmity against them. They also are unpleasant men, and a foreigner can never acquire their friendship. Outside of what they have studied, they are so credulous and simple that they would believe any impossibility. The common people are very uneducated and ignorant regarding natural things and hold any natural movements to be divine acts. These men are very intemperate in the way they live, in their dealings and in their speech. They always speak loudly and are prompt to hit others. And in every street one can see them fighting. Their rulers scorn and despise them. A ruler thinks an animal has more value than a citizen. They have no representatives, leaders, principals or administrators who could in any way be their guides or counsels in matters of governance. They also are quite crude and ignorant in matters of commerce. They don't have exchange desks nor do they employ a representative who would go with their merchandise from place to place. Each trader wants to stay near his merchandise, and where the merchandise goes, the owner goes. They are as avaricious as possible, and many among them have never invited in their house any strangers, whether it would be out of courtesy or for God's sake. There are, however, a few who repaid the benefits they received from others. They are melancholy and do not enjoy themselves because they are constantly working at making a living, since in these regions, there is great poverty and the gains are low. The inhabitants of the mountains and the rural areas – the shepherds and a part of the [Bedouin] Arabs – live a life of struggle and hard work, constantly facing misery and need. They are brutes and thieves; they are very greedy and they do not pay what they have bought with credit. They are very ignorant of letters and of all kinds of commerce. They are cuckolds more than roosters. A father would pick a friend for his daughter, and offer a banquet, and the boyfriend touches the hand of the daughter or the sister, and they become lovers. However, after the girlfriend gets married, the boyfriend stops seeing her, and rather flees from the hostility of the husband. Most of them are not true Muslims, nor Jews nor Christians. They don't know God nor saints. They never pray and would not know how. They have no temples, nor priests, nor [religious] scholars. The few among them who are religious are lost because they do not know the laws or the rules and live the way they want, without any rule. The inhabitants of Numidia are ignorant of all things, and they have no knowledge of a natural way of

living. They are traitors, murderers and thieves, and have no conscience. They are vile; they go to Barbary and practice any vile job – they make and clean latrines; they work as valets, guards and stable boys. For money, they practise all kinds of vile jobs. The inhabitants of Libya are brutes, uneducated and ignorant of all sciences. They are thieves and murderers, and they live like wild animals. They have no religious practice and obey no rules. They live and have always lived in misery. They are treacherous, especially when it comes to merchandise. They have very long horns.¹³ They consume their whole lives in vanity, either hunting or waging wars among themselves. The rest of the time they go with their animals through the desert barefoot and naked. The inhabitants of the Black Land are brutes and deprived of reason; they are even worse than irrational. Besides, they are deprived of natural or acquired talent. They don't know anything, and they live like animals without law or rules. There are many prostitutes and many cuckolds. Only among those who live in cities are there some who have a little more rationality and some human sense.¹⁴

The Black Land

- ¶ 12 The ancient cosmographers, like al-Bakrî [c. 1040–1094] and al-Mas'ûdî [c. 896–956], have not written anything about the Black Land except al-Wahât and Ghâna, because in their time there was no information about the other countries of the Blacks. However, after the year 380 of the Hejira, the Lands of the Blacks were discovered, because the people of Lamtûna and the people of Libya became Muslim thanks to a predicator, who also sent the Lamtûna to rule Barbary.¹⁵
- ¶ 13 As the author has said, the African cosmographers did not know the particularities of the Black Land; they only knew about it in general. They began to obtain information about these lands when the people of Libya became Muslim. Then the cosmographers began to have more detailed information about these regions. These countries used to be inhabited by people who lived like animals. They had no kings nor lords nor government at all. They had no civilisation (*civiltà*) at all. They barely knew how to sow seeds and they used to wear sheep skins. They held women in common, and men, women and children from a village would go together during the day, working the land or leading cattle to pasture. In the night they would go, at 10 or 12 more or less, in a hut and sleep together on some sheep skins. They did not wage wars and never left their country. Some used to worship the sun every morning. When they woke up and saw the sun, they would salute it to show reverence for

the sun. And that was all their religious practice and all their ceremonies. Others worshipped fire, like the people of Walâta, and that was also the observance of the inhabitants of Barbary. Maybe they learnt it from them. Some, like the people of the region of Gaogao, were Christians, in the mode of the Egyptians. The inhabitants of Libya had always been in relations with these Black people and had had commerce with them. After the people of Lamtûna invaded Numidia and Barbary and established their domination over this region, King Yûsuf [ibn Tashfîn], the founder of Marrakesh, secured and pacified his kingdom. Then the rest of his people returned to Libya, and they began to establish their domination over the Black people, since they had learnt how to rule thanks to that predicator, and thus all the people of Libya used his cunning and they dominated the Black people. Then a good part of the Blacks became Muslim and began to learn laws, civilisation and the necessary arts. The inhabitants of the cities of Barbary began to visit these countries for the purpose of trade and learnt their languages. These populations are divided into five parts, and each of these five realms was dominated by one of the peoples of Libya. They have stayed this way until today. However, the present king of Timbuktu, Abû Bakr Askiya, is a Black man. He was a captain of Sunni 'Alî, the king of Timbuktu and Gagho. After Sunni 'Alî died, Abû Bakr Askiya rebelled against Sunni 'Alî's two sons, and he routed their army. When he held his hands on them, he had them both killed. Then he became king and he liberated this region from the domination of the people of Libya. He then began to follow up on his victory in such a way that in six years he acquired a few more kingdoms. After he had pacified his realm, he did the pilgrimage and went to Mecca. He brought with him great treasures for the expenses of his trip, which cost him one hundred and fifty thousand ducats. Thus, the five¹⁶ kingdoms that are known to us extend from one side to the other which separates the river Niger from other rivers, which are tributaries of the Niger. And all these five kingdoms are in the middle of two very long deserts. One desert begins in Numidia and ends at their countries, and the other desert extends in the south up to the ocean, where there are many possessions or regions. But most are unknown to us because it would be a long and difficult journey, and because their language and their religion are different. They have no relations with our people, and we have none with them. However, some traders, who are Muslims, and who are neighbours of those who live on the ocean coast, deal with them, although their relations with them is very limited due to the difference in languages and in religion.¹⁷

The kingdom of Timbuktu

- ¶ 14 The name of this kingdom is modern, and comes from the name of the city called Timbuktu. It was built in 610 of the Hejira [1213–14] by a king named Mansâ Sulaymân, next to a branch of the river Niger at a distance of two miles. The houses are huts made of poles covered with clay. The roofs are covered in hay. In the middle of the city there is a temple made of stone and lime, built by a master from the city of Almería in Spain. The king lives in a big palace built by the same master. There are many shops of craftsmen and traders in the city, especially weavers of cotton cloth, and slaves, and free women as well, selling food and fresh dairy. Men are well dressed in black or blue cotton clothes. They also wear clothes that the Barbary merchants bring from Europe. The women of the city cover their faces, except for the slaves. The inhabitants of the city are very rich, especially the foreigners. The present king even gave two of his daughters in marriage to two brothers, very rich merchants, because of their wealth. There are many freshwater wells in the city. When the Niger floods, the water goes through canals. There is abundance of grain and cattle, and the inhabitants consume lots of milk and butter. They also have fruits in great abundance. However, salt is scarce and is imported from Tegaza, which is 500 miles distant from Timbuktu. The king of Timbuktu is very rich in precious gems and gold bars, each weighing 50 pounds, and up to 300. His court is well ordered. When the king travels with his courtiers, they mount the camels called *Mehari*, and his footmen lead the horses by hand. When he goes to war, they tie the camels and they ride the horses. They also ride horses in the country for pleasure.

[. . .]

In this city there are many doctors, priests and jurists. They are pensioned by the ruler, who has great esteem for all learned men. There are many books in this city which are imported from Barbary, all manuscripts, and those who trade these books make more money from them than from all other merchandise.¹⁸

A Black ambassador is received by the king of Fez

- ¶ 15 During the time of the author, the lord [of Tensita, in the territory of the kingdom of Marrakesh] sent a beautiful present [. . .] The author attended the occasion when this present was delivered to the king of Fez. The ambassador was a very black, short and fat man, and his language and manners were very barbarous. He delivered a letter from the lord, as

well as a letter describing the present, sewn into his coat. To demonstrate his loyalty to his lord, he insisted that the king unravel the coat himself, since he had sworn that he would not touch the letter. That made the king laugh a lot, and one of his secretaries unravelled the threads. The letter was very awkwardly written in the obscure style of the ancient orators. Even worse was the allocution delivered by the orator in his own mouth. The king, his brothers and the courtiers burst out laughing, but out of politeness they all covered their mouths with their hands or a piece of cloth. After the reception, the king ordered lodging for the envoys in the beautiful house belonging to the man in charge of the main mosque and paid for all the expenses for the servants and the companions of the ambassador, a total of 24 people.¹⁹

Black servants and slaves in the Maghrib

- ¶ 16 Many bathhouses are open to both women and men, meaning that men begin to use them in the morning and until three in the afternoon, and women use them from three to midnight. When women enter, a curtain is drawn on the entrance of the bathhouse, which signals that no man can enter. If someone wants to say something to one of the ladies, he has to call one of the Black female servants who work at the bathhouse, to transmit the message. Men and women of Fez eat in the bathhouse, and they sing loudly. All young men from the lower classes enter the baths as naked as the day they were born, and they look at each other without shame. Men of the higher classes wrap towels around themselves when they enter, and they don't sit in the common areas of the bathhouse. There are small rooms that are always ready for men of reputation.²⁰
- ¶ 17 The third type of fortune-tellers [in Fez] are women who make the common people believe that they are friends with red demons, and others are called white demons, and others are called black demons [. . .] These women, according to the judgement of good people and scholars, are *sahacat*, meaning tribades. They have a bad habit: they rub each other. When a beautiful woman goes to a soothsayer, if the latter is drawn to her, she asks to rub her, but not as a woman. She pretends that the spirit who possesses her makes the request. The woman then lets her do it, thinking that she is doing it with the demon who is the friend of the soothsayer [. . .] The women who want to indulge in this habit pretend that they are sick, and they faint and fall on the floor. The cuckold husbands bring the soothsayer to provide a remedy for the wives. Then the sick woman tells in secret to the fortune-teller that she wants to belong to their congregation.

The soothsayer tells the husband that the wife is possessed by a demon who wants to befriend her, and if he wants his wife to stay healthy, he must let her associate freely with the female soothsayers, and to give a party and feast for them. The husband then throws a banquet, invites those fake women, and brings Ethiopian musicians. They all dance, not as women but as demons, and they all change their voice [. . .]²¹

¶ 18 The major part of the household of [Muhammad] the king of Fez is made up of Black slaves, including chambermaids and concubines. However, the king's wife is White. He also has White slaves, who are Christian, either Spanish or Portuguese. All the women are guarded by the eunuchs, who are all Black slaves.²²

¶ 19 The tenth official [in the court of the king of Tunis] is the treasurer and housekeeper. His role is to furnish the close household of the king with all the food and clothes that they need. These are the wives and concubines of the king, the eunuchs and the Black slaves who serve in the chambers of the king and his wives. He is also in charge of the expenses for the small children of the king and their nurses. He also takes care of all the services that happen in and out of the castle related to the Christian slaves of the king and of their expenses and dress according to their need.²³

Mixing between Blacks and Whites in Africa

¶ 20 [In Tegavost in the kingdom of Marrakesh] the people are divided into three factions, who are often at war. Sometimes, one of the three factions asks the help of the [Bedouin] Arabs against their enemies. The Arabs are paid, and they help the faction that pays them the most, or, in truth, the faction they believe would be most useful to them if they were victorious. In the territory belonging to this city there are many fertile lands and cattle. The wool is cheap, and they make many clothes which they sell in Timbuktu. Many traders of the city go to Timbuktu and Walata, in the Lands of the Blacks. Twice a week there is a market in this city. They are well dressed, and the women are very beautiful and gracious. A large part of the population of the city are Brown, born of White and Black parents [. . .]²⁴

¶ 21 [About Wargla in Numidia] This is a very old city built by the Numidians [. . .] In this city there are many foreign merchants, especially from Constantine and Tunis, who bring to the city goods from Barbary, which they exchange with the merchants who come from the Lands of the Blacks [. . .] Most inhabitants are Black, not due to the air, but because they have Black slaves and have children with them. As a result, a fifth of them are

Whites, and the others are Black or Brown. The people in this city are generous, pleasant and very nice to foreigners [. . .]²⁵

- ¶ 22 [About Aswan in Egypt] Its inhabitants are almost all Brown, because they mixed with the people of Nubia and Ethiopia [. . .] East of the city, there are no more notable cities or towns, but there are villages inhabited by Brown people and they speak a different language which is a mixture of Arabic, Egyptian and Ethiopian [. . .]²⁶

Leo about Pliny

- ¶ 23 It might be expected that one should write like Pliny did in his very famous work. Pliny was indeed a great man who was outstanding in the sciences and the arts, but he was deceived about a few little things, especially when it comes to Africa. The author does not disparage such a great person, but he thinks that the fault lies with his informants, who told him things that do not exist in Africa, and with those who wrote before him.²⁷

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Commentary by Oumelbanine Zhiri

Hasan al-Wazzân (al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzân al-Fâsî), known as Leo Africanus, was born around 1490 in Granada, the last Muslim kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula, which was conquered by the Catholic Kings in 1492. When he was still very young, his family emigrated to Fez, the seat of the weakening Wattasî dynasty, which reigned over a portion of what is now Morocco. Local powers tested the sultans' authority, and Morocco also faced constant aggression by Spain and especially Portugal on the coasts. Some of Wazzân's educated relatives found employment in court. Since early on, Wazzân belonged to the entourage of the Sultan Muhammad (r. 1504–1526). He received a good education, studied law and theology in local madrasas, and appreciated history and poetry. He undertook many travels, starting in his teenage years. These included a trip to the East, during which he accomplished the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, probably with a family member. When he was 16, he accompanied his uncle on a journey to Timbuktu, his first crossing of the Sahara.

Wazzân became an official in the service of the sultan, whom he represented in Moroccan regions and beyond. The trip that would disrupt his life began in 1515, when the sultan sent him to Istanbul. On his way,

he visited many cities of the Maghrib. On the return trip, he stayed in Egypt, and he was in Rosetta (Rashīd) when the Ottoman Sultan Salīm, who had just conquered Egypt, visited that city in June 1517. The ship that was bringing him back to Morocco was seized by Sicilian pirates in 1518. Wazzân was enslaved, and his captors delivered him to Pope Leo X, of the Medici family, probably due to his status as ambassador. After a year of captivity in a fortress, he converted to Christianity. On 6 January 1520 he was baptised in the cathedral of Saint Peter by the pope himself, who gave him the name of Giovanni Leone de Medici (Johannes Leo), known as the African, or Africanus. Now freed, Leo worked in Italy as a copyist and a teacher. He taught Arabic to the erudite cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1469–1532), who was a student of Oriental languages and cultures. It is maybe at his request that Leo wrote several books on the history, religious trends, languages and cultures of Africa, some of which were lost. It is presumed, without any concrete evidence, that he returned to the Maghrib around 1529, where he died at an unknown date.

His most important extant work is a book on the geography of Africa, written in Italian and completed in Rome on 10 March 1526. It was published and given an eminent place as the first text in the first volume of the *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, a successful collection of travel accounts in Italian, edited by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485–1557). Ramusio gave it the title *Descrittione dell' Affrica* (Description of Africa). Leo's work attracted so much attention that it was soon published on its own in French, Latin and English translations. However, the published text was different from the one he actually wrote. Only when a manuscript titled *La Cosmographia de l'Affrica* was discovered in 1931 did the vast extent of the manipulation of his text by his first editor truly become known. Even less reliable is the 1600 English translation by John Pory, who used a frankly terrible Latin translation (first published in 1556) and compounded its many mistakes with his own distortions. Especially when it comes to representations of racial and ethnic differences, the Pory text is to be completely rejected. Fortunately, the 'Cosmographia' manuscript has been published, as well as an English translation, which allows access to the text closest to the author's original work and intentions.²⁸

The word 'race', like many others we still use, acquired its modern meaning in the nineteenth century. When European imperialism was at its height, modern racial ideologies justified dubious 'scientific' hierarchies and imbalances of power between ethnic groups. The use of the concept in the context of premodern times has been the object of strenuous debate. In a much-discussed recent book, Geraldine Heng contributed challenging arguments to these discussions. She contends

that it is not only profitable but essential to link modern racial theory with premodern processes. Her polemical aim is not only to better understand the past, but also to change the present. According to her, 'not to use the term *race* would be to sustain the reproduction of a certain kind of past'.²⁹ It would also obscure the workings of race in our present, including in the academic world. Thus, her approach welcomes and promotes presentism.

Heng's arguments have sparked lively debates and led to a deeper consideration of the history of racial thinking. Even if one finds her avowed presentism an obstacle to historical analysis, her views have put into sharper focus premodern processes of racialisation, or race-craft, when differences between ethnicities could be reified and essentialised, and seen as passing through the generations. Even though still far from the 'scientific' underpinnings of modern racial theory, such racialisation processes indicate meaningful ways to analyse the premodern world, without collapsing the distinction between modern and premodern.

More directly relevant to Leo Africanus and his work is the question of whether Heng's arguments, even if one accepts them for Europe, also apply to other cultures. Critics have pointed out that her approach fails at decentring Europe, one of her ostensible goals, and in fact entrenches the racial views of nineteenth-century imperial Europe by projecting them backwards in time. Pondering whether her approach could help create an understanding of Islamicate cultures, Justin Stearns concludes that Heng's views cannot 'be taken as paradigm setting for scholarship outside of Europe'.³⁰ He also rightly insists on the need to precisely contextualise the ways past Islamicate cultures understood differences between groups. In agreement with this analysis, the present essay will aim to situate Leo's representations of collective identities, including potential processes of racialisation, within his own time.

His case should not be taken as a snapshot of early modern Maghribî thought, given his very peculiar situation between European and Arab cultures. The *Cosmographia de l'Africa* belongs to the latter, but was written in Italy, for a European audience. Situated at this crossroads, this text mediated between two knowledge traditions: the Arab-Islamic one and the Latin-Christian one. Both originated at least partly in the Graeco-Latin classical traditions; they thus contained common features but also points of departure. Leo had to navigate these differences in Italy, where he was exposed to European geography. Many passages of his work describe the remnants of the pre-Islamic period, including the ruins left by the Romans and Byzantines. However, as Federico Cresti has noted, Leo's information was almost entirely filtered through Arab authors, rather than directly collected from classical sources.³¹ He did

read some classical texts during his time in Italy but was not impressed by them. His introduction to his pages on animals contains one of the very few passages in which he directly mentions a Latin or Greek author, and he pointedly insists that Pliny's description of Africa was erroneous (see ¶ 23). Nevertheless, his stay in Italy, his observations of its monuments and his contact with intellectuals involved in the Renaissance probably made him more acutely aware of these earlier traces and led him to identify ruins and inscriptions as Roman, and to speculate on the Latin origins of some words. He also accepted distinctly European classical and medieval traditions, which inflected his representation of ethnicities, through his borrowing of several toponyms.

The most important of these is 'Africa'. The reader might miss how innovative its usage was in the context of the Arab culture of that time. In fact, Leo borrowed from European geography the very conception of Africa as a continent. The Europeans of his time had adopted the ancient Greek division of the known world into three masses: Europe, Asia and Libya (later called Africa by the Romans). Thanks to the revival of classical learning in the Renaissance, this 'continental scheme became the authoritative frame of reference'.³² Leo might have been surprised by its prevalence in Italy, since the partitioning of the earth by continents was then practically absent from Arab geography. Arabic culture had early on adopted another division originating in the Greek tradition: the division by climes or climates (*iqḷîm*). Astronomers conventionally divided the Earth into seven climes, parallel to the equator, each one extending from west to east. The Arabic word *Ifṛîqiya* came from Latin, but designated only a region included in modern-day Tunisia. In fact, on the very first page of the manuscript, Leo states the Arab view, according to which Africa or *Ifṛîqiya* is only the region of Carthage, while the whole of Africa is the 'Western Part', meaning the *iqḷîm* of the Maghrib. This highlights that, in his book, he renounced the Arabic *Ifṛîqiya* and accepted the European 'Africa' (see ¶ 1).

Having adopted the continental scheme, Leo divided Africa from north to south in four main regions: *Barbaria*, *Numedia*, *Libia* and *Terra Negresca* (see ¶ 2). The first three toponyms are European words, and these borrowings are relevant for the way in which the author draws his ethnic map. *Barbaria* is particularly important. This toponym was not attested in Arabic; however, Leo must have felt that this word was quite natural, since it is a cognate of the word *barbar*, which Arabs used for the Amazigh population of North Africa. Furthermore, all or parts of North Africa were sometimes known as *Bilâd al-Barbar*, the land of the *Barbars*.³³ Arabic had borrowed the Latin word, although some authors

(including Leo) proposed other etymologies. His text uses *Barbaria* to designate North Africa, the meaning that had often been attached to it in Romance languages since the thirteenth century.³⁴ In other cases, Leo used toponyms in ways that diverge from their meaning in Italy. Libya and Numidia, as designated in a European geography still based on ancient texts, were regions that extended to the Mediterranean coast. However, he misunderstood them, respectively, to mean the Sahara and the *Bilâd al-Jarîd* (or land of the palm trees), a region that borders the desert to the north.

The European toponyms designate vast regions. From them, Leo derived names of people, themselves divided into many groups, with local names. There is thus an inherent instability at the heart of his attempt to 'combine ancient and current categories in Latin and vernacular' European languages with North African ones that were themselves often unsteady.³⁵ *Africani* is sometimes used to designate all inhabitants of the continent. However, most of the time, alongside *Barbari* and especially when opposed to *Arabi*, *Africani* designates the Amazigh population who lived in North Africa before the Arab conquest. The distribution of the usages of this word is very telling in terms of its function: most often *Africani* appears in a historical context to indicate which cities predated the Arab conquest and were built by the 'ancient Africans'. For contemporary meanings, the text mostly uses *Barbari*. The opposition between *Arabi* and *Barbari* is underscored by the equivalence between *mustehgeme* Arabs and *imbarabarati* Arabs, both designating the 'foreignised Arabs' whose language and customs were altered by their contact with foreigners (see ¶ 9). The word *musta'jam* comes from '*ajam*', a term that designates non-Arabs, or people who don't speak (good) Arabic. In fact, '*ajam*' is equivalent to the Latin *barbarus*, both designating the foreigner and both carrying disparaging connotations. Here, Leo thus summons the original meaning of the word from which *Barbari* is derived.

It might be both tempting and perilous to make *Barbari* the equivalent of the modern term 'Berbers', the origins and oscillations of which Ramzi Rouighi has studied in great detail, and which acquired its modern sense only recently. Furthermore, Leo's text also underlines that it would be erroneous to overstate the ethnic component of the difference between *Barbari* and *Arabi*, since the groups have mixed over the centuries. This is especially true in the cities, an important feature since, as we shall see, the distinction between urbanity and rurality is crucial in Leo's representation of communities. A similar instability can be seen in the word *Arabi*. When opposed to *Barbari*, it means ethnic Arabs. When used on its own, it often designates the Bedouins, thus indicating a way

of life and not just an ethnicity. As for *Numidi*, the word does not cover a different ethnic meaning than *Barbari* (although it might designate different sub-groups); instead, the distinction is territorial.

Finally, coming to the more southern region, the text calls it *Terra Negresca*, or *paesi de li Nigri*, which are both translations of an established term in Arab geography, *Bilâd al-Sudân*, the Lands of the Blacks. In contrast, the inhabitants of Barbary and Numidia are sometimes called *Africani bianchi*, White Africans. The expression 'Lands of the Blacks' also naturally gave rise to an opposite *paesi de li Bianchi*, Lands of the Whites. In another characteristic instability in the ethnic map, the distinction is not clear cut, since Leo also states that in parts of Numidia, four-fifths of the population are of mixed descent, and that there are regions and cities in Barbary and Egypt where most of the population is mixed. This feature is usually connected with trade relations, including the slave trade, with the Lands of the Blacks (see ¶ 20, ¶ 21, ¶ 22).

Leo's map of Africa provides somewhat unstable ethnic distinctions, due in part to the use of both Latin and European as well as Arab and Amazigh nomenclatures. Let's examine which meanings the author assigned to these distinctions between the groups, and which established frames he uses or disregards. He ignores physiognomy (*firâsa*), which was widespread in Islamicate cultures. He mentions Biblical genealogies, also widely used by premodern Arab authors, as Kâzim has shown.³⁶ He does not, however, use them to make clear-cut distinctions between populations. In fact, his text insists that all the African people have the same biblical genealogy, being descended from Ham and Cush (see ¶ 4 and ¶ 5). Very importantly, he does not even mention the curse of Ham (which, according to some authors, condemned Black people to Blackness and slavery). He also does not use climate to explain skin colour: when he states that in some regions of Numidia most of the population is either Black or Brown, he clearly points that this is not due to the air, but to the mixing of populations (see ¶ 21). One noteworthy element of his account is that it mentions the subdivision of the Whites into many smaller groups, while such precision is absent in the description of the Blacks. This is probably due to Leo's lack of familiarity with the Lands of the Blacks, which he had only visited, as opposed to his intimate knowledge of the Maghrib. He knew, however, about the different languages spoken in the regions belonging to the Blacks (see ¶ 7).

Tendencies toward the racialisation of Blacks and anti-Black prejudice appear in the text when the author asserts that *Barbaria* is 'the most noble part of Africa, in which there are cities and White reasonable men' (see ¶ 2). Such statements are to be compared with other examples,

including a disparaging description of a Black ambassador visiting the Wattasî court in Fez. The author had attended this event, and, like the king and the other courtiers, looked with disdain on the archaic style of the diplomatic letters and of their presentation by the ambassador, as well as his physical appearance, associating his Blackness to his lack of worldliness (see ¶ 15). Such instances were not uncommon in premodern Arab texts, where there was a 'powerful though not hegemonic discourse of anti-Blackness against Africans south of the Sahara'.³⁷ In Leo's text, such examples of anti-Black sentiment do not pervade all his descriptions, and they are in fact undercut by other forms of distinction making.

These appear in the description of the Lands of the Blacks. In the general introduction to this part of the text, he recalls the very hazy information about the region provided by earlier Arab writers and recounts their often disparaging descriptions in the past tense (see ¶ 12 and ¶ 13). His first editor, Ramusio, chose to put these passages in the present tense, as if they represented Leo's views, and all translators followed suit, considerably distorting the significance of the text. According to these earlier authors, the inhabitants lived 'like animals', meaning that they had no government, no crafts, and only rudimentary religious practices. In sum, they had no *civiltà*, no civilisation. Their only outside connections were with the people who lived in the Sahara, especially the Lamtûna. After the conversion of this Amazigh population to Islam, they founded the dynasty of the Almoravids.³⁸ They then conquered Numidia and Barbary in the North, as well as part of the Lands of the Blacks in the South. These conquests furthered the connections between the regions and changed the way of life of the Blacks, some of whom became Muslims and adopted the laws and practices of the people from the North. Later, the foreign rulers were overturned by the local Askiyas, according to Leo's simplified version of the history of the Songhay realm.

Even situated in the past, this account implied that civilisation came to the Blacks from outside influences. However, when it comes to contemporary descriptions, Leo's account of the life in the Lands of the Blacks is structured by the same principles that he employs for the northern part of Africa. The main prejudice that the author betrays is his strong bias in favour of urban life, and his disdain for the habits and customs of rural people, whether they live in the countryside, the mountains or the deserts. This bias is clearly illustrated in the chapters about the virtues and vices of the different groups, in an exercise common in the Arabic *adab* (belletrist) tradition (see ¶ 10 and ¶ 11). A crucial feature of these pages is that the differences between groups are not

based on ethnicity, nor on climatic differences. The main basis for Leo's admiring or disparaging judgements is the distinction between urban and rural. *Civilità* – civility or civilisation – is mostly prevalent in the cities of Barbary. Its hallmarks are organised religious practice and laws, craftsmanship, trade, literacy and elaborate architecture. Leo recognises some virtues among the inhabitants of the deserts and mountains of Barbary, but mostly portrays them like he does the inhabitants of Libya and Numidia – as brutal, ignorant and living 'like animals', not following laws, rules or reason. This is no different from his description of Black people, a few especially disparaging remarks about Black people notwithstanding. The opposition between cities and rural areas also structures the value judgements inherent in his description of their lands. Timbuktu is painted favourably as having all the attributes of civilisation, including monotheistic religion, court life, literacy, imposing buildings, trade and craftsmanship (see ¶ 14). In sum, Leo's text contains both some racialisation of Blacks and countervailing tendencies.

Other information he provides on the presence of Blacks in the Maghrib helps flesh out the relations between ethnicities within the region. Many passages illustrate the relationships between Blacks and Whites in North Africa, which resulted from trade relations and from the presence of Black slaves, producing a mixed population in many regions. Black servants were also a large part of the households (*harams*) of the kings of North Africa, as Leo points out in the case of the Wattasî king of Fez and the Hafsid king of Tunis (see ¶ 18 and ¶ 19). The text also mentions White slaves, coming from Christian Europe: the women belonged to the royal households, while the men were employed in the military. These descriptions underline that slavery in the early modern Mediterranean was not solely predicated on skin colour. Black slaves were usually people brought to the region through trade, while White slaves were often people reduced to servitude due to captivity resulting from military or corsair activity. Leo Africanus himself experienced that condition when he was captured and enslaved by Sicilian pirates.

Beyond the royal castle, Black people were present in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Fez, and Leo mentions that they staffed the bathhouses of the city (see ¶ 16). One very noteworthy passage suggests that they also belonged to the communities that lived on the fringes, and that included quack doctors and entertainers. One of the very valuable contributions of Leo Africanus' work is that it sheds light on these usually overlooked parts of society. He is especially informative about the city of Fez and provides illuminating albeit sensationalistic particulars. These include not only soothsayers and street performers,

but also sexual minorities, including male inn-keepers who lived in same-sex couples and sorceresses who pretended to be possessed by demons and belonged to a 'congregation' of lesbians (see ¶ 17). They lured women customers to join them and threw banquets and parties in which they danced to the sound of Black musicians. The fact that Leo adds this precision is noteworthy, and his description suggests that the Fez of the turn of the sixteenth century housed transgressive communities. These blurred the lines that separated the sexes and the ethnicities, and even humans and non-humans, the latter including the demons who possessed the soothsayers.

Both the racialisation of Black people and countervailing tendencies are present in Leo's text, and his contribution is remarkable in the history of Moroccan culture. He wrote well before two events that have recently become the focus of the reflection on race in premodern Morocco: first the invasion of the Songhay kingdom by the Sa'dî Sultan Ahmad al-Mansûr in 1590 and the subsequent enslavement of many Blacks, and, secondly, the subjugation of the Harratin minority by the 'Alawî Sultan Mûlay Ismâ'îl in the late seventeenth century. These two later events indicate strong racialisation processes taking place in Morocco. Some passages of Leo's work foreshadow these later developments. At the same time, ethnic or racial difference is not the only form of group identity that structures his description, and one can argue that the distinction between urban and rural life is more important than ethnicity, including in his description of the Lands of the Blacks. Another point is remarkable: Leo's work is an important source of information about Jewish life in early modern North Africa. However, the author represents Jews as a religious minority, but not as a specific ethnic group. This underlines that the differences and hierarchies he establishes between groups are primarily based on ways of life, and that racialisation processes, though not absent (especially for the Blacks), are secondary in his representation of Africa.

Regarding Leo's use of the classical tradition, it is both relatively small and quite significant, and is also exemplary of his situation between European and Arab cultures. Most of the information he provides about life in Africa is collected from Arabic books or from direct observation and experience. However, some broad geographical concepts are borrowed from the classical tradition and these helped him structure his descriptions in ways that would have made his work more easily understood by the European readers he was addressing.

Notes

- 1 Medici, *Africa*, 243.
- 2 Medici, *Africa*, 244–6.
- 3 Medici, *Africa*, 251.
- 4 The Peloponnese.
- 5 Medici, *Africa*, 251–2.
- 6 Medici, *Africa*, 725.
- 7 Medici, *Africa*, 253–7.
- 8 Medici, *Africa*, 257–9.
- 9 Medici, *Africa*, 268.
- 10 Medici, *Africa*, 274.
- 11 Leo alludes here to a text, now lost, that he wrote on the Maliki school of Islamic law.
- 12 Medici, *Africa*, 301–3.
- 13 Meaning they are cuckolds.
- 14 Medici, *Africa*, 303–5.
- 15 Medici, *Africa*, 697.
- 16 Or 15, depending on how one interprets the discrepancy between the number (5) given by Leo in this introduction, and the number of kingdoms (15) he actually describes. See Africanus, *The Cosmography and Geography of Africa*, 492, note 2.
- 17 Medici, *Africa*, 699–701.
- 18 Medici, *Africa*, 705–7.
- 19 Medici, *Africa*, 384.
- 20 Medici, *Africa*, 433.
- 21 Medici, *Africa*, 463–4.
- 22 Medici, *Africa*, 492.
- 23 Medici, *Africa*, 636.
- 24 Medici, *Africa*, 333.
- 25 Medici, *Africa*, 683.
- 26 Medici, *Africa*, 771.
- 27 Medici, *Africa*, 785.
- 28 See Medici, *Africa*; Africanus, *The Cosmography and Geography of Africa*.
- 29 Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 4.
- 30 Stearns, 'Race in the Islamic Middle East', 120.
- 31 Cresti, 'L'età preislamica del Maghreb nella *Descrittione dell'Africa*' di Giovanni Leone Africano.' In *L'Africa romana, Atti del XIII convegno di studio*, volume 1, edited by Mustapha Khanoussi, Paola Ruggeri and Cinzia Vismara, 321–44. Rome: Carocci, 2000.
- 32 Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 24.
- 33 Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers*, Chapter 4.
- 34 Turbet-Delof, *L'Afrique barbaresque dans la littérature française*, 16–18.
- 35 Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers*, 125.
- 36 Kâzim, *Representations of the Other*, 216–31.
- 37 Stearns, 'Race in the Islamic Middle East', 119.
- 38 This dynasty lasted from the 1050s to the 1140s.

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Bartolomé de las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, 1552)

'Prologue', translated from the Spanish by Nigel Griffin and included in the *Open Anthology of American Literature*, 1999, under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.¹ 'The Kingdom of Yucatán', in *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, translated from the Spanish by Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin Classics, 1999). Commentary by Christian Høgel.

Prologue

of Bishop Brother Bartolomé de Las Casas, or Casaus, to the most high and most mighty Prince of Spain, our Lord the Prince Philip

Most high and most mighty Lord:

As Divine Providence has ordained that the world shall, for the benefit and proper government of the human race, be divided into kingdoms and peoples and that these shall be ruled by kings, who are (as Homer has it) fathers and shepherds to their people and are, accordingly, the noblest and most virtuous of beings, there is no doubt, nor could there in all reason be any such doubt, but that these kings entertain nothing save that which is morally unimpeachable. It follows that if the commonwealth suffers from some defect, or shortcoming, or evil, the reason can only be that the ruler is unaware of it; once the matter is brought to his notice, he will work with the utmost diligence to set matters right and will not

rest content until the evil has been eradicated. This would appear to be the sense of the words of Solomon in the Bible: 'A king that sitteth in the throne of judgement scattereth away all evil with his eyes.' For, granted the innate and natural virtue of the ruler, it follows that the simple knowledge that something is wrong in his kingdom is quite sufficient to ensure that he will see that it is corrected, for he will not tolerate any such evil for a moment longer than it takes him to right it.

Contemplating, therefore (most mighty Lord), as a man with more than fifty years' experience of seeing at first hand the evil and the harm, the losses and diminutions suffered by those great kingdoms, each so vast and so wonderful that it would be more appropriate to refer to them as the New World of the Americas – kingdoms granted and entrusted by God and His Church to the Spanish Crown so that they might be properly ruled and governed, converted to the Faith, and tenderly nurtured to full material and spiritual prosperity – I am persuaded that, if Your Highness had been informed of even a few of the excesses which this New World has witnessed, all of them surpassing anything that men hitherto have imagined even in their wildest dreams, Your Highness would not have delayed for even one moment before entreating His Majesty to prevent any repetition of the atrocities which go under the name of 'conquests': excesses which, if no move is made to stop them, will be committed time and again, and which (given that the indigenous peoples of the region are naturally so gentle, so peace-loving, so humble and so docile) are of themselves iniquitous, tyrannical, contrary to natural, canon, and civil law, and are deemed wicked and are condemned and proscribed by all such legal codes. I therefore concluded that it would constitute a criminal neglect of my duty to remain silent about the enormous loss of life as well as the infinite number of human souls dispatched to Hell in the course of such 'conquests', and so resolved to publish an account of a few such outrages (and they can be only a few out of the countless number of such incidents that I could relate) in order to make that account the more accessible to Your Highness.

Thus, it was that, when the then bishop of Cartagena and tutor to your Highness, the archbishop of Toledo, asked me for a copy of my *Account*, I duly gave him one and this he presented to Your Highness. But Your Highness has been fully occupied with journeys, by land and sea, as well as other pressing royal business, and it

may well be that Your Highness has never found the time to read the *Account*, or has perhaps allowed it to slip to the back of your mind. Meanwhile, the boldness and the unreason of those who count it as nothing to drench the Americas in human blood and to dispossess the people who are the natural masters and dwellers in those vast and marvellous kingdoms, killing a thousand million of them, and stealing treasures beyond compare, grow by the day, and, masquerading under false colours, they do everything within their power to obtain further licence to continue their conquests (licence that cannot be granted without infringing natural and divine law and thereby conniving at the gravest of mortal sins, worthy of the most terrible and everlasting punishment). I therefore determined to present Your Highness with this *Short Account*, which is but a brief digest of the many and various outrages and depredations which could and should be recorded. I implore Your Highness to accept it and to read it in that spirit of clemency and royal benevolence with which Your Highness traditionally approaches the works of those of Your Highness's subjects and servants whose only desire is to serve the public good and the interests of the Crown. It is my fervent hope that, once Your Highness perceives the extent of the injustices suffered by these innocent peoples and the way in which they are being destroyed and crushed underfoot, unjustly and for no other reason than to satisfy the greed and ambition of those whose purpose it is to commit such wicked atrocities, Your Highness will see fit to beg and entreat His Majesty to refuse all those who seek royal licence for such evil and detestable ventures, and to put a stop once and for all to their infernal clamour in such a way that nobody will henceforth dare to make such a request nor even to mention ventures of this kind.

This, Your Royal Highness, is a matter on which action is both urgent and necessary if God is to continue to watch over the Crown of Castile and ensure its future well-being and prosperity, both spiritual and temporal. Amen.

The Kingdom of Yucatán

The year 1526 saw yet another thorough scoundrel elevated to a position of power, this time as governor of the kingdom of Yucatán. As others seeking office in the New World had done before him, this man made false claims at court and made promises he had

no intention of keeping in order to secure for himself a position and an authority which he then proceeded to use to feather his own nest at the expense of those he was appointed to govern. The kingdom of Yucatán was very densely populated, for it enjoys a healthy climate and produces foodstuffs in plenty, even more so than Mexico province. This kingdom, some three hundred leagues in perimeter, is particularly well endowed with fruit of all kinds, and produces more honey and wax than has been discovered to date in any other part of the New World. The inhabitants stood out from all their neighbours not only on account of their virtue and their level of civilization but also because they were freer than any of their neighbours from the taint of sin and vice. Among all the peoples of the region they seemed the fittest to hear the word of God, and their territory the best suited by Nature to the establishment of towns and cities, where the local people might have lived side by side in peace and prosperity with the Spanish, who would then have found themselves, had they only proved worthy, in a paradise on earth. But the Spaniards were utterly unfit for such a future, their savage greed and manifest sinfulness rendering them as unworthy of such a paradise here as they had in every other region of the New World the Almighty had consented that the Spanish should discover. The poor innocent people of the area, who simply stayed in their homes and gave not the slightest indication of ill will towards the Spanish, found themselves attacked in the most vicious manner by this butcher and the three hundred men under his command, and many were killed. If there had been any gold in this province, the Spaniards would have finished off the local population by sending them down mines to dig it out of the earth, as it was the only way they could realize a profit from the bodies and souls of these poor wretches for whom our Lord died on the Cross was to enslave all those whom they had not already murdered, and this they proceeded to do indiscriminately, bartering with the masters of the vessels that came in number to the region once it became known that slaves were to be had in exchange for goods. Natives were sold to buy wine, oil, and vinegar, salt pork, items of clothing, a horse, or whatever else the butcher and his men imagined they might need. A man would be invited to choose from among fifty or a hundred young girls the one he most fancied, and she would then be handed over in exchange for an *arroba* of wine or oil or vinegar, or for a side of salt pork. Two or three hundred young men would be lined up in similar fashion, the price being much the same. It happened

that one young man, the son of a chief, was traded for a cheese; on another occasion a hundred natives were exchanged for a single horse. This went on for seven years, from 1526 until 1533, and during that time the whole region was devastated and the native population enslaved or massacred without quarter. In 1533, the people of the area were granted a short respite from this Hell, with the Spaniards leaving in response to news that great wealth was to be had in Peru but it was not long before the commanders were back and the hellish round of atrocities, robberies and enslavement was once again in full swing. It still goes on today, and the whole region of three hundred leagues, once, as we have said, so full of bustle and life, is now almost entirely abandoned.

There is no way the written word can convey the full horror of the atrocities committed throughout this region nor, even if it were to, would the reader credit the excesses that such an account would reveal. I shall accordingly give details of but two or three incidents. The wretched Spaniards actively pursued the locals, both men and women alike, using wild dogs to track them and hunt them down. One woman, who was indisposed at the time and so not able to make good her escape, determined that the dogs should not tear her to pieces as they had done her neighbours and, taking a rope, and tying her one-year-old child to her leg, hanged herself from a beam. Yet she was not in time to prevent the dogs from ripping the infant to pieces, even though a friar did arrive and baptize the infant before it died.

When the Spaniards were in the very act of leaving the province, one of them demanded that the son of a local chief go with him, but the boy declined, adamant that he did not want to leave home. The Spaniard retorted: 'You will come with me or I will cut off both your ears.' When the boy persisted, repeating that he had no wish to leave home, the Spaniard took out his dagger and lopped off first one of his ears and then the other. When the boy again insisted that he did not want to go with him, he hacked off his nose, laughing out loud as he did so as though he were doing no more than pull his hair playfully.

This was the same fiend who was later to boast to a venerable cleric, without any sign of shame or remorse, that he always laboured long and hard to make the local women pregnant so that they would fetch a higher price as slaves.

It was in this kingdom, or in one of the provinces of New Spain, that a Spaniard who was out hunting deer or rabbits realized that his dogs were hungry and, not finding anything they could hunt, took a little boy from his mother, cut his arms and legs into chunks with his knife and distributed them among his dogs. Once they had eaten up these steaks, he threw the rest of the carcass on the ground for them to fight over. These examples should suffice to give some idea of the brutality of the Spanish throughout this territory, of how far God has given them over to a reprobate mind, and of the attitude they take towards a local people created in God's image and redeemed by His blood. Yet, as we shall see, worse was to come.

Without dwelling on atrocities too many and too horrible to imagine committed throughout this kingdom by those calling themselves Christians, I should like to close my account with the following incident. As soon as these hellhounds had left, dazzled as they were by the prospect of the riches of Peru, Brother Jacob and four fellow-members of the Order of Saint Francis determined to go to the area to calm the native population, preach to them and bring to the love of Christ those who had survived the Hell that was seven years of continual Spanish tyranny. They set off, I believe, in 1534, sending on ahead of them a number of natives of the province of Mexico to act as messengers and to ask whether the people would permit the brothers to come among them and to preach their gospel of a single God, the true Lord of Creation. The locals took advice and debated long and hard among themselves, asking what kind of men these were who called themselves 'Father' and 'Brother', what was it they were after, and in what ways were they different from the 'Christians' who had committed such injustices against them and done them such grievous harm. They finally agreed to let them come among them, provided they came alone and brought no Spaniards with them. The friars undertook to respect these conditions, which had in any case the prior approval of the Viceroy of New Spain, agreeing that only friars would enter the lands in question, that no Spaniard would accompany them, and that there would be no repetition of the atrocities that had been committed by Christians in the recent past. They preached Christ's Gospel in the usual way and also taught the people about the good and godly intentions of the King of Spain towards them. The local people were so affected by the doctrine and good example of the friars and so delighted by what they told them of the kings of Spain (for

throughout the previous seven years no one had ever breathed a word in their hearing about there being any king save the governor who mistreated and slaughtered them) that the mission was only forty days old when the local chiefs brought all the idols they had previously worshipped and handed them over to the missionaries for burning as well as entrusting them with the schooling of their children who are the apples of their eyes. They built churches and temples and houses for the friars while invitations poured in from other areas of the country from local people who wished to hear the word of God and to learn more about this great King of Castile. They also did something previously unheard of in the New World (reports of similar happenings written by those who had tyrannized the local people and destroyed vast swathes of their land in the New World being nothing but a pack of lies): at the suggestion of the brothers, twelve or fifteen local lords, each with dominion over many subjects and each the owner of large estates, gathered together their people and, with their full approval, voluntarily subjected themselves and them to the Spanish Crown, acknowledging the Emperor as their supreme lord in his capacity as King of Spain, and appending their marks (as they could not write their names) to a number of documents which I have in my possession together with the sworn testimony of the missionaries themselves.

It was at this point, with these people well on the road to the love of Christ and the friars joyful in the belief that they would be able to convert all the people of the kingdom (or at least the not inconsiderable number who had survived the slaughter and barbarity of the past several years), that a band of thirty Spaniards irrupted on to the scene, eighteen of them on horseback and a further twelve on foot. These brigands brought with them bundles of idols they had looted from the people in other parts of the country and their leader instructed one of the local lords to take the idols and distribute them throughout the territory. The price for each was set at one slave, male or female, and the chief was warned that, unless he complied, the Spaniards would attack his people. This threat was enough to frighten the chief into doing what they wanted and he duly distributed the idols throughout his lands, instructing his subjects to worship them and to surrender men and women as Spanish slaves. The people were cowed into compliance with this sacrilegious traffic, those families with two children handing over one and those with three two, and the local

chief in this way satisfied the greed of Spaniards whom I cannot bring myself to dignify with the name of Christians.

One of these blasphemous and ungodly bandits, a certain Juan García, being ill and on the point of death, instructed his Amerindian slave-girl that the two sackfuls of idols he kept under his bed should under no circumstances be bartered but that, since they were of good quality, she should insist on getting the proper price of one slave for each. With this thought on his mind and these words on his lips he died. Who can doubt but that this wretch is now plunged into the depths of Hell?

We are now in a position to reflect on just how these Spaniards have improved the life of the peoples of the New World, alerting them to the true Faith, teaching by example and bringing honour to the name of the Lord. We have seen them strive to ensure that He is known to these people and worshipped by them. We have witnessed Spanish concern that the true Faith should take root, grow and blossom among them and we can judge whether the sins of the Spanish are any less grave than that of Jeroboam who made Israel to sin when he struck the two golden calves for gods, or whether they are any less grave than that of Judas Iscariot, or their consequences any the less terrible. For time and again the Spaniard in the New World, overcome by his lust for gold, has betrayed the Lord, and time and again he has denied Him, the betrayals and the denials continuing down to the present day.

Once the local people saw that the undertaking given by the missionaries that they would ensure that Spaniards would be excluded from the territory had not been honoured, and that it was those selfsame Spaniards who now brought idols and made them buy them after they had surrendered all their own gods to the friars for burning in return for the promise of one single God they could worship, they were beside themselves and, as one man, rose in revolt against the missionaries, asking them: 'Why did you lie to us? Why did you trick us with your promise that you would keep the Spanish out of our territory? Why did you burn our gods when you knew they would bring us others from other parts of the country which we would have to buy? Were not our own gods better than those of other people?' The brother friars did the best they could to appease them, but had no real answer to their questions. They did seek out the band of thirty and explained to them the harm they had done, pleading with them to be gone, but the Spaniards refused and

even gave the locals to understand that they had come at the express invitation of the missionaries, which was a barefaced lie. The people eventually determined to kill the friars and they only managed to escape by night after they had been warned of the plan by one or two locals. It was only after they had left that the people realised that they had been innocent all along and that it was the Spaniards who had lied. They sent messengers over fifty leagues to plead with them to return, begging them to forgive the hostility shown towards them. Being true servants of God and having the souls of the people at heart, the missionaries agreed. When they returned, they found themselves welcomed as angels and remained in the area four or five months, during all of which time the local people showered kindnesses on them. Eventually, however, given that the soldiers showed no signs of leaving, that (because Yucatán is so far from New Spain) the Viceroy proved unable to shift them even by having them publicly declared traitors, and that they continued to maltreat and abuse the local population in their usual manner, it seemed to the missionaries that, sooner or later, the people would be provoked beyond measure and might even see the friars as scapegoats, especially as it was proving impossible to preach calmly to a local population that was, like the friars themselves, in a state of continual turmoil provoked by maltreatment at the hands of the Spaniards. They accordingly resolved to abandon their mission, and so the whole region was left without the light and staff of true doctrine, and the local people returned to the darkness and misery in which they had lived previously, deprived, at the very moment that they could most have used it and when they hungered after it, of the sovereign remedy that is knowledge of God, and left, for lack of spiritual sustenance, to wither as do seedlings when they are deprived of water. And all this was occasioned by the unforgivable behaviour and consummate wickedness of the Spaniards.

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Commentary by Christian Høgel

A short biography of Bartolomé de las Casas

Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) is mostly known for his role as advocate for better treatment of the population in the newly conquered areas of the American continent. Las Casas came to the New World, more

precisely to Hispaniola (the island that today is divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic), initially in 1502, as a teenager together with his father, who was a merchant. He later became an *hacendado*, receiving land and becoming a slave owner, in Cibao (now in the Dominican Republic). At this early stage, sources find las Casas arguing against the rising criticism by especially members of the Dominican order against Spain's colonising measures. In 1506, las Casas returned to Spain, completed his studies in canon law. He was soon after ordained deacon and, after a visit to Rome, also secular priest. In 1513, las Casas participated in the Spanish conquest of Cuba, joining the expedition as a chaplain, but in 1515, he relinquished his allotted land and slaves in Cuba and returned to Spain. Here he started publishing writings against the Spanish policy in the 'Indies', as the Americas were called. In 1516 came his *Memorial de Remedios para las Indias* (A consideration of remedies for the Indies), in which he – as the title indicates – called for the introduction of several measures to alleviate the conditions of the 'Indians', the local enslaved population. The proposed remedies ranged from introducing labour regulations to restructuring the entire indigenous society into satellite settlements that could serve the Spanish population. But las Casas also recommended the importation of enslaved workers from the African continent to replace the indigenous population, who were succumbing to the extortion. Working from the assumption that the Spanish conquest had been a just war, las Casas was not arguing against slavery in itself. In 1516, las Casas travelled to Santo Domingo (now in the Dominican Republic) as part of a group that were to introduce a new and more lenient policy in the Indies on behalf of the Spanish king. Heavily opposed by *encomenderos* – feudal settlers who owned both land and enslaved local people – only few of the original plans were ever introduced, and las Casas had to return to Spain in 1517.

After years of agitation in Spain, in 1520 he again sailed to the New World, now with the intention of establishing a colony of Spanish peasants in the area of Cumaná (now in northern Venezuela) and also giving indigenous people from all the newly conquered colonies a chance to settle there. By 1522 this plan had completely failed, after more atrocities were committed, and las Casas entered a Dominican monastery in Santo Domingo in the same year and became a Dominican friar the following year. The subsequent period saw las Casas involved in debates between various religious orders and in missionary activities in Central America. He wrote a treatise – *De unico vocationis modo* (On the only way of converting) – presenting his missionary ideals. In 1540, just after being made bishop of the diocese of Chiapas (in present-day

Mexico), he returned to Spain and participated in debates that led to the abolishment of the *encomienda* (entrustment) system in 1542. He had originally fought for this same system, but had never been satisfied with it. The main arguments that he presented in these debates were those that appeared in his later (and most famous) *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (*Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*), published in 1552. In 1545 he returned to his diocese in Chiapas, but after conflict he left for Spain in 1547, never to return to the new World. In 1550–1, he participated in a debate, staged formally by the royal court in Valladolid in Spain, acting as the opponent of the Doctor of Law Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who was favoured by the *encomenderos*. The final verdict was inconclusive, and each party believed he himself had won.

Las Casas continued to be influential at court, publishing his *History of the Indies* (commenced already in 1527) in 1561, five years before his death in 1566. The many twists and turns in the career of las Casas, and his frequent travels across the Atlantic, clearly reflect his strong engagement and the complexities of his political identity – first active on the side of conquering Spaniards but then, for several decades and until his death, strongly engaged in arguing for improvements to the conditions of the indigenous peoples. It is this part of his active life that makes him interesting to us, not least because his writings illustrate his manner of argumentation, while at the same time displaying his strong desire to document the atrocities committed by the Spaniards and seek political solutions.

Las Casas and the classical tradition

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies is not the only book that las Casas wrote expounding his ideas about Spain's colonisation of its newly conquered territory. Already in his earliest published book, *Memorial de Remedios para las Indias* (from 1516), las Casas had called for reforms to alleviate the suffering of the local population. However, as in his Latin *De unico vocationis modo*, the main goal of these early views was to establish a rule that would ensure Spanish domination with less violence and extortion, and with the potential improvement of conditions as a result of conversion to Christianity. It is clear that las Casas rejects all notions of the indigenous people not being human beings and insists on taking their pain and the maltreatment of them into account, but only within the rights of empire to dominate and discriminate. In this sense, there is no great divide between the earliest text of las Casas, where he advocates the transportation of enslaved people from the African continent to supplant

the unfit 'Indians' as enslaved labourers, and his more famous text, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (from which our excerpts come). However, in the latter his focus is on disclosing the greed and cruelty of the conquering *conquistadores* (conquerors) and the colonising *encomenderos* and he also takes further steps in defending the enslaved people of the Indies, insisting on their rights and dignity to a greater extent.

Las Casas wrote in a Spanish context, and Spaniards had only a generation earlier become masters of large tracts of land on the American continent. Through his travels and personal experiences, Las Casas was exposed both to a new, enlarged imperial reality and to new intellectual winds blowing in Europe. Into his argumentation based on Christian, imperial ideas (about legality and warfare) now entered questions about the universality of humankind and the issue of how to assess warfare with non-Christians – in this case with states and people who did not have weapons that could match those of the Spaniards. Therefore, Christian discussions about universality, rooted in ancient Stoicism, and the concept of *humanitas* ('humanity', in the humane sense), originating from Cicero but reintroduced by Erasmus, began to appear in the writings of Las Casas. And in his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* he widened his earlier argumentation, which had been confined to practical remedies and notions of economic gain, to view matters within a universal frame and to argue against warfare in much the same manner that Erasmus had done on the basis of Cicero's Latin tradition.

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies

Las Casas's presentation of the maltreatment – or destruction, as it says in his title – of the indigenous people of the Indies goes a long way to both document specific cases and present precise arguments against the injustice these cases represent. His *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* both chronicles and decries the greed and cruelty of the Spaniards. He had been an eyewitness to many of the events he narrates, or at least came in close contact with those involved; for his arguments, he drew on his legal education and on his Christian and Classical learning. The main thrusts in the argumentation of Las Casas come from the following areas: secular/canon law (concerning just wars and slavery), Christian dogma (concerning the universality of humankind but also of the missionary obligation) and Latin philosophy, especially Cicero (concerning the references to 'humane' action and treatment, not least in an imperial context). Las Casas opposed the greed of the Spanish *conquistadores* and

encomenderos and their inability to view the indigenous people as possible or actual Christians. And when these deficiencies went hand in hand with an enormous power inequality in terms of weapons, there appeared to las Casas an unsurpassable divide, which he then attempted to remedy by reference to higher ideals, though within the limits of his world-view.²

Concerning war and slavery, las Casas followed the old notion of slavery as an obvious outcome of war. It had, since antiquity, been the right of the conqueror to enslave subjugated people, depriving them of any rights in their society and giving them and their progeny only very restricted chances of attaining/regaining any rights. This also goes for las Casas, who nowhere denies the Spaniards the right to conquer and control the lands across the Atlantic, or to enslave the local population, even if this was no longer common procedure in European wars, at least between warring Christian nations.

Likewise, las Casas saw the missionary role of the Church as an action of piety which would impart knowledge of truth to the local population of the Indies. Though this can be seen as giving free rein to cultural subjugation, on the other hand it led las Casas to insist that indigenous people were truly human, in the Pauline spirit of seeing all members of humankind as possible Christian believers. Paul had insisted that both 'Greek and barbarians' (Romans 1.14) could become included in the Church, and las Casas employed this universalist argument not least to counter the views of some Westerners who questioned the human capabilities of the 'Indians', such as Juan Ginés de Sepulveda, las Casas' adversary in the so-called Valladolid debate.³ But las Casas also speaks of the 'effeminate' character of the local population, and in describing their attempt to take up arms against the injustice of the Spaniards, he emphasises the meek nature of the indigenous people in such a way that they appear naturally endowed with Christian virtues. In this way, the meekness of the people of the Indies worked as an argument to allow them some peace and physical possibility of conversion, even if this did not necessarily save them from aggression.

But as is clear, not least in his account of the kingdom of Yucatán (included in the excerpt), las Casas had to go all the way and attempt to avoid warfare altogether. For even if the indigenous people could be admired by las Casas for their capacity for conversion to Christianity, the ideals of which he never doubted, the local people had few chances of matching Spanish aggression. Here las Casas sought support, as had Erasmus when criticising the warfare of Christian princes against Muslim and other non-Christian nations, in the argument of the humane, as first formulated by the Roman author, philosopher and politician Cicero.

Cicero had insisted that rulers must act in accordance with his ideal of *humanitas*, not least when dealing with people of imperial provinces, insisting that they be 'humane' and not commit acts of greed and violence. Cicero's argument drew on Stoic notions of wisdom and an almost divine duty to live in accordance with one's nature. He presented, for example, the Roman commander Scipio Africanus as an ideal of this, insisting that his *humanitas* was evident when he acted as conqueror and even reciprocated by the grateful inhabitants of newly conquered provinces. Cicero presented this image of the Roman general in a speech where he accused the Roman provincial administrator, Gaius Verres, of greed and of extortion of his province.⁴ But Cicero also discussed *humanitas* in connection with slavery, not least in his final work *On Duties*, where he insists that the notion of *humanitas* is what makes it impossible to view slaves as simple property on the level of other commodities.⁵

Thus we may recognise in the arguments of las Casas a mix of Christian virtues and rising Renaissance ideas, stemming from Cicero and advocated by especially (near-)contemporary thinkers such as Erasmus. Erasmus, who found himself in a situation quite comparable to that of las Casas, had in his argumentation against war referred to Christian values when opposing inter-Christian wars, but concerning wars beyond the Christian sphere (for example against the Muslim Ottomans), he was forced to turn to a common human law as a yardstick. Especially in *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516) he introduced the argument of the humane – based on the Latin concept of *humanitas* – to oppose any action of war.⁶ Therefore, when documenting the atrocities of the Spaniards, las Casas would insist on speaking of their 'inhumane' actions, basing his arguments on the ideals represented by the Ciceronian – and Erasmian – *humanitas*. What has to us become a common manner of expression, when insisting on humane treatment, was a very new and learned expression for las Casas and his readers.

This notion of *humanitas* had its advantages but also its shortcomings. It is clear already in the writings of Cicero that this concept could only partly engage with the conditions of the enslaved. Not only would the slave continuously depend on, and be restricted by, his or her owner, but it was also unclear how the reciprocity implied in the concept (implying an exchange between more or less equal humans) could ever be realised between persons of such markedly different legal ranks. This lack is also characteristic of the exposition of las Casas, both in the beginning of his exposition and in his treatment of the various regions of the New World. The Spaniards are, according to las Casas, treating the indigenous people inhumanely, but their right to dominance, which las Casas does

not deny them, makes the final goals of *humanitas* seem unattainable. This is where he introduces the prospect of converting the indigenous people, for this could – at a final stage – ensure them the legal status necessary for the attainment of some equality.

Las Casas's views from a modern perspective

The demand for just wars and the acceptance of slavery, which las Casas never questioned, have ancient origins. A great divide therefore separates us from the world of las Casas, since the increased insistence on human rights and norms of equality have led to a normative rejection of slavery in the modern world – even if the enslavement of humans is still practised around the world – just as modern restrictions on warfare imply that military action is only acceptable in self-defense (even if aggressive warfare continues to happen). A modern reader may therefore find it hard to accept the way that las Casas keeps apart the lawful and pious but (according to him) unknowing king of Spain (who, according to las Casas, will set things right as soon as he hears about the injustice) and the greedy and cruel *conquistadores* and *encomenderos*. As part of a colonising action, the king will to a modern mind carry blame.

Racism is in modern times treated from a perspective that was unknown to las Casas. He was first involved in and then opposed to a manner of colonisation of what had only decades before been to him and other Westerners completely unknown parts of the world. Much modern racism would, according to many observers since then, spring from just that Western colonising experience.⁷ The long history of racism integrated into societal structures arrived as part of modernity, whose dawning las Casas witnessed. It is not possible to understand this deep-seated modern/Western discrimination without going back to its historical origins. Cornel West's 1993 book *Race Matters* is an eloquent analysis of the long history of Western racism, and yet he, like many others, focuses more on the slave trade and the subsequent long-term lack of equal rights. Las Casas gives the reader the chance to view an observer from that era, caught between what was seen as the obvious rights of Empire and Church on the one hand, and horror in the face of extortion and genocide on the other. Notions of human rights – that all humans must be seen as humans and as equal – were not yet known or acknowledged when the so-called New World was discovered and were only slowly developed and enforced. It is the shaky argumentation of las Casas which indicates the starting point of this modern development, based on the cruelties that shaped his opposition.

The exposition of las Casas brings us back to the question about universalising concepts and thinking: when is universalism a good thing? The French thinker Alain Badiou presents a favourable view of the universal thinking of the apostle Paul in his *Saint Paul: The foundation of universalism*. Though insisting on a completely secular approach, Badiou nevertheless finds Paul's insistence on a universal approach to humankind (setting men and women, Greek and barbarian, and so forth, on equal terms) a fundamental and required step for a modern approach to society and life. Yet universalism has become heavily problematic in debates about culture, gender and much more. And often, as we see in the case of las Casas, even the proponents of universalism argue for it within their own inbuilt limits.

Notes

- 1 See <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/americanliteratureanthology/chapter/bartolome-de-las-casas/>.
- 2 The limitations of las Casas's world-view have received much attention in recent studies, most fully in Castro, *Another Face of Empire*.
- 3 Losada, 'Controversy'.
- 4 Cicero, *Orations Against Verres*, speech 2, section 2.35.86.
- 5 Cicero, *On Duties*, 3.89.
- 6 Högel, *The Human and the Humane*, ch. 5.
- 7 See, however, the preceding chapter on Leo Africanus' descriptions of African geography – for European readers – and the discussion in Heng, *The Invention of Race*.

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Juan Latino's *Ad Catholicum* and *Austriad* (1573)

Austriad prolegomenon 17–29, 1.56–63, 1.370–89, 2.368–79; *Ad Catholicum: Autorem res magna petit* 17–22, arranged in order of discussion. All translations from the Latin are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated. Commentary by J. Mira Seo.

Text A: *Austriad* 1.56–63¹

So that the ruler of Olympus might favour what I have begun, and Apollo might truly illuminate my mind with words, and the Sun of justice, Jesus, man born of virgin, and the Catholic Muses might aid one who sings of Spanish deeds, so that I might be strong enough to create with my verses a poem full of piety once I have been washed in the sacred spring of Parnassus, the Roman church, with the gift of its waters' power: I will relate the tale under the Virgin's protection and in Christ's name.

Text B: *Austriad* 2.368–79

Then the surface of the water grew red with the blood of the dying. You could see the bodies tossed and carried by the currents, and fighting in the midst of the waves: pairs of men circling and chests raised out of the water from the waist up, with legs intertwined and still struggling with savage blows, clawing at each other's noses with their nails like beasts. Some, while there is life still in them, swim in the wide swell, clutching others to drown with themselves in the deep; a few resume battle from the water: some who had suffered grievous wounds from a precipitous fall, although their hands were severed, were still struggling to clutch a keel, trying to

cling to the prows with their teeth, and to attack the ships by (if this is even possible) gnawing on it.

Text C: *Ad Catholicum: Autorem res magna petit* 17–22

Aurora birthed him – like the blessed kings of Arabia she dedicated to God as first-fruits of the pagans.

And if my black face displeases your ministers, o King,
a white one is not pleasing to the people of Ethiopia.

There, the white man visiting Aurora is the sullied one.

Officials are black, and the king there too is dark.²

Text D: *Austriad* prolegomenon, address to Don Pedro de Deza, 17–29

O watchful Deza, you yourself long knew that all manner of things were being prepared, and that heretical treacheries, schemes and the Moors were stirring. You, o prince, by the judgment of your intuition were able to discern their crafts, plots, and intricate deceptions, you saw their ancient alliance confirmed, the massacres of believers that were yet secretly hidden in the unfathomable mind of the Moors. As you magnanimously bore the burden of war and the recent attacks of the Moors, you averted danger from the kingdom; you kept the people safe and the city untouched by upheaval and you hosted Philip's brother on his way to war. Your home in the centre of town, splendid in its royal luxury, and your elaborate banquets astonished him, your lavish generosity sustained the noble entourage both at table and with ready resources.

Text E: *Austriad* 1.370–89

The captains in a spirited mass, gleaming in their armour on their high sterns, begin to set the fearful sailors aflame with speeches: that each one of them should follow the flag, and he will fight victorious, since he would conquer in the name of Christ. Three and four times the men repeated Juan's words, all giving their commands imitating their general's manner. Though the captured Moorish rowers who were bound in chains were hopeful as they saw their Turkish allies, yet they were terrified, since each feared his own death at the hands of the impassioned captains. The cunning general began to frighten them with arrogant words, and to threaten them aggressively with a gleaming sword: 'Look, Moor – rower, show some concern for your

own life, if you do not impede the rowers with any evil trick, and you preserve only your loyalty to our generals, when Juan is victorious, you will be freed: but if you now perfidiously attempt to spoil the rowing to aid a Turkish victory, I myself will cut your lazy throat with this drawn blade, and you will go as a headless traitor into the salt waters.' Against their will, they rowed vigorously, and they watched with sidelong glances the proud Turks, the standards bearing the crescent too well known to its victims, that demonstrated to the Turks their descent from Parthian kings, and as they rowed, they recalled the sweet fields of their homeland, for which their death or their freedom was to be offered in the greatest peril.

* * *

Commentary by J. Mira Seo

Biography and historical context

Juan Latino is the first attested Black poet and professor of Latin grammar in Europe; he lived in Granada, Spain, between 1518 and 1597, or possibly until as late as 1607. Although there are some independent contemporary testimonials of his accomplishments and biography, much of the information about his life comes directly from his own statements in autobiographical verse, or from contemporary and later historians of Granada, who presented Juan Latino as a remarkable figure of his time (these sources are at times contradictory and uncertain).³ Born to African parents likely enslaved in West Africa, Latino was the property of Don Luiz Fernandez de Córdoba, the Count of Cabra, and primarily attended his son, Don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the Duke of Sessa, with whom he was raised and educated. As a young man, Latino was freed by his master and continued his studies in Granada. Latino received his first degree, the *bachillerado*, from the University of Granada in 1546, and was then granted two further credentials, the *licenciado* in 1556 and the *maestro* in 1557.

In 1547 Latino married Ana Carlobal, the daughter of the Duke's estate manager, an interracial marriage certainly sanctioned by his patron and in-laws, but extraordinary enough to draw the attention of the Golden Age playwright Diego Ximénez de Enciso, who dramatised their courtship and betrothal as a triumph of erudition and civility over race prejudice.⁴ In 1566 Latino was appointed by Archbishop Pedro Guerrero to be the professor of Latin grammar at the Cathedral of Granada, a position he

held until his death, some time after 1599. In addition to teaching, Latino published three volumes in Latin. Of these, only two remain, neither of which has yet been fully edited and translated into modern Spanish or English. The first volume, published in 1573, contains epigrams in praise of King Philip of Spain, poems on the relations between the Spanish Crown and Pope Pius V, and a hexameter epic in two books on the battle of Lepanto, entitled *Austriad*.⁵ The second volume, titled *De Translatione* and published in 1576, consists of poems on the transfer of the Spanish royal family's remains from Granada to the monastery-palace-library complex of the Escorial, as well as an autobiography of the poet in verse. A third work, a small pamphlet praising the family history and noble qualities of his patron, Don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, was published in 1585 but has not been identified in any library catalogues.

Latino's poetic output, with its topical commemorations of imperial wars, royal births and deaths, and addresses to the local aristocracy and his ecclesiastical patrons, provides an important insight into the political and literary upheavals of post-Reconquista Spain. Granada was the epicentre of a Christianisation process that systematically overwrote Islamic history and culture in southern Spain. In 1492 the last Nasrid king and his Muslim population were officially expelled from southern Spain, or Al-Andalus as it had been previously known, and the Islamic capital, Granada, became the capital of Reconquista Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella. Nonetheless, many Muslim inhabitants remained in the region. They were subjected to forcible conversion and intense scrutiny, like the Jewish *conversos*, as the new Spanish Christian rulers were far less tolerant of other religions than their Muslim predecessors.⁶ As the last frontier of Islamic rule in Spain, Granada became a conspicuous site of imperial building projects for the Holy Roman Emperor, the Spanish Hapsburg Charles V. His ambitious ideological investment in the new capital led him to found the University of Granada on the foundations of the former Islamic *madrassa* in 1526, and the imperial crypt, the Capilla Real, in which he interred the remains of his parents, Ferdinand and Isabella.

Under Charles's son, Philip II, aggressive Christianisation increased, with restrictive new policies against former Muslim converts, or *moriscos*, eventually inciting a *morisco* uprising, the War of the Alpujarras, in 1568–71. The king's illegitimate brother, Juan of Austria, was sent to quell the rebellion in 1569 in joint command with Latino's local patron, the Duke of Sessa, and Latino relates in verse that he first encountered his future royal patron at this time. After completing a brutal campaign against the *morisco* guerilla fighters, Juan of Austria oversaw the full subjugation of the *morisco* population from 1569 to 1570, including the execution of all

adult male captives and the enslavement of over three thousand women and children; all *moriscos* were officially expelled from Spain in 1609.⁷ This military victory, hailed by Spanish poets as a second Reconquista, elevated Juan of Austria as an experienced commander against ‘infidel’ threats, and he was later appointed the Admiral of the Holy League’s navy against the Ottoman Empire. While other local authors, like Latino’s contemporary Juan de Rufo, wrote extensively about their domestic campaign, it is notable that Latino never treated the war in his own region as an independent topic, choosing instead the Holy League’s naval victory at the battle of Lepanto for his two-book hexameter epic, the *Austriad*. Perhaps the theological propaganda of Christian conquest over the infidel rang hollow for a Black man who had lived through the increasing marginalisation, mass enslavement and final expulsion of his former neighbours – some perhaps even his own students – themselves nominal Christians, in Granada. Latino’s race could never allow him to identify wholly with his Spanish elite patrons’ ideology; where and how might his perspective as their former slave manifest itself in his literary work?

Lepanto, the *Austriad* and Latino’s classical learning

Latino’s epic added to the chorus of Lepanto-themed verse in Latin and vernacular languages that exploded in Europe immediately after the naval battle.⁸ The Holy League’s victory over the Ottoman Turks on 7 October 1571 was hailed as a divine victory given the fractious European powers’ internal conflicts and the evident superiority of the Turkish navy. For the first time, the pre-eminent Catholic powers in Europe, Venice, papal Rome, and Spain managed to unite in a successful engagement with the Ottoman forces near Lepanto, Greece. With France conspicuously absent, supporting the Huguenots at home and committed to the Franco-Ottoman alliance, the Catholic military victory under the Vatican’s aegis was also a vital political victory over the rising Reformation.

Lepanto’s suggestive location near Actium, where Octavian had his decisive victory over Antonius and Cleopatra in 31 BCE, proved an irresistible analogy for many poets steeped in the classical tradition, and especially those sensitive to the Hapsburgs’ imperial aspirations to be the successors of the Roman Empire.⁹ Scholars have noted the many Vergilian references throughout Latino’s epic, particularly to the resonances with the ecphrasis of Aeneas’ shield and its depiction of Actium in Book 8 of the *Aeneid*.¹⁰ Latino himself announces his own novel approach to reconciling classical mythological tropes with Christian piety in his proem (Text A, above).

The proem programmatically juxtaposes Christian and pagan elements. Invoking the Olympian gods Jupiter and Apollo (1.56–7) alongside Jesus and the mother of Christ (1.63) demonstrates Latino's affiliation with classical and Christian traditions; Latino adopts the classical incipit tropes of 'beginning with Jove' and invokes Apollo as the patron of poetry (1.56–7). The special prominence of Jupiter may also signal Latino's attention to the dynastic ideology of his Hapsburg patrons, whose interest in tracing their lineage via Aeneas to Jupiter and even Saturn reached its peak in the sixteenth century.¹¹ Latino boldly innovates in his invention of Catholic muses and a baptism of sorts in the 'holy' spring of Parnassus (1.61–2). Nonetheless, the Virgin Mary and Christ himself remain the ultimate inspirational divinities behind his song (1.63), a song 'full of piety' (*plenum pietatis*, 1.60), he assures us, lest any readers misunderstand the purely ceremonial presence of Jupiter and Apollo in this poetic invocation.

Far from a derivative imitator of Vergil, Latino's corpus seems to reflect a broader awareness of writers in other genres, especially Statius' occasional poetry to patrons in his elegies, and, in epic, that of his fellow Spaniard, Lucan. Although the *Austriad* has been called a 'miniaturization of the *Aeneid*',¹² this may be an oversimplification: through patterns of reference to Lucan's *De Bello Civili*, and in his attentiveness to Lucanian allusions to Vergil, Latino demonstrates a sophisticated engagement with the epic tradition. Lucan's epic of civil war may seem a more appropriate model for an account of the *morisco* revolt than for the naval victory over the Ottoman fleet, but Latino erases Lucan's republican polemics to emphasise a connection between Julius Caesar and his successors, the Hapsburgs. While the alignment of protagonists seems schematic – Latino associates Juan of Austria with Caesar, and Ali Bassan, the Ottoman admiral, with Pompey – the references to Lucan's portrayals also create complex allusive resonances. Introducing Juan of Austria as he meets the fleet, Latino compares him to Caesar in his famous solo crossing dramatised in Lucan, Book 5 (*Austriad* 1.402–4): *Austriades visus sic lintre occurrere Caesar / Iulius, hunc remex comitatus gurgite quondam / Hellespontiaco captus ubi Cassius uni*. '(Juan seemed to race in his skiff like Julius Caesar; a single rower accompanied him on the swell just as once Cassius was taken prisoner by a single man.)'¹³ Latino merely establishes the comparison, allusively imbuing his protagonist with Caesar's boldness as he takes up his command with the fleet. The allusions to Lucan's Pompey, however, are far more ambiguous and suggestive.

While the description of Actium on the shield of Aeneas is certainly an important model for Latino, Latino's description of the sea battle

borrowing many striking images from Lucan's gruesome naval battle of Massilia. Lucan has been acknowledged as the bloodiest of Roman epic poets, with a special fondness for mutilation and dismemberment, and Latino adopts distinctly Lucanian descriptions of gore.¹⁴ Lucan presents the naval battle at Massilia as a chaotic display of bizarre deaths: 'And on that day / many amazing sights of varied death were presented to the sea' (*multaque ponto / praeuit ille dies uarii miracula fati*; *De Bello Civili* 3.633–4),¹⁵ a description that well captures Latino's poetic escalation of notorious Lucanian incidents. In one passage (3.603–32), Lucan relates the deaths of twins fighting on opposite sides: one leaves a severed hand clinging to the prow of a ship and, while continuing his attack, has the other arm hacked off. Latino's description seems to multiply and outdo the model (Text B, above).

In the *Austriad* the twin protagonists of Lucan have been multiplied into a melee of struggling pairs, or *geminos* (2.370), in an unusual word choice that may signal the allusion to Lucan's famous twins (... *gemiini fratres, fecundae gloria matris*; *DBC* 3.603). Whereas Lucan's twins gloriously suffer extreme wounds inflicted through conventional warfare, Latino's soldiers fight literally tooth and nail, like animals, in the water (*unguibus et nares scindentes more ferarum*; *Aus.* 2.373), desperate to kill even as they themselves drown. In Lucan, the soldier's double amputation reveals his dedication (*DBC* 3.629–32):

creuit in aduersis uirtus: plus nobilis irae
truncus habet fortique instaurat proelia laeua
rapturusque suam procumbit in aequora dextram.
haec quoque cum toto **manus est abscisa** lacerto.

(In adversity his courage grew: mutilated, his noble wrath increases and with strong left hand he renews the battle and leans across the waters to seize his own right hand: but this hand too with the entire arm is severed.)

Where Lucan offers his episode as an *exemplum* of astonishing martial courage, Latino exaggerates beyond belief, depicting limbless men (*abscissis manibus*; *DBC* 2.378) thrashing in the water, attempting to attack the ships with their teeth.¹⁶ Latino concludes with an ambiguous editorial aside on the dental attack, *si fas est* (if this is even possible), perhaps acknowledging the absurdity of his own poetic escalation.

The treatment of Ali Bassan, the Ottoman admiral and brother-in-law of the Ottoman sultan, reveals a complex layering of allusions to Vergil

and Lucan. Bassan plays Pompey to Juan of Austria's victorious Caesar and, as in Lucan's epic, includes a prediction of Bassan's end. Exhorting the Holy Fleet, Juan of Austria declares, '[then that barbarian race will see] their Bassan broken, decapitated, a Parthian corpse without a name' (*atque caput victum, Bassan Parthum sine nomine truncum*; *Aus.* 1.632). This language establishes a programmatic link between Bassan and Pompey through the severed *caput* and headless *truncus*. Bassan's *truncus* evokes one of Lucan's most famous allusive 'corrections' of Vergil's description of Priam as Pompey: 'he lies as a huge trunk on the shore, head torn from the shoulders and a corpse without a name' ([...] *iacet ingens litore truncus, / avulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus*; *Aen.* 2.557–8). Lucan returns the description to its proper historical referent as a frenzied *matrona* 'identifies' Pompey's body on the sand in a vision of his future defeat (*truncus... agnosco*; *DBC* 1.685–6).¹⁷ While Vergil's subtle historical reference relies on a significant anonymity (*sine nomine*; *Aen.* 2.558) to link the murdered Priam with the historical Pompey's mutilated corpse, Juan of Austria emphatically juxtaposes this Vergilian phrase with two proper names, Bassan and Parthum. In linking Bassan with Pompey through this powerful double allusion, Latino reaffirms the metaphorical identification of the Ottomans with the Parthians, the traditional Eastern foe of Rome.

In Book 2, an ordinary foot soldier cuts down the Ottoman admiral in an evocation of Pompey's seedy assassination and wretched burial. Bassan's decapitated head is impaled on a pike (*Aus.* 2.431–8, a detail also found in Lucan, *DBC* 8.679–84) and Latino embellishes with relevant gruesome details from the Cacus episode in *Aeneid* 8:

Iam Bassan truncus summas volitare per undas,
 atque caput magnum praefixum cuspidē acuta,
 praelongo in pilo, magno clamore videntum,
 terribiles oculos, nequeas adversa tueri
 ora viri tristi nigroque fluentia tabo:
 semiferi facies terret, proluxaque barba,
 turgentis vultus ut vivens, fronte minari
 visus, [...]

(Now Bassan's headless corpse floated on the surface of the waves, and his great head was fixed to a sharp spear point on a tall pike, displayed to great acclaim. You could hardly gaze upon the man's fierce eyes and his

hateful face as it dripped with evil, black gore: his bestial expression was terrifying, as was his luxurious beard, and his face, contorted as though still alive; he seemed to have vengeance writ upon his brow...)

Latino removes the indignation and outrage of Lucan's account and amplifies the grotesque effect with a Vergilian reference, the dripping gore from the bloody heads nailed to Cacus' lair (*ora virum tristi pendebant pallida tabo*; *Aen.* 8.197; cf. *ora viri tristi nigroque fluentia tabo*; *Aus.* 2.435). Bassan is further bestialised with the 'fearsome eyes' of 'monstrous' Cacus' corpse (*terribilis oculos, uultum uillosaque saetis / pectora semiferi atque extinctos faucibus ignis*; *Aen.* 8.266–7). Latino repeats the Vergilian allusion to Pompey by describing Bassan as a *truncus* (*Aus.* 2.433) and further confirms the double allusion to Vergil and Lucan by applying Pompey's cognomen, *magnum*, to Bassan's severed head in the following line (2.432). Latino adapts Lucan's gruesome description of Pompey's still living head (*dum uiuunt uoltus*; *DBC* 8.682) trying to speak as it is impaled on a spear (8.679–84) in Bassan's lifelike features (*turgentis vultus ut vivens*; *Aus.* 2.437) and threatening expression.¹⁸

Although Juan of Austria predicts that Bassan will end up as a nameless corpse, Latino's complex poetics ensures that Bassan's body will be semantically and historically overburdened with identities. Can readers entirely eliminate the pathos of Vergil's Priam and the narratorial sentiment for Lucan's Pompey from Latino's Bassan? Juan of Austria's prediction of Roman victory over the Parthian enemy seems undermined by the poetics of the verse itself.

Poetry, referentiality and perspective: Juan Latino and Claudia Rankine

While Latino's extraordinary status as a Black intellectual and member of Granada's elite made him a memorable figure in local histories even after his death, his poetry remained largely untranslated and unread beyond his lifetime. The topical subjects that ensured the patronage of local aristocrats in Granada, at the court of Philip II and in the halls of Pope Pius V's Vatican, and the erudite Latin that guaranteed Latino respect and fame in his lifetime, nonetheless condemned his poetry to oblivion with the rise of vernacular Spanish literature. The later biographical tradition in regional histories emphasises the visibility of his race, repeating and perhaps exaggerating the same anecdotes of social slights and comments on the colour of his skin, while attesting to his exceptional literary and professional achievements. In one anecdote, when Latino pointed out

that he alone had not been greeted among a group of companions, his interlocutor is said to have replied: 'I thought you were the shadow of one of these other gentlemen.'¹⁹

In his autobiographical verse, Latino himself reverses the direction of racial prejudice; he asserts that his black skin guarantees impeccable Christian lineage as an 'Ethiopian' as he imagines the racial politics at an Ethiopian court (Text C earlier in this chapter). With a hybrid of classical and biblical references, Latino compares himself to Ethiopian Memnon, son of Aurora, and reminds his addressee, King Philip, that the dark-skinned Magi, the 'kings of Arabia', were arguably the first worshippers of the infant Jesus. While projecting racial prejudice onto the king's 'ministers', through a perspective shift Latino invites the king to imagine a lone white visitor confronting a sceptical African version of himself and his court! The portrait is effectively damning without being directly accusatory. As the elegy itself is couched as an appeal to the king to grant Latino the favour of praising his half-brother, Juan of Austria, it is unclear how real this objection to his race may be (it is unlikely that he ever appeared at the royal court), but the very mention indicates an expectation of prejudice.

As Latino argues, far from being a liability, his race adorns and enhances his royal patrons: many kings and heroes have had verse written about them, but how many by a Black poet? In the opening of the elegy, Latino envisions the poet-patron relationship as radically mutual: 'If in fact the wars of Austriades ennoble the poet, he, / because he's black, makes Austriades a phoenix' (*Nam si nobilitant Austridae bella poetam, / phoenicem Austriadam, quod niger, ille facit*).²⁰ Latino is perhaps being overly generous: surely he has a better claim to being the 'phoenix', as the only Black poet writing in Latin verse? Latino further dramatises his extraordinary status by recounting Juan of Austria's astonishment at meeting such a unique figure in Granada. The commander exclaims, 'I will tell my brother Philip wonderful things about you who are called a new sort of writer' (*Et dixit, fratri narrabo mira Philippo / de te, qui scriptor diceris esse novus*).²¹ Latino's imaginary dialogue aligns the poet and the prince in parallel roles: Juan of Austria will first extol (*narrabo*) Latino to King Philip, as Latino himself will eventually praise the admiral's victory at Lepanto in verse. Latino's poetry demonstrates a distinct interest in mirroring and exchanging perspectives between individuals of different status, a necessary survival skill for a Black professor of Latin who once served his master as a slave.

In other poetic contexts, Latino performs the poetic equivalent of code switching, matching his language to reflect his patron's perspective and even his ethnoreligious prejudice. The tone of his prolegomenon

to Don Pedro de Deza, an inquisitor of the Church and President of Granada during the *morisco* uprising, performs Deza's suspicion of the converted, formerly Muslim, population. Deza enforced Philip II's policy of increasing cultural restrictions on the *morisco* community, until the resulting violence seemed to validate the Spanish authorities' suspicions of their 'spurious' conversion to Christianity. In his dedication to Deza, Latino seems to focalise the president's perspective and programmatically establishes the Catholic Church's narrative of Lepanto: as a continuation of a religious war against the 'Moors' that began with the *morisco* uprising (Text D).

Latino's emphasis on his addressee's insight (*cognovisti*) and intuition (*iudicio mentis*) places this suspicion – of the *moriscos* as secret infidels plotting with the Ottomans – squarely in Deza's mind. While he seems to praise Deza for his heightened watchfulness (*pervigil*), Latino represents *morisco* disloyalty as hypothetical, derived from Deza's perception of their hidden intentions (*secretum Mauris tunc alta mente repostum*). Latino thus depicts the paranoid logic of the persecution from Deza's perspective, not as fact. He mentions the war only briefly, praising Deza for bearing the responsibility of leadership and for keeping the city safe (the war was fought in the outlying Alpujarra mountains, far from the urban centre). The adjective *magnanimus* seems to anticipate Deza's real source of pride: the lavish hospitality that impressed Juan of Austria and sustained his extensive entourage. Deza's provisions for the troops seem tacked on as an afterthought, concluding three lines on his luxurious dinner parties. Latino seems intimately aware of his local patron's particular concerns about his self-image.

Latino's insightful moral imagination similarly captures complex ethnoreligious interactions in the *Austriad*. In the epic, Latino demonstrates the Christian captains' suspicious attitudes towards and abuse of their enslaved rowers (likely *moriscos* from the recent uprising) and a surprising nobility and pathos in the rowers themselves. The captains threaten the rowers with death if they attempt to aid the Ottomans from their benches; like Deza, they assume that the enslaved *moriscos* are secretly allied with the Ottoman enemy (Text E).

Latino presents a more complex emotional ambivalence in the *moriscos*: he emphasises the rowers' captivity (*captus*) and physical helplessness in chains, and while they perceive the Ottomans as 'friends' (*Turcas ... amicos*), it is left ambiguous whether their hope (*spem*) derives from latent religious affinity or a rational hope for deliverance from their violent captors. The Christian captains' gruesome threats and menacing gestures seem to confirm the rowers' alarm that these frenzied Islamophobes

might well murder their own rowers before the battle even begins. That the rowers are not Ottoman captives is clear from their lack of identification with the Ottoman insignias, which Latino describes from the perspective of awed enemies. This absence of identification with the Ottoman fleet creates added pathos as the rowers nostalgically recall their homeland, with the focalised adjective *dulcis* expressing their longing. Enslaved and victimised by their Christian neighbours, and forced into association with the Ottoman foe by Islamophobic suspicion, *morisco* captives at Lepanto yearn for their own country, perhaps their lost Al-Andalus, as it was before the Spanish Reconquista and Christian domination.

Would this complex reading of the rowers as nostalgic *morisco* captives be possible if Latino were not himself a formerly enslaved Black poet in Granada? As an author highly conscious of his race in Spanish elite society, and a man who had been born into slavery but raised in the household of Granada's nobility, freed and employed by the Church, surely Latino had much experience with 'passing', suspicion and dislocation. Latino's unique position in Spanish aristocratic society, and his role as a teacher and panegyrist of the Church and Spanish Crown could have enabled him to absorb the experiences of his students (perhaps themselves *moriscos* to be re-educated 'properly?') and to reflect the grandiosity and paranoia of his patrons' perspectives. His professional success and personal elevation into Granadan society bear witness to his social awareness; Latino's unusually empathetic insights into diverse figures demonstrates the hyper-consciousness of others' perceptions that he must have developed. While his noble Spanish patrons had the luxury of enacting their religious suspicions on the subject *morisco* population, Latino had to calibrate his self-presentation, counter his distinctive racial difference with classical erudition, and in daily life, with charm and affability. While he could not hide his race, like so many successful individuals from racial minorities, Latino could pass socially into a higher status as long as he was considered pleasant and inoffensive. And perhaps his exceptional ability to perceive others' interior narratives and self-perceptions allowed Latino to provide the version of himself best suited for every situation.

In 2020 the contemporary poet Claudia Rankine published *Just Us: An American conversation*, a collection of essays that chronicled her interactions as a Black woman in 'white' spaces: Rankine pursued conversations with white people on business-class flights, in airport lounges and at dinner parties at Yale (where she is a faculty member) and explores the discomfort she and her interlocutors experienced in scrupulously researched first-person essays and poetic interludes.²²

Rankine's social explorations and reflections on herself and others attempt to make explicit the uncomfortable feelings that these interactions simultaneously generate and avoid. Like Latino, Rankine is a Black poet, public intellectual and educator buttressed by recognition, institutional status and privilege. She too is married to a white partner and inhabits an elite white-majority social environment. Having already produced an acclaimed work of poetry and lyric essays on American racial dysfunction (*Citizen: An American lyric*, published by Penguin in 2014), Rankine attempts to expose the hidden assumptions behind seemingly innocuous quotidian interactions. She created this project from an awareness of a mutual unintelligibility between herself and the white men who had created these environments for their own comfort and separate privilege:

After a series of casual conversations with my white male travelers, would I come to understand white privilege any differently? They couldn't know what it's like to be me, though who I am is in part a response to who they are, and I didn't really believe I understood them, even as they determined so much of what was possible in my life and in the lives of others. But because I have only lived as me, a person who regularly has to negotiate conscious and unconscious dismissal, erasure, disrespect, and abuse, I fell into this wondering silently. Always, I hesitated.²³

Up to that point, Rankine had 'hesitated', but for her research she pushed against this reluctance and silence by asking strangers about white privilege in spaces designed to enhance an awareness of elite status. While special boarding lines and VIP airport lounges use criteria other than race to limit access, Rankine explores the unspoken racial alignments that mark her as a Black female intruder into these majority white male environments. Like Latino in his autobiographical elegy, Rankine employs her own race as a fulcrum to pry open the systematic, assumed racialisation of American society: both authors use writing to interrogate the racial alignments of their own social spaces and interactions.

Whereas Latino's poetry effectively ventriloquises a variety of individuals, from Juan of Austria to the lowliest galley slaves, Rankine presents a more complex and pessimistic representation of her interlocutors:

That the laws favour him as a white male must remain a known unknown. He cannot bear to know it and know that he accommodates and makes visible all that has been redirected toward him. He

cannot bear the burden of what was taken to be given to him. He cannot know himself as the embodied space of privilege even as he becomes its evidence. He will not know himself as the favoured even as he destroys others in order not to know. Even as person after person lives dependent on him, waiting for him, looking to him to know what he cannot – or is it will not? – know.²⁴

Latino gives voice to Juan's delight at encountering an unusual Black poet in Granada, projects Don Pedro de Deza's Islamophobic suspicion and imagines the ambivalence of captive rowers; Rankine places only a willed ignorance in the white male mind, a blindness that protects him from sharing the pain of others who are systemically deprived or even 'destroyed' by the disproportionate advantages he enjoys. Where Latino's poetry demonstrates the empathetic perceptiveness that likely advanced him socially, Rankine's attempt to understand her white male travelling companions results only in baffled frustration at the absence of reciprocal understanding. Rankine performs the asymmetrical psychological labour of imagining and expressing her white interlocutors' ignorance; they remain sheltered by their obliviousness and its costs to others. If Latino's poetry projects a confidence in his authorial ability to shape his social interactions, Rankine's experiment produces negative results. Latino's optimism was unfounded: he could not know that his elevated status as a Black man in Western European history would remain exceptional for centuries as the Atlantic slave trade industrialised and African captives became a global commodity. Rankine's literary works reveal the nuanced psychological and social barriers that remain in contemporary American society centuries after slavery's end.

Notes

- 1 Line numbers refer to the Latin original, not to the English translation.
- 2 Translation by the late John Quinn (Hope College).
- 3 This essay supplements Seo, 'Identifying authority'; for biographies of Latino, see Wright, *The Epic of Juan Latino*, and Gates and Wolff, 'An overview of sources'. Literary studies of Latino's work include Fra Molinero, 'Juan Latino and his racial difference', Wright, 'Narrating the ineffable Lepanto', and Wright, *The Epic of Juan Latino: Dilemmas of race and religion in Renaissance Spain*.
- 4 Juliá Martínez, *Diego Ximénez de Enciso*. An investigation of Latino's reception and his evolution as a figure in Golden Age Spanish literature is beyond the scope of this essay, but his presence in Cervantes' epigraph to *Quixote*, and as the subject of Ximénez de Enciso's eponymous play, *La Comedia Famosa de Juan Latino* (composed sometime between 1620 and 1621 and first published in 1652), attests to his continued fame beyond his lifetime.
- 5 Modern edition with translation into English in Wright and Spence, *The Battle of Lepanto*.
- 6 See Majid, *Freedom and Orthodoxy*, 25–8, for an effective summary of the royal policies and their ideological impact, with reference to contemporary conflicts between the West and Islam.

- 7 For a detailed biography of Juan of Austria, see Petrie, *Don John of Austria*.
- 8 Wright and Spence, *The Battle of Lepanto*.
- 9 See Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas*, on Hapsburg pretensions to Roman lineage.
- 10 See Gonzales Vasquez, 'Juan Latino, imitador de Virgilio' on references to Vergil, and Wright, 'Narrating the ineffable Lepanto', 74.
- 11 Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas*, 97.
- 12 Wright, 'Narrating the ineffable Lepanto', 74.
- 13 Cf. the account in Lucan, *DBC* 5.519–677; the solo crossing is also recorded in Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar*, 63.
- 14 On gory violence in Lucan, see Dinter, 'Lucan's epic body'; Lucan is statistically shown to favour mutilation relative to other Latin epic poets in Most, '*Disiecti membra poetae*'.
- 15 Translations from Braund, *Lucan: Civil war*.
- 16 The men attempt to bite the sterns (*puppae*; *Aus.* 2.379) of the ships, the location from which (*de puppe*; *DBC* 3.620) Lucan's twin first initiates his doomed attack.
- 17 Narducci, 'Il tronco di Pompeo'; Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*, 41.
- 18 Dinter, 'Lucan's epic body'.
- 19 Gates and Wolff, 'An overview of sources', 22.
- 20 Latino, *Ad Catholicum*, 7–8; translation by the late John Quinn (Hope College).
- 21 Latino, *Ad Catholicum*, 34–5; translation by the late John Quinn (Hope College).
- 22 Rankine, *Just Us*.
- 23 Rankine, *Just Us*, 22.
- 24 Rankine, *Just Us*, 130.

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The Florentine Codex (sixteenth century), edited by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún

Excerpts from Book 10, Chapter 29. Translated from the Nahuatl by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. Reprinted with permission from *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain. Book 10, The People*, edited by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, and translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. Copyright 1981 by the School of American Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico. All rights reserved. Commentary by David Tavárez.

Book 10, Chapter 29 (pp. 171–4)

Those called Chichimeca are of three kinds: the first are the Otomi; the second, those named Tamime; the third, those called Teochichimeca and Çacachichimeca.

The nature, the manner of life, of the Otomi will be told further on. This name Tamin means “shooter of arrows.” And these Tamime were only an offshoot, a branch, of the Teochichimeca, although they were somewhat settled.

They made their homes in caves, in gorges; in some places they established small grass huts and small corn fields. And they went mingling with the Mexica, or the Nahua, or the Otomi. There they heard the Nahuatl language, they spoke a little Nahuatl or Otomi, and in a measure they there learned a civilized way of life from them. Also they put on a few rags—tattered capes. Also in places they laid out small maize plots; they sowed them, they harvested them.

They were called Tamime, that is to say, “shooters of arrows,” for they went bearing their bows; everywhere they went out. These were the vassals of some ruler, some nobleman, to whom belonged the land, the city, where they dwelt. Their tribute payments became that which they caught: rabbits, deer, serpents. And these understood very well the power, the essence, of the herbs, of the roots; the healing herbs, the deadly ones, those which dried one up [and] after much time killed one. And also they knew of the so-called *maçacoatl*. They went about carrying their little reed baskets; they went among the houses selling medicinal herbs.

These [were] without their hair cut. The men wore the hair covering them, parted in the middle, hanging long; likewise the women.

The Teochichimeca, that is to say, the real Chichimeca, or extreme Chichimeca, and also those named Çacachichimeca, that is to say, those who lived on the grassy plains, in the forests—these were the ones who lived far away; they lived in the forests, the grassy plains, the deserts, among the crags. These had their homes nowhere. They only went about traveling, wandering; they went about crossing the streams; they only went here and there. Where night came upon them, there they sought a cave, a craggy place; there they slept.

These had their leaders, their rulers. That which they caught—were it a wild beast, or bobcat; perchance somewhere they shot an ocelot, a wolf, a mountain lion—they gave its hide and its flesh [to the leader]; and a little additional meat, either rabbit meat or venison. In this way they furnished provisions for the house of the ruler. They presented all to him. Or their tribute became a bow, a long, slender dart—that is to say, an arrow.

The ruler of these had his house, a palace, perhaps a grass house, or only a straw hut or a cave in the cliffs. This ruler had a consort, a wife—only one; he had only one. These Chichimeca had spouses; each one had only one wife. They knew not polygyny. And thus they lived; each couple lived alone, not two couples together. Thus did they seek their sustenance.

So, it was said, there were no adulterers, because they went guarding their women with care. And an adulterer appeared very seldom, almost never. When [one was] discovered, then as many as the ruler governed were summoned, called by a crier. They took the adulterer and the woman before the ruler; he sentenced them. All his vassals assembled together by them somewhere on the desert. Each one shot them with four arrows as long as they still lived.

And the array, the clothing, of the ruler [consisted of] his cape, perhaps of lynx skins, or wild animal skins, or ocelot skins, or wolf, or puma skins, and what was called his squirrel skin head piece, and his circular fan device of yellow parrot feathers. And his wife also had her skin skirt, her skin shift—likewise all the women. [The men] always carried their bows. They left them nowhere; when they wandered they went carrying them. When they ate, [their bows] stood nearby; when they slept, they rested at their heads. It is said they called them their guardians; they considered them [such]. And their sandals were of yucca or palm [leaves]. And the bed of the ruler—this was of wild animal skins. And his seat and his resting place, the so-called seats with back rests, were all of wild animal skins, most wonderful. Many Chichimeca guarded this ruler.

Also likewise were arrayed all the [Teo]chichimeca, only they took not the wild animal skins, the wild animal seats they did not belong to them: only small deer skins, small coyote skins, small grey fox skins, grey fox skins, squirrel skins, etc.

Behold, the following were the abilities of these Chichimeca: they were stone cutters: very well did they work the flint, the obsidian. They set it, they placed it as the tip on the reed, which is called the arrow. And also they understood very well about mirrors, for all used mirrors. They always bore them on the small of backs. And when they went somewhere, as they made their way, following a single leader, in order, in line, there they went looking into the mirror which [the one ahead] went bearing in the middle of his back. And they worked, they abraded the turquoise, the fine turquoise, [for] their necklaces, their ear rings, their pendants.

And they knew the qualities, the essence, of herbs, of roots. The so-called peyote was their discovery. These, when they ate peyote, esteemed it above wine or mushrooms. They assembled together somewhere on the desert; they came together; there they danced, they sang all night, all day. And on the morrow, once more they assembled together. They wept; they wept exceedingly. They said [thus] eyes were washed; thus they cleansed their eyes.

And they were feather gluers, feather workers; for they made, they glued the fan-shaped device of yellow parrot feathers. And they cured skins; they were tanners; for all the clothing of the Chichimeca was of skins, and the skirts of their women were of skins. They tanned the skins; they cut them into thongs.

And when, perhaps, [there was] a little food, they roasted it, broiled it, boiled it. The men did not do the work; only the women, because [the men] protected their eyes exceedingly; they could not endure the smoke. They said that it harmed their eyes, for these Chichimeca saw very far, and they took very careful aim. That at which they loosed an arrow, not twice, not thrice did they shoot it; [but] only once. Even if [the target were] very small, they did not miss it; even if it also were far away, they could hit it with an arrow. They did not miss it, nor did they shoot at it many times.

The following is the food of the Chichimeca: nopal, tuna, roots of the *cimatl* herb, *tziuactli* cactus, honey, maguey, yucca flowers, yucca sap, maguey sap, bee honey, wild bees, wild honey; and the roots of which they had knowledge, which were in the ground; and all the meats—rabbit, snake, deer, wild animals; and all [things] which flew.

Such was the food of these Chichimeca, that they never sickened much. They became very old; they died only at an advanced age; they went on to be white-haired, white-headed. And if sickness settled upon someone, when after two days—three days—four days—he recovered not, then the Chichimeca assembled together; they slew him. They inserted a bird arrow into his throat, whereof he died. And they likewise slew those who became very old men [or] very old women. As for their killing the sick, the aged, it was said that thus they showed him mercy; it is said [that it was] in order that he would not suffer on earth, and so they would not feel sorry for him. And when they buried him, they paid him great honor; two days, three days, they mourned; there was dancing, there was singing.

Such was their food and so limited their clothing, that they were strong, lean, hard, and very wiry, sinewy, powerful, and they ran much. As they went, as they climbed mountains, it was as if they were carried by the wind, for they were lean—they had no folds of fat—so that nothing impeded them.

Otomi (pp. 176–9)

A little is mentioned here of those [who were] the Otomi and of their way of life, their qualities. The name of the Otomitl comes from, is taken from, the name of him who first became the leader of the

Otomi. They say his name was Oton. His children, his descendants, and his subjects were all called Otomi; a single one, Otomitl.

These Otomi had a civilized way of life. The men wore capes, clothed themselves, wore breech clouts, wore sandals. The women wore skirts; they wore shifts. The clothing, the capes, the sandals of the men were of good quality; the skirts, the shifts of the women were of good quality.

There were rulers who governed them; there were nobles, there were lords; there were the so-called stewards; there were leaders; there were priests, the so-called Otomi priests. There was their supreme priest by the name of Tecutlatoa. There was their wise man, whom they called, whom they named, Tlaciuhqui. That is, he performed sorcery for [the god]; he was equal to, he resembled [a god]; he addressed them as if [he were] a god. He addressed the gods; he informed them of that which they desired. The Otomi inquired of [the sorcerer], if it were necessary to go to war, whether perchance they would die in war; they inquired of him whether there would be rain during the year, or whether, perhaps, there would be no [rain]; they inquired [if] famine, if perhaps sickness might come—might spread. They asked many things of the sorcerer. They worshipped [sorcerers] as gods; hence were they very highly esteemed; they were regarded well everywhere.

These Otomi possessed gardens; they possessed maize bins; good [was] their food, good [was] their drink. The name of their god was Iocippa. Very good [was] his temple, which they had erected for him, had dedicated to him—the straw hut of trimmed and smoothed straw called the temple of Oton. All provided themselves with straw huts, grass huts; they did not greatly esteem flat-roofed houses. There in their temples lived the priests, and there the small boys were reared; there they did penance, passed the night, entered the bath; maguey spines were placed; they bled themselves, they cut themselves, they fasted. All night they played the two-toned drum on the top of their temple. It was said they held guard on top. (This they said.)

In this manner were they adorned. The hair of the still small boys was cut short leaving a little hair on the back of the head. They named it *piochtli*. Then lower lips were perforated; lip plugs were provided; ear plugs were provided. And they shaved over the foreheads of the grown men, and on the backs of their heads they left much long hair. Hence were they called *piocheque*.

The lip plugs of the rulers were green stone lip plugs, or sea shell lip plugs, or gold lip plugs. And also the ear plugs of the brave men, the brave warriors, were gold ear plugs or copper ear plugs, or sea shell ear plugs, or mirror stone ear plugs, or turquoise [mosaic] ear plugs. The lip plugs of all the [other] people were of rock crystal, obsidian, or smoky stone, and their earplugs were of obsidian or smoky stone, or those known as stalactites, green ones resembling turquoise, or ear plugs made of black beetles, or pottery ear plugs. And furthermore, at last came their ear plugs of dried maize stalks or reed ear plugs.

When the women were still young girls, they cut their hair short; but when [they were] grown, when [they were] young women, the hair covered their shoulders. However, the hair over the forehead was cut. And when one was a mature woman, when perhaps she also [had delivered] her child, the hair was bound about her head. Also they wore ear plugs, and their arms, their breasts, were painted. Their painting was well scratched, well scarified, very green, bluish, very beautiful.

This [was] their food: maize, dried maize ears, beans, chili, salt, tomatoes. Their greatest specialties, or, as I have mentioned it, their great pleasures, [were] fruit tamales, cooked beans, dogs, gophers, deer.

Behold the defects, the faults of the Otomi. They were untrained, stupid. Thus was there scolding, or thus was one scolded; thus was there the scolding of one untrained, It was said: "Now thou art an Otomi. Now thou art a miserable Otomi. O Otomi, how is it that thou understandest not? Art thou perchance an Otomi? Art thou perchance a real Otomi? Not only art thou like an Otomi, thou art a real Otomi, a miserable Otomi, a green-head, a thick-head, a big tuft of hair over the back of the head, an Otomi blockhead, an Otomi ..."

With all this one was scolded, one was shamed. It was taken, it stemmed, from the uncouthness of the Otomi. The Otomi were very covetous, that is, very desirous, greedy. That which was good, they bought all; they longed for all of it even though it was not really necessary.

The Otomi were very gaudy dressers—vain people; that is to say, what there were of capes, of clothing, which were one's special privilege, they took all, they wore all, to be vain people. It was not worn in good taste; thus of them was said: "Hath it possibly been said that someone called thee an Otomi? Is it true that thou art an Otomi?"

Likewise the women, who also bought up all the skirts, [all] the shifts, did not wear the skirts well; they did not wear the shifts well. Such gaudy dressers [were] the young girls [that] they pasted their legs, their arms, with red feathers. Faces were smeared with yellow ochre, and teeth were darkened. Faces were covered a fine brown.

And as gaudy dressers, as vain as the [other] Otomi, were the old women, who still also cut the hair over the forehead; who still also cut the hair on one side, leaving the other side long; who still also darkened their teeth, still painted their faces, still pasted themselves with red feathers; who still also put on the embroidered skirts, the embroidered shifts.

The Otomi were lazy, shiftless, although wiry, strong; as is said, hardened; laborers. Although great workers of the land, they did not apply themselves to gaining the necessities of life. When they had worked the land they only wandered.

Behold what they did: they went catching [game], they went catching rabbits, spearing rabbits, snaring rabbits in nets, shooting rabbits with reed arrows, hunting rabbits with balls; they went catching quail with snares; they went catching game with snares, catching game with a throw-net, catching game with a lasso; they went shooting deer with arrows, catching deer in nets; they went setting traps; they went setting dead-falls; they went boring the maguey plant, becoming drunk; there they went whiling away their time. [...]

Huasteca (pp. 185–6)

The Huasteca. In addition, their name [is] Toveiome, and Panteca, or Panoteca. Their name comes from the land, the place, named Cuextlan. Those who dwell in this land, it is said, are named Cuexteca. The name of only one is Cuextecatl. And their name is Toueiome; one alone is called Toueio. This name Toueio means “our neighbor.” And their name is Panteca or Panoteca. This name comes from Pantla or Panotla, for Pantla is also the name of the place where they dwell. Pantla or Panotla means “where the water is crossed,” for this is on the sea coast.

Hence is it given the name, “where the water is crossed”: they say those who arrived, who reached the land—those who settled here in the land called Mexico, now called the West Indies—came in

boats; they crossed over the sea. And there, the coast on which they came to land, so it is said, is given the name Pantla. Earlier it was called Panotla, that is to say, “where the water is crossed.”

And there it is very hot; there is much suffering from the heat. And there are all kinds of food; many different kinds of food grow there, none of which appear here, [such as] the one named *quequexquic*. Many other wonderful [plants] grow there; the sweet potato every month. There are all different kinds of cotton. It is called the land of food, the land of flowers.

Behold their array: [they were] wide-headed, broad-headed; they colored, they dyed their hair diverse colors—some yellow, some red. They patted it. It is said that the men wore the hair over the ear lobes; they let it hang over the ear lobes; they left a tuft of hair over the back of the head. They filed the teeth; their teeth were like gourd seeds.

These [wore] arm bands, leather bands about the calves of their legs, bracelets of green stones, quetzal feather devices carried on the back, circular devices of palm leaves, circular devices of arara feathers, arara feather fans.

These used the slender arrow, the bow; and they called it the tipped arrow. On the end was flint, or an obsidian flake, or a broad obsidian blade. And when one came to overpower his enemy, he cut off his head, casting his body aside. He carried off only his head; he tied it [on a stick]. If he seized four or five in war, he tied on as many heads.

The clothes, the capes, the large cotton capes of these were all of good quality. There were made those called capes of many colors, large capes of many colors, large varicolored capes. From there came the capes with the serpent face design; the capes painted with bloodied faces; indeed they were adept in many [capes]. They used many jewels, green stones, turquoise, fine turquoise; their ear pendants [were] of green stones.

The women dressed themselves very well in skirts, in shifts; they covered themselves very well. Their hair braids [had] varicolored [strips of cloth] wound with feathers.

The defects of the Huasteca: the men did not provide themselves with breech clouts, although there were many large capes. They perforated their noses with palm leaves. And when they were enlarged, they inserted there a gold palm leaf stem, or a reed from

which emerged a red arara [feather]. They filed their teeth; they darkened them with red or with the *tlamiaualli* herb.

* * *

Commentary by David Tavárez

In contemporary Mexico, the concept of *mestizaje* has governed perceptions about ethnicity, race and national belonging for more than a century. *Mestizaje* is commonly understood as the convergence of Indigenous and Spanish ancestry, most pointedly in identity discourses promoted by the Mexican state after the 1910 Revolution and later adopted in popular discourse. A most influential definition of *mestizaje* was articulated by the intellectual and Minister of Public Education José Vasconcelos in his 1925 book *La raza cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*). While Vasconcelos argued that the merging of Indigenous and Spanish origins after the Spanish conquest was a transcendental transformation, he also made equivocal pronouncements about the alleged characters of European, Asian and American ‘races’. Several theorists in Chicana and Latinx studies, among them Gloria Anzaldúa, have proposed a re-evaluation of *mestizaje* that upholds borderlands, border crossing and mixed heritage as a necessary ambiguity for people of various heritages along the US–Mexico border.

This contemporary emphasis on hybridity and *mestizaje*, however, minimises how Indigenous people in Mesoamerica conceptualised their own identities through an emphasis on different cultural practices, historical origins and languages before and after the Spanish conquest. An important sixteenth-century resource that documents Nahuatl views on difference and belonging is an encyclopaedic work in Nahuatl and Spanish, composed by Indigenous scholars and artists under the supervision and editorship of the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún between 1555 and 1577, when the seizure of this work was decreed by royal order. The contents of this work, known generally as the *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* (*General History of the Things of New Spain*), survives in several manuscript copies, of which the most complete is the 12-volume manuscript known as the Florentine Codex and containing 1,223 folios, as it is preserved in Florence’s Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.¹

This essay first addresses *mestizaje* as the fulcrum of Mexican collective identity, as proposed by Vasconcelos and Anzaldúa. It turns then

to the Florentine Codex, and in particular to Book 10, Chapter 29, which focuses on preconquest Central Mexico and provides intimate portrayals of linguistic and cultural variation among Mesoamerican societies from the perspective of Mexica and Tlatelolca people. The essay then proposes an interpretation of Chapter 29. The discussion focuses on several sections that describe the Otomi and Huasteca peoples as an Other to Mexicas, but which also emphasise the legacy of Chichimeca heritage as a common bond. The essay ends with an assessment of linguistic difference, a vector employed both in Book 29 and in the work of Zapotec anthropologist and poet Víctor de la Cruz.

As articulated by Vasconcelos, *mestizaje*, in opposition to the separation of races in the United States and Europe, heralded a 'future Cosmic Race', a fifth race separate from the four 'racial trunks', namely 'the Black, the Indian, the Mongol, and the White'.² Hence, the 'mixed race that inhabits the Ibero-American continent' was destined to 'become the first synthetic race of the earth', as long as this fifth race could 'consolidate its culture'.³ In contrast, Anzaldúa proposed a new category beyond 'racial *mestizaje*': the new *mestiza*, 'a liminal subject who lives in borderlands between cultures, races, languages, and genders', with an identity constantly in flux and in a permanent state of 'in-betweenness', as epitomised by the Nahuatl term *nepantla*, 'in the middle'.⁴ This term was famously used in the sixteenth century by a Nahua neophyte to describe the merging of Christian and Nahua observances, according to the Dominican chronicler Diego Durán. Anzaldúa also reclaimed Malintzin or Malinche, the interpreter who mediated between Cortés and the Mexica, as a symbolic figure for new *mestizas*, and reassessed Coyolxauhqui, Cihuacoatl and other Mexica deities as a new 'spiritual *mestizaje*'.

We now turn to difference and belonging in the Florentine Codex. The influence of authors from classical antiquity on this work has been widely discussed, as its focus on language and rhetoric may reflect the influence of both Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History) – a first-century work found at the Franciscan library at Tlatelolco, Mexico – and Isidore of Seville's seventh-century work *Etymologiae* (Etymologies).⁵ Moreover, the framing of several sections about Nahua deities, and the discussion of omens that foretold the arrival of the Spaniards, was influenced by classical models. Andrew Laird convincingly argues that Sahagún had in mind a list of 12 important Roman gods, as recorded by Livy and others, when he and his co-authors described Nahua deities. Hence, the tutelary deity Huitzilopochtli was compared to Mars and Hercules, and the water and fertility deity Chalchihuitl Icue was likened to Neptune and Juno. Moreover, an omen of Spanish conquest that

features a weeping woman associated with the deity Cihuacoatl could have been influenced by Plutarch's story of a crying oracle that foretold the death of the god Pan and the end of human sacrifices.⁶

While Book 10, Chapter 29 claims to encompass all settlers and founders of cities 'who dwelt everywhere here in the land', Zapotec and Maya societies in southeastern Mesoamerica are excluded. As indicated by the order in which various peoples are discussed, the authors' geographical gaze traces a spiral across Central Mexico and westward to the Gulf Coast, and employs Nahuatl labels to demarcate different groups: Tolteca, Chichimeca, Nahuatl, Otomi, Matlatzinca, Mazahuaque, Totonaque, Huasteca. Then, it twists back towards southwestern Mesoamerica: Tlaluica, Coahuica, Tlapaneca, Olmeca, Huixtoli, Mixteca, Michhuaque, and back to the Mexica and to the shared origins of the Chichimeca.

From our vantage point, these categories may seem markers of ethnicity. But the Mexica and/or Tlatelolca authors of Chapter 29 systematically describe these categories as different sorts of *tlaca*, 'people'. Most of these 'people' were descended from legendary founders who had led people on lengthy migrations throughout Central Mexico and who sometimes bestowed their name on their descendants – thus, the Otomi were called after their first leader, Oton. As Alfredo López Austin notes, the same procedure is observed in various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, some of which stated that the Mexica were named after a divine leader called Mexi, or Mexitli.⁷ In a contrarian note, Chapter 29 provides a more fanciful etymology, as it insists that the Mexica, or Mexiti, derived their name from the legendary priest and leader Citli, 'Hare'. Citli had been placed as a youngster on a *metl* or maguey leaf, thus yielding the appellation *Me-citli*, a surprisingly convoluted argument that could bear the imprint of Sahagún's interest in Isidore's *Etymologiae*.

The Nahuas sorted the Central Mexican peoples according to an obvert hierarchical order. First appear the famed Tolteca, which the Nahuas regarded with the same admiration that the Romans reserved for ancient Greek civilisation. The Tolteca, who inhabited Central Mexico before the other settlers mentioned in Chapter 29, were also skilled artisans and wise people; thus, the house of their principal deity, Quetzalcoatl, is described lavishly. The Chichimeca were classified into Otomi, Tamime (or 'shooters of arrows') and Teochichimeca ('extreme Chichimeca'); this latter term includes *teo*-, usually 'deity, divine', deployed here as an intensifier.

What were the traits of that primordial category, Chichimeca? Chapter 29 asserts that these people were accomplished nomadic hunters, for 'they only went about traveling, wandering', hunted all manner of beasts, dressed their leaders in ocelot or puma skins, worked wonders with flint and obsidian for arrows and turquoise for ornaments, and knew about wild plants, for the hallucinogenic peyote plant 'was their discovery'. In an apparent contrast with the urban Mexica, their Spartan food and clothing rendered them 'strong, lean, hard, and very wiry, sinewy, powerful,' and hence 'they died only at an advanced age', their hair having turned white. In a possible nod towards Christian mores, they were acclaimed as a society with virtually no adultery, as 'each one had only one wife', and adulterers were shot to death with arrows.

The Otomi and Huasteca were defined in partial opposition to the dress and character of more urbane Nahua and Mexica peoples. While excellent gardeners and devout practitioners of self-sacrifice for their deities, the Otomi were regarded as 'gaudy dressers – vain people' because of their clothes and ornaments. In this regard, they were like the Nahuatl-speaking Tlaluica, who 'appeared pompous as they tied on capes' and were also cowardly.⁸ The allegedly gauche Otomi painted and scarified their bodies regardless of their gender; blackened their teeth; wore turquoise, gold and crystal ear and lip plugs; and boys and men embraced the *piochtli* hairstyle, with the top of the head shaved and long hair in the back. However, they were 'lazy, shiftless, although wiry, strong', for they worked the land but preferred to wander and embrace an indiscriminate diet of skunks, mice, lizards, serpents, chameleons, beetles and grasshoppers.⁹ The trope of the Otomi as hunters was well established; in a seventeenth-century version of a conquest chronicle edited by Nahua historian Chimalpahin, he stated the Otomi were 'free people of the highlands, courageous like the Arabs in Africa, who fight naked with bow and arrow' and also 'true and native Chichimeca'.¹⁰

From a Mexica perspective, the Otomi's cardinal 'defect' was that they were 'untrained, stupid'. In a premodern version of ethnic stereotyping, Nahua speakers ridiculed 'untrained' people by saying, 'Now thou art a miserable Otomi [...] Not only art thou like an Otomi, thou art a real Otomi, a miserable Otomi, a green-head, a thick-head, a big tuft of hair over the back of the head, an Otomi blockhead'. In another barb directed at the Otomi, the Tlappaneca of west Central Mexico, who painted themselves with red ochre, 'were like the Otomi; yet they were really worse'.¹¹

But these hierarchical and ethnocentric views deployed by the Mexica and the Tlatelolca would not have surprised Sahagún or other Franciscan editors. The notion of a differentiation between virtuous

Mexica and uncouth and stupid Otomi propounded in Book 10 was immediately recognisable to Franciscan readers of Aristotle and of neo-Aristotelian polemics regarding citizenship and belonging. For instance, in his *Politics*, Aristotle argues that true citizens are those who are involved in the process of ruling thanks to their possession of higher virtues, such as practical wisdom. In contrast, as stated in *Politics* 1.33, natural slaves are those whose nature impedes them from developing higher virtues, and must therefore be excluded from citizenship. Aristotle was also convinced that various non-Greek ethnicities, along with manual labourers, had the characteristics of natural slaves.¹²

As for the Huasteca, the Nahuatl praised them as the owners of a bountiful territory they described as ‘the land of food, the land of flowers’. But the Huasteca, like all others, were described in terms of their clothing, hair and adornments: they filed and darkened their teeth, wore their hair over their earlobes and dyed it yellow or red, decorated themselves with jewels, sported leather arm and leg bands, and used cotton capes ‘of good quality’. Moreover, Chapter 29 echoes a Christian sense of modesty and suspicion of naked bodies by stating that a Huasteca ‘defect’ was that they did not wear breech clouts and that they had only begun to sport loincloths when ‘the true Christian faith came’. In fact, this grave fault arose in an episode during collective migrations into Central Mexico in which a Huasteca ruler became inebriated and ‘threw off his breech clout’ before everyone.¹³ The same criticism was levelled at the people of Michoacan, who ‘went bare’ underneath shift-like coverings.

But Book 29 also acknowledges that some people were more fortunate than the Mexica. Besides the fertility of Huasteca lands, the Totonaque grew all manner of fruits; the Cohuixca were ‘very rich’; the Mazahuaque excelled at working their lands; and the Olmeca, Huixtoti and Mixteca in the east were wealthy and had ‘such abundance in their homes, it was said of these in times past that they were sons of Quetzalcoatl’.¹⁴ In contrast, other groups, such as the Matlatzinca, were unable to grow anything on their land.

The Mexica authors reserved the description of their own kind for the end of Chapter 29. They present themselves as direct descendants of legendary ‘grandfathers’ and ‘grandmothers’ responsible for many achievements and migratory journeys that were also celebrated in other Mesoamerican sources. These ancestors had crossed over Panotla, reached Quauhtemallan (Guatemala) and reached the legendary region of Tamoanchan.¹⁵ They were led by wise people such as the first diviner couple, Ohxomoco and Cipactonal; they had first devised ‘the book of days, the book of years, the count of the years, the book of dreams’.¹⁶

They built the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon in Teotihuacan, were present when the deity Mayauel first concocted alcoholic beverages, and had their historical records burnt by the Mexica ruler Itzcoatl in the early fifteenth century. In sum, the Mexica claimed a position of *primus inter pares* among other peoples – excepting, perhaps, the Otomi and the Huasteca – because they claimed a direct link with major historical and migratory events in Central Mexico.

In its retelling of migration histories, Chapter 29 debunked the argument, emphasised by the sixteenth-century *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* and other sources, that the ancestors of Central Mexican peoples emerged from a place of origin called Chicomoztoc, ‘At Seven Caves’. In an iconoclastic move, it states:

[A]ll the different people glorify themselves; they say that they were created at Chicomoztoc, that from Chicomoztoc they came forth. But there was no emerging from Chicomoztoc; [it was] merely that offerings were made at Chicomoztoc when they lived in the desert. And thereupon there was departing, there was returning.¹⁷

The idea of Chicomoztoc as a place of origin echoes through multiple narratives, from colonial times to historical reinterpretations proposed by Chicanx activists in the 1960s. But Chapter 29 provides a different argument for a common sense of belonging: that many Central Mexican peoples, whether or not they spoke Nahuatl, were in fact Chichimeca. Indeed, the chapter states, ‘These different people all called themselves Chichimeca. All boasted the Chichimeca estate, because all had gone into Chichimeca land where they went to live.’¹⁸ To emphasise this point, the Tepaneca, Acolhuaque, Chalca, Tlalhuica, Couixca, Huexotzinca, Tlaxcalteca, Tolteca, Otomi, Otonchichimeca and Michoaque were all declared Chichimeca. The only peoples excluded from this idiom of belonging were those on the east: the Olmeca, Huixtotin and Nonohualca – a list that could have included, logically, the Huasteca.

Language is depicted as a crucial form of differentiation in Chapter 29. From a Mexica ethnocentric perspective, all those who did not speak *nahuatl* – a term whose root means ‘clear’ and which also refers to the language – were regarded as *popoloca*, ‘barbarous’, a term that perfectly aligns, as despective onomatopoeia, with the Greek label βάρβαρος, ‘barbarian’. Foreign peoples received Nahua labels: thus, speakers of Hñāhñu languages were called ‘Otomi’. Retroactively, the ancient Tolteca were declared Nahua, since they spoke a form of Nahuatl. Moreover, ‘[a]ll

the Nahua, those who speak clearly ... are the descendants of the Tolteca ... those who could no longer migrate.'¹⁹ But even the Nahua belonged in a linguistic hierarchy that placed the Mexica at the top, for the Nahua were said to 'speak a little [like] the Mexica, although not really perfectly, not really pronounced in the same way'.²⁰

To return to modern views about racial and ethnic difference in Mexico, the arguments made by Víctor de la Cruz regarding Zapotec identity echo, in part, Chapter 29's emphasis on language. Cruz observed that the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) continued a 'Castilianisation' project of Zapotec peoples that was launched by Dominican missionaries in the sixteenth century, and which was contested in the 1980s by the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI), an opposition party based on the revindication of the Isthmus Zapotec language and alphabet. As Cruz observed,

Multiple forms have been used to teach Spanish to Mexican Indians, but it is a sophism to say that knowledge of the Castilian language equalizes the economic and cultural situation of the Indian with that of the creole bourgeoisie ... [F]or COCEI, the Juchitecos are not equal citizens under the law as in bourgeois-liberal ideology. Treating the unequal equally is an inequality.²¹

From our vantage point, Vasconcelos's 'cosmic race' may seem an exercise in nationalist myth-making, while Anzaldúa's 'new *mestiza*' consciousness emerges as an astute reading of the ambiguous position of Mexican-Americans and other border denizens, and Cruz's emphasis on Indigenous languages and autonomy reveals the permanent inequality fostered by Spanish-language cultural hegemony. It is not a surprise that, among these diverging identity assessments, only Cruz's work maintains a partial link to criteria of difference that were articulated by sixteenth-century Indigenous intellectuals.

In conclusion, a most remarkable absence in Book 10, Chapter 29 of the Florentine Codex is that nowhere do its Mexica authors foreground differences in phenotype – such as skin tone, eye colour or hair colour – as indicators of difference in preconquest Central Mexico. But phenotype was not irrelevant for Mexica observers. In a bloodcurdling discussion of skin tone, the authors of Book 12, which narrates the conquest of Mexico, noted that Spanish invaders forced themselves on Indigenous women guided by their predilection for lighter skin colour: 'And [the Spaniards] seized, they selected the women – the pretty ones, those whose bodies

were yellow: the yellow ones. And some women, when they were to be taken from the people, muddled their faces and clothed themselves in old clothing, put rags on themselves as a shift.²²

Beyond this rare discussion of phenotype, in Chapter 29 the Mexica classificatory gaze focuses on distinctions not only in language, but also in dress, hairstyles and hair length, bodily ornamentation, and display of jewels, feathers and ornaments. Other distinctions concern characteristics and habits, such as quotidian diet, hunting and agricultural skills, physical endurance, and longevity. Some peoples were derisively stereotyped – the ‘untrained’ and ‘gaudy’ Otomi; the ‘scandalous’ absence of loincloths among Huasteca and Michoaque men.

In the end, obvert racialisation forms were not discussed directly, as people differed in terms of their language, appearance and bodily habits. The Mexica classificatory gaze privileged its own position in a set of received historical accounts, and defined other Central Mexican groups from an ethnocentric perspective. But it also proposed a profound sense of belonging that was tied to common migration narratives and historical experiences: a common denominator that preserved language and cultural hierarchies as it bound together the diverse peoples who descended from the celebrated Tolteca and Chichimeca *tlaca*, ‘people’.

Notes

- 1 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*.
- 2 Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 3, 9.
- 3 Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 23, 25, 26.
- 4 Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 205, 209.
- 5 Ríos Castaño, *Translation as Conquest*.
- 6 Laird, ‘Aztec and Roman gods’, 150–60.
- 7 López Austin, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, 48, 77, 110; Mexi was associated with Huitzilopochtli.
- 8 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 186.
- 9 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 180.
- 10 Chimalpahin, *Chimalpahin's Conquest*, 145.
- 11 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 187.
- 12 Smith, ‘Aristotle's theory of natural slavery,’ 148–52.
- 13 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 193–4.
- 14 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 184, 188.
- 15 López Austin, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, 80, 88.
- 16 This phrase echoes three categories – years, days and feasts, dreams – out of the five for ancient Mesoamerican books (which also included names for children and marriage ceremonies), as described in Motolinia, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*.
- 17 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 195–6.
- 18 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 196.
- 19 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 170.
- 20 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 175.
- 21 Cruz, ‘Brothers or Citizens’, 247–8.
- 22 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, 122.

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Part II

Race and the Enlightenment

Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein's *De servitute, libertati christianae non contraria* (Is slavery compatible with Christian freedom or not?, 1742)

Excerpts from the preface and chapters 1 to 3 of *De servitute, libertati christianae non contraria* (1742). Translated from the Latin by Grant Parker. Commentary by Grant Parker.

Preface (excerpt)

Now, since I shall shortly complete the course of my academic studies, by the grace and aid of the most high God, I shall try in this preface to introduce the topics I was then speaking about. In general, it is incumbent on all true Christians to promote diligently those means which enable this conversion of heathen, God willing, to develop, whether independently or with the help of others. In particular, the task has been entrusted to those who are linked to this or that tribe, from which they themselves were converted to Christianity. This is found to be the situation when converts devote themselves to missionary work.

On the whole, nobody will deny Christian truths when viewed in this way. For since those people all accomplish with perseverance and joy the religious work that is most pleasing to God, they are bound and obliged to recognise of their own accord that this burden is forced on them – provided that they scrutinise closely and fairly the nature of the New Covenant, and the burning eagerness of the Apostles and missionaries to this purpose, and finally the times in which we live. This is one of the features by which the New

Dispensation is distinguished from the Old, and should by no means be criticised, namely that worship of God must no longer be restricted to one place or one race. This has all been foretold for you in the books of the prophets. Firstly, Hosea said (2:23): 'I will say to those who were not my people, "You are my people"', and Joel (2:28): 'Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh'. In fact Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, applied each promise to our current situation in the most eloquent words. But above all, we must not overlook the words of Zechariah, who said (14:9): 'On that day the Lord will be one and his name one.' The cause of all this is that the Messiah, about to be sent into the world at that time, after sacrificing his own soul for the guilty, would receive from his father an enormous kingdom extending to the farthest shores of the world. This is how, to adopt a loftier tone, the Psalmist depicts the glory of this kingdom, the citizens and the frontiers in vivid colours, and sings of the Messiah with resounding voice: 'May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, etc.' (Psalm 72:8).

And so, once he had come to earth at the predicted time, he placed the seat of his spiritual kingdom at the mountain of Holy Zion, where all the Jews who were awaiting the consolation of Israel had been stationed. But, as he continually stressed to those who heard him, he wanted this to take place through the spirit and through truth, among the people in the land where God is worshipped in the New Dispensation. He sent his disciples to preach not only through the entire land of Israel, but he also wished them to approach all nations without distinction. Those who were obedient to the word of their Lord and king boldly scorned all life-threatening dangers, and gladly gave up their possessions so as to inspire all and sundry to the faith, until the majority of people entered the spiritual kingdom of Christ and all Israel was saved. In fact, there was so much zeal among the Apostles that one would try to outdo the rest in performing this duty. It is more than sufficient to observe Barnabas and Paul, whose description in the Bible overflows with great and everlasting praise, since they are called 'men who have risked their lives of the sake of our lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 15:26). The followers gladly stood by the rest of the Apostles, although the anger of the enemies of truth and various torments were cast upon them – people such as Timothy, Titus, Clement of Rome, Polycarp

of Smyrna, Quadratus, Ignatius and others, whose history William Cave and other scholars have written.

Who that is already a Christian and in whose innermost spiritual thoughts this name carries a profound meaning, as is fitting, would not wish to imitate those founders of the assembly of Christ who were very pleasing to God? – especially in our day and age when the church is no longer constrained on all sides as once it was, but now that a wide doorway is opened up so that the mysteries of the Gospel may be known even to people across the seas, people who until this day have been enveloped in the darkest cloud of ignorance, and who have not been reached by God's word. Indeed, those who by God's wondrous prudence and goodness converted from paganism to Christianity can be of use in spreading the Gospel and should in fact commit themselves to this endeavour. For apart from the fact that nature itself of its own accord says to all people that they should strive first of all to do good to those people who are joined to them in a closer bond, it is clear from the mission work of the Apostles that, before they travelled to pagan tribes to proclaim the Gospel, they needed to take care of the wellbeing of their people, the Jews, according to the command of the Lord himself (Matthew 10:6). Therefore, I have always thought that the greatest obligation was placed upon me also to be useful to my people at some time. This, I would say, is the greatest obligation and no injustice. For God, who is to be praised from age to age for the profound richness of his wisdom and foresight, not only led me from Africa to the blessed land of Holland; indeed, he initiated me into a superior religion and endeavoured to hand down to me the rudiments of knowledge. No Christian will begrudge me a few words here as I set forth a summary, so that I can describe God's providential care for me and my studies.

As a boy of seven or eight, orphaned by war or some other cause, I was sold to Admiral Arnold Steenhart, who had landed at a certain place in Africa called St Andrew's River, in order to buy slaves. That much the distinguished gentleman himself related when I recently spent time in Middelburg. After travelling from there to the Castle, the citadel of Elmina, and then to Shama, he gave me to his friend Jacob van Goch, now my greatly revered patron and Maecenas, someone who will have my filial right up to the grave. At that time he was a very successful and skillful merchant on behalf of the noble directors of the African Society. He wanted me to be known as

Capitein (sc. 'captain') and he doted on me with paternal love thanks to his good character which caused his fame to spread virtually throughout all Guinea. Eventually, when he was about to return to his native land, he promised that he would take me with him and would see to it that after being duly instructed in Christianity, I might practise some trade which is not demeaning and thereby earn a living. After some years, in the course of which the acclaimed admiral sailed back from Zeeland to Guinea, miraculously guided by God, we sailed over and arrived at Middelburg in Zeeland. This event I have described elsewhere with the following verse: 'This land received me when I first came from Africa / And was the door to the vale of Holland.'

Later we proceeded from this city and made for the Hague, birthplace of my honored patron:

This is the place where our sequestered youth
was devoted to noble studies.

This is where the Netherland's forefathers came

And met to save the pact of nourishing peace.

This place with a thousand roads and shady retreats

Fosters ease and lays cares aside.

In this most delightful Dutch town, I not only learnt the rudiments of the Dutch language, but I also worked on the art of painting, in which I proved to be quite talented. Meanwhile, with the passage of time, a most humane person called Johann Philipp Manger allowed me to join the catechists at his private institute. I was always an exceptional admirer of his man, who had a sound education and a singular devotion to God, and upon his journey to the mournful fates, when he was taken from the church of the Hague last year, I composed the following mournful elegy: [lengthy poem omitted]

At that time the school superintendent was one Isaac Valkenaar, someone widely known for his scholarly intellect. Whenever I summon up his memory, I can visualise even now his extremely devoted support for me to be educated privately. When all this happened, I became known through the memorable theologian Henrik Velse, to F. C. Roscam, a noblewoman of immense endowments, who greatly helped me in learning Latin and then taught me the rudiments of Greek, Hebrew and Chaldaean

[sc. Aramaic]. She is dedicated to unblemished piety and to the study of languages, and she makes her house available to young students without charge. She also afforded my education no small advantage in that she introduced me to the influential and noble Peter Cunaeus: to him and to the rest of my patrons I have dedicated this dissertation, for what it is worth. When I was moved up from the first to the fourth class I received holy baptism from J. Philipp Manger in a service conducted by Ludwig Timon Pielat, whose outstanding rhetorical skill as well as his study of Practical Theology, as it is called, deservedly cause listeners of all ranks to hang on his words. At that point I was named Jacob after my esteemed patron, Elisa after his sister, who has been like a second mother to me, and Johannes after their cousin, who is the wife of Peter Mesker, a very successful clerk and chief secretary. And so, for six years, with half of my schooling completed and a public oration delivered under the guidance of the rector, Rutger Ouwens, a man steeped in both learned languages [sc. Greek and Latin], I was sent to this most distinguished Dutch university. Since the costs to be paid for anyone's academic studies to be completed properly were not small, the most honourable curators of the University of the Hague and the most eminent senators of the Netherlands graciously bestowed their patronage on me, so that after being trained in the liberal arts I could at last bury myself completely in theology. Since all of this has come to pass, full of wonder I burst forth with these appropriate words of the psalm (39[40]:6): 'How wondrous are your works, God, how precious to me are your plans! How manifold is the universe.'

For the reasons stated above, the Gospel must be spread in our time whenever the dominion and power of Christians are open to it. Nevertheless, I have often come to the realisation that some Christians fear that through evangelic freedom slavery will disappear entirely from those colonies which Christians own, to the great detriment of the overseers of those colonies. Indeed, there once were and still are people in the Christian world, and especially in the Netherlands, who, led astray by some unknown spirit, have determined that evangelic freedom cannot coexist with servitude in the body. As I shall demonstrate, my own present situation demands that I prove that such an opinion stems either from ignorance about the nature of evangelic doctrine, or from superstitious anxiety stemming from the customs of the early Christians, or finally from

the institutions and morals of these regions. [. . .] [dedicatory poem omitted from the end of the Preface]

Chapter 1, which defines slavery and proposes the subject of inquiry (excerpt)

Scholars applaud Cicero's dictum that 'every rationally undertaken argument about a topic should proceed from a definition so that the theme of dispute is understood' (*On duties* 1.7). For this reason, we shall define slavery before beginning to speak. We do not perceive slavery to involve any voluntary agreement, whereby two or more persons mutually pledge that one person will act as a slave in order to get nourishment and other necessities of life, while the other grants requests and gives him or her tasks to perform. For in this sense, strictly speaking, someone who lives in servitude should by no means be called a slave but rather an 'attendant' or 'servant', what the Greeks call *misthōtos*. But instead we see that slavery, as defined by jurists, is a status in which someone is unwillingly subjected to the authority of another. And for this reason the name slave or chattel must be assigned. We see this distinction perfectly, to my judgement, in the extant *Sententiae* of Lucius Annaeus Seneca and Publilius Syrus: 'If you obey unwillingly, you are a slave; if willingly, you are a servant.'

Therefore the question is precisely this: whether Christians are permitted, in keeping with evangelic freedom, to possess human beings in the manner of personal goods? And, if these human beings properly profess Christianity, should they continue to be subjected to bodily slavery? In order to discuss this, we shall divide all the material that must be covered into two chapters. The first will explore the ancient origins of slavery and will show that its use is accepted among almost all tribes. The second will provide that slavery is not at odds with Christianity.

[...]

Chapter 2, which explores the ancient origin of slavery and shows that nearly all societies made use of it (excerpt)

The most learned people propose that, without a shadow of doubt, every human being is under his own authority according to natural

law, and that the common condition of early humankind permitted equal freedom to all humans. It is because we are all similar by origin. There is the same reasoning for the same things, and where there is the same reasoning, there is the same law. The thorny argument of Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5,¹ where he judges that in the natural state the difference among people must be recognised, that while one person is free by nature, another may be born a slave, plainly exhibits either humour in a serious context or the arrogance of the Peripatetic schools in matters such as this. [further discussion omitted]

[...]

Chapter 3, which proves that slavery and Christianity are not antithetical (excerpt)

It is clear beyond doubt that most Netherlanders wish to persuade themselves and others in the back-and-forth of debate that Christian freedom can in no way walk in step with slavery in the proper sense. For now in our time it is thought that worship of God must necessarily be cultivated not only with a pure mind, which does not allow itself under the devil's control to be reduced from the spiritual basis that gives it life, but indeed also with a free body. If this opinion, as I would label it, is not on the right lines, at least it can be linked somehow to the views and sayings of fanatics, by which they, charged up with the meaningless spirit and arguing that every magistrate in the Christian world should be removed, were unable to proclaim that slavery does not contradict Christianity. This incorrect view would never have occupied the minds of adversaries had they not formed preposterous ideas of all sorts about the nature of the New Covenant, and were they not ignorant of the ways of the early Christians, of their own regions, of ancient law and of the more significant customs.

Concerning the nature of the New Covenant they believe that this freedom promised to believers is just as much corporeal as it is spiritual. And so, as the Old Covenant was transformed into the new, slavery which flourished under the Old now in our age would be thrown out together with the other repealed practices of Mosaic law. All of this is affirmed, they allege, by the witness of II Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1, I Corinthians 7:23 and John 8:32, among other sacred writings.

They think that support and corroboration for their opinion derives from the custom of their regions: on the grounds that slavery is unknown in the Netherlands, since it is forbidden for any person to be cast into slavery, nay more, that every slave who is brought to live here in the Netherlands from some other place is granted bodily freedom as if by consent, and even more if he formally embraces Christianity, so much so that he can no longer be sold to his master at will. Although these reasons may seem specious to some, still after being called back to a just weighting with a balanced scale, they will easily be found to lack weight. For my part, I freely assert that the New Covenant gives freedom to people who, through the special grace of the Most High God, are or become participants in it. But how should it be understood? As spiritual and bodily simultaneously? Decidedly not. It is only the spiritual which shakes off from Christian shoulders the burden of ceremonial law which, according to Paul and Peter, the fathers were not able to bear, and liberates them so they may undergo the mild yoke of Christ. [. . .] [extensive detailed discussion of biblical passages and early modern scholarship omitted]

Lest I continue indefinitely, I can, I think, safely draw the following conclusion from the above discussion, even though I by no means concur with every opinion of the most learned writers mentioned above: that slavery in no way contradicts Christian slavery – slavery, which indeed has been repealed here in the Netherlands out of some sense of benevolence and clemency or for political expediency, not because of divine law. From this it follows naturally that slavery does not impede the spread of the Gospel in those Christian colonies where it prevails right up to the present day. For this reason, a kingdom most amicable and pleasing to God can and should be built for both masters and slaves, educated in the better religious practices. This is what Paul recommends to Philemon (v. 16). And in this way slaves will certainly in the end be as prepared as possible for the will of their masters, as we read in Ephesians 6:5–8: ‘Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in the singleness of heart, as to Christ.’ On these lines, another passage will grow deep roots in the minds of those masters who have not cast off the character of a Christian gentleman (Ephesians 6:9): ‘Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.’

Henry Velse, esteemed pastor of the Church of the Hague and an erudite man if ever there was one, has pointed out the ways and means by which this kingdom may be founded and strengthened under good auspices, in the historical preface appended to the *Detailed Reports on the Founding of Christianity among the Heathen on the Coromandel and Malabar Coasts, Written by the Danish Missionaries at Tranquebar*. Here that incomparable theologian has reviewed and refuted the doubts of certain people with which they were troubled (paras. 46–47), and discussed in a logical fashion whether the teachings of the Gospel, which will promote and serve this religious work, can be handed down to slaves without ill effect (48–53).

* * *

Commentary by Grant Parker

Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein was born in 1717 in the Dutch Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) and orphaned and sold into slavery at the age of seven or eight, whereupon he spent three or four youthful years in and around Elmina and other coastal trading ports as the ‘property’ of a ship’s captain. In 1728 his second ‘owner’ took Capitein back with him to the Netherlands upon leaving the service of the Dutch West India Company (WIC). Once in the Netherlands, Capitein became free by default, since the foundation of the Dutch Republic in 1648 had precluded domestic enslavement even as Dutch traders trafficked persons in both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Capitein resided first in the small town of Middelburg in Zeeland and then, supported by the patronage of several burghers, clergy and scholars, received a first-class education at the Hague Latin School and subsequently the University of Leiden. He completed his studies in 1742 with a lengthy Latin oration, the academic medium until the late twentieth century. In the same year he was ordained into the Dutch Reformed Church, having already joined the service of the WIC as a paid missionary.

In July 1742 Capitein returned to Guinea, where as a minister of religion (*predikant*) he had pastoral oversight over WIC employees at Elmina and elsewhere on the Guinea coast. After initial success, he came into conflict with both the Company and the Church over several matters, beginning in 1743 when his letters first indicate misgivings about social conditions at Elmina. At this point he also sought to marry an African

woman, motivating his request by arguing that such a union would better integrate him into the local community. But the request was turned down and he was instead made to marry a Dutch woman sent by the Company: its explanation was that the African woman (whose name is not known) would need to receive the catechism, which it was improper for Capitein as prospective husband to provide. He also had doctrinal differences with the Church, overseen by the Classis of Amsterdam, when he published the Lord's Prayer and other religious texts in the local language of Fante without their approval. Capitein died in 1747 at the age of 30, indebted and in personal distress (as emerges from a letter of 1746); the exact cause of death is not known, nor is the site of his burial. Two months after his death, a WIC official wrote to company headquarters that his 'craving for trade [. . .] had dampened his zeal for religion'. The burning question as to whether he participated in the slave trade is open.

Capitein's treatise, *De servitute, libertati christianae non contraria* (Is slavery compatible with Christian freedom or not?) constituted the final examination for the degree of either master's or licentiate. In contrast to other works by formerly enslaved persons, the work ostensibly defends the practice on ethical grounds. The work was immediately translated into Dutch and other languages, with four new editions appearing in the same year (1742). Though his life and treatise were sometimes mentioned in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates, the treatise for which he is known was, somewhat surprisingly, not translated into English until the end of the twentieth century.²

The work was dedicated to his sponsors over the years, several of whom are celebrated in a lengthy autobiographical preamble. The Dutch-language cover page of the earliest published version reveals its author's resolutely negative answer to the question of whether slavery is incompatible with Christianity. His argument for the compatibility of slavery and Christian freedom has three successive elements: (1) historical precedent, in that enslavement was part of ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman societies and thus acceptable; (2) Christian doctrine, in that the body and soul are separate phenomena, as expounded in the writings of St Paul and Augustine, among others; and (3) ecclesiastic benefit, in that the slave trade brought Europeans to different parts of the world, thus allowing the Gospel to be spread. He first developed part of this three-part argument in a public speech, 'On the calling of the heathen', delivered in 1737 at the end of six-and-a-half years at the Hague Latin School: he describes this earlier oration in some detail in the preface, its full text having since disappeared.

Capitein's prologue narrates his childhood, including his enslavement as a child, and the beneficence he received. He describes his patrons in detail, by name. Even his own name, adopted once he was studying in the Netherlands, reflects his benefactors very directly: Jacobus from his 'greatly revered patron and Maecenas', Jacobus van Goch; Elisa after Van Goch's sister; and Johannes after their cousin. His original name receives no mention, a silence which might be taken quite literally as a token of his assimilation into the society of Dutch burghers. As if accentuating the loss of his original name, nineteenth-century sources sometimes refer to him as 'Asar', which is probably a misreading of the Latin *Afer* (African). The latter name would have been familiar in humanistic culture from the second-century BCE playwright, Terence, whose origins are linked with North Africa (modern-day Tunisia). All told, though Capitein's work survives, his name survives only in its later, enslaved form.

A key element of Capitein's treatise is his self-presentation. In a sense, this should occasion no surprise, given that some autobiographical element is typical of dissertations of the time and that there is considerable ancient precedent in prose prefaces, such as that of Cicero's *De Oratore*.³ In this case, generic normality is at odds with the nature of Capitein's life path from childhood enslavement to academic achievement as a young adult, and therewith assimilation into both the church and WIC.

Capitein's self-image, emphasising his integration into Dutch society, has a geographical dimension as well: both the small town of Middelburg in Zeeland, the first point of his arrival from Africa, and the Hague, where he would begin his studies, are celebrated in verse. Such verse compositions, typical of elite Dutch education at the time, briefly halt the narrative, as if with a note of celebration. Typical of epideictic rhetoric, they also add topographical details to Capitein's ostensible sense of personal belonging. A lengthy verse composition, omitted from the extract, honours his catechism teacher Johann Philipp Manger and fulfils the same function.

Such individualisation emerges also from the three portraits that accompanied editions of the treatise.⁴ In each he is dressed as a cleric with a Bible; in one, he is glossed as 'Africaansche Moor' and shelved books provide the background; in another, he sits meeting the viewer's gaze, his right hand on his breast and his left pointing to a biblical passage. In themselves, the portraits assimilate Capitein into the habitus of Dutch humanism and the Church, and differ from portraits of contemporaries only in the colour of his skin. Yet, there is an important clue that this was decisive at the time. Johannes van Meurs' *Athenae Batavae* (1625), a

detailed history of Leiden and its university, the oldest in the Netherlands, contains portraits of several early professors. Those of Capitein seem to align in every respect other than skin colour. That factor cannot be downplayed, given that the portrait of Capitein by Frans van Bleyswyck (see [Figure 7.1](#)) contains the following epigraph by one Brandyn Ryser:

Capitein [. . .] African Moor. Called to the ministry at the Castle of St George in Elmina.

Viewer, observe this Moor.⁵ His skin is black

But his soul is white, since Jesus himself as priest prays for him.

He will teach the Moors Faith, Hope and Charity.

May they, made white, with him always honor the Lamb.⁶

This sentiment is frequently found and fits easily into the antithetical style of epigram. It draws on the famous words near the start of the *Song of Solomon*: this is rendered ‘I am black and beautiful’ in contemporary translations, such as the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Older translations, such as the King James Version (1611), add an adversative conjunction (‘but’). This language does not reflect the original Hebrew, which does not specify either conjunction, with the result that the choice between ‘and’ or ‘but’ is in the power of the translator. If this is the kind of situation in which a canonical text reads the reader, the racial sentiment of the time is clear: Capitein’s acceptance into Dutch society takes place on the strength of his learning and faith, and despite his blackness.

The text is significant from several other points of view as well. Firstly, the treatise contains, certainly in the prefatory excerpt, a rare slave narrative of sorts, even if that was not the goal of the work. In this sense it offers a marked contrast to, say, Olaudah Equiano’s disputed *Interesting Narrative* (1789), Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) or Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Each of these American narratives reflects a strong abolitionist agenda; each is known to have been written with the assistance (perhaps substantial) of an ‘editor’. Capitein, by contrast, defends enslavement and there is no evidence of a ghost writer in his work. His biography, as presented in the extract, when viewed together with the body of the treatise, represents a coming together of theory and practice. In this light, Capitein’s frequent references to *adversarii* (‘adversaries’) in the body of the treatise suggest that he is arguing against anti-slavery sentiment that is otherwise not evident. If this interpretation is correct, it seems that anti-slavery sentiment was expressed in the Netherlands earlier than is usually imagined.



Figure 7.1: Portrait of Jacobus Capitein, by Frans van Bleeswyck (1801). (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam via Wikimedia Commons.)

Secondly, the treatise marks Capitein out as one of the earliest of a handful of black intellectuals active in eighteenth-century Europe. In terms of origins, we might compare Capitein to the poet Phillis Wheatley (1753–84), also born in West Africa but transported to North America. Wheatley also learnt Latin with the support of beneficent patrons, composing Latin poems that reflect her immersion in Horace and Vergil alongside other celebrated authors. We may compare this with the use of Horace in

Victorian Britain, where the *Odes* in particular became the touchstone of English gentlemen.⁷ Closer in time, origins and destination was Anton Wilhelm Amo (c. 1700–53), who hailed from Axim in what is now Ghana and went on to study philosophy at the University of Halle. He graduated in 1736 with a doctoral ‘treatise on of the art of philosophising in a sober fashion’ (*Tractatus de sobrie philosophandi*), which survives today, and thereafter reached the honoured rank of *Privatdozent* (non-stipendiary lecturer) at the same university.

Thirdly, Capitein’s work is typical of humanistic culture in which theological, philosophical and philological studies coexisted. Latin is paramount but other languages also play their part; apart from Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic also appear in Capitein’s treatise. The sheer learning exhibited by the work is impressive, including obscure Byzantine authors such as the grammarian Manuel Moschopoulos and the anonymous Scholiast to Aeschines, the fourth-century BCE Attic orator. Capitein’s Latin exhibits and perhaps even exceeds the elaborate form of Cicero’s periodic style, in which individual sentences are scaffolded with several subordinate clauses and conspicuous figures of speech.

Fourthly, there is a significant political theology that connects enslavement and race. At the very start of the treatise, Capitein mentions the so-called Curse of Ham: the first section of his previous work, four years earlier, had stated, ‘The promises made concerning Japheth and Ham are found in the occupations of their descendants, according to God’s true word’.⁸ Popular in Europe and North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Curse of Ham builds on the biblical story of Noah’s three sons: Japheth, Ham and Shem. In Genesis 9–10, Ham’s son, Canaan, is cursed because his father Ham finds Noah lying drunken and naked. Ham reports this to his brothers, who, walking backwards, cover their father with a garment. When Noah awakes and finds out and ‘knew what his youngest son had done to him’ (9:24), he says: ‘Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers’ (9:25). Shem and Japheth receive their father’s blessing, and Canaan is to be the slave of each of them. Genesis proceeds with the Table of Nations (10:1–32), according to which Ham’s descendants live in the Egyptian orbit (10:6–20). Within this broad schema, Canaan’s two sons are Heth (linked with the Hittites, originally from Asia Minor) and Sidon (representing the Phoenician coastal cities).

Readers have long struggled to make sense of this brief biblical passage concerning the curse. As the text stands, the extent of Ham’s culpability is hard to grasp. Attempted explanations have been many, including the possibilities that the text euphemistically suggests that

Ham sexually assaulted or even castrated his father. Some have cited Ancient Near Eastern traditions of a son's duty to his father's honour when the latter is intoxicated, including non-disclosure, as opposed to reporting the matter to his brothers. Presumably, Ham's failure to look away from his father's nudity was the decisive taboo that contrasts with his brothers' actions. Why, further, is Canaan rather than Ham the subject of the curse? Some have sensed later redaction as an explanation for the ostensible inconsistency. In a geopolitical sense, the story has been taken as a legitimisation of Israel's conquest, or impending conquest, of Canaan around the start of the twelfth century BCE.

Whereas the Curse of Ham is central to Capitein's thought, another popular ideology receives short shrift. Aristotle's theory of natural slavery⁹ is highly problematic and riddled with contradictions.¹⁰ According to Aristotle, some slaves belong to other people as property, in keeping with the natural order (thus 'natural slaves'), in contrast to those enslaved by law or convention. Whether or to what degree this theory was conceived in racial terms is disputed. Nonetheless, Aristotle's clear implication that 'natural slavery' was unchangeable bolstered later ethnologies: those propounding essentialist views found in it the moral justification of enslavement. A notable case comes from the Americas, in the Valladolid debate over Spain's right of conquest (1550–51). Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda made extensive use of Aristotle to claim that Amerindians were natural slaves and therefore less than fully human; he had in fact translated Aristotle's *Politics* into Latin.¹¹ His most famous adversary, Bartolomé de las Casas, emphasised instead the sufferings inflicted by the colonists and biblical imperatives of clemency. Certainly, Aristotle's theory of natural slavery was at the centre of considerable early modern debate.¹² Capitein chooses not to engage the topic, coyly claiming that the Aristotelian passage in question 'plainly exhibits either humour in a serious context or the arrogance of the Peripatetic schools in matters such as this'.¹³ Even though Capitein is here dismissive of Aristotle's theory, he articulates the essentialist view that black people are by nature inferior, as revealed by their servitude, a circular argument linking servitude and blackness.¹⁴ The authority of such ancient texts, so important for Capitein in 1742, seems to have waned in the 1760s.

What happens if we look beyond ideology to the practices of racial formation? Thus far we have seen Capitein's use of the racially defined Curse of Ham and also glimpsed the impression others had of him in his portrait. How might we take a broader view of the racial dynamics around his life and work? To answer this question, I turn to the theorisation, by race theorists Paula Moya and Hazel Markus, of race as 'a doing'. Moya

and Markus insist that race is ‘a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that sorts people into ethnic group according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics [. . .]; [it] associates differential value, power, privilege with those characteristics; [it] establishes hierarchy among the different groups and confers opportunity accordingly’.¹⁵ In emphasising pragmatic, everyday aspects of social identities, they develop Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s idea of ‘racial formation’: here the socially constructed nature of race receives emphasis.¹⁶ For Moya and Markus, race ‘emerges when groups are perceived to pose a threat [. . .] to each other’s worldview or way of life; and/or to justify the denigration and exploitation [. . .] of other groups while exalting one’s own group to claim an innate privilege’.¹⁷ Scholars of classical antiquity have, until recently, gravitated to the overlapping concept of ethnicity rather than race.

The value of Moya and Markus’s definition of ‘race as doing’ is that it points modern readers beyond the limits of representation to Capitein’s own agency. As we have seen, his portraiture marks race purely by pigmentation, while all other elements are entirely in keeping with a notional white equivalent. This suggests a kind of race effacement that is consistent with the brevity of Capitein’s own remarks on his enslaved past, while in a preface he devotes much more space to the praise of his generous patrons. His ostensible choice of joining both the WIC and the Church is curious, even if his historical context reminds us to suspend judgement as to what indeed constitutes free choice in the context of explicit enslavement in Africa and the New World and subtler coercion in the Netherlands. All told, this is not an invitation to excuse the adult Capitein as a facilitator of enslavement, if not more; rather, this serves as a recognition of the web of discourse and power within which Capitein was caught up in the world of the Netherlands’ seaborne empire as well as the Dutch Reformed Church.

By way of a coda, I consider it important to mention the ethical difficulty implicit in studying this particular topic and treatise, being a descendant of enslavement – also under the Dutch seaborne empire but from within the Indian Ocean basin rather than the Atlantic. It is from a South African perspective that I write these comments. Though slavery at the Cape of Good Hope ended officially in the 1830s, its long-term aftereffects are still sorely felt in the lives and mentalities of South Africans.¹⁸ If it is necessary to ask today how classics can be decolonised, then Capitein’s story seems dispiriting. Here we have focused on what renowned theorist and novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o would surely label a colonised mind.¹⁹ Whereas Ngũgĩ argues that writers use indigenous

languages to promote decolonisation, Capitein used the learned European language of Latin to write about enslavement. In the end we are left with a once enslaved Capitein who is writing at the heyday of the Dutch seaborne empire, a sometime chattel and later apologist, ostensibly making little of his own enslaved past yet at a deeper level co-opted thereby. But perhaps it is also possible to respond more optimistically, on the lines that Graeco-Roman studies contain the seeds of their own political refiguration – despite their entanglements or even because of them.

Notes

- 1 Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5, 1259a38–1260b26.
- 2 Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*; Parker, *The Agony of Asar*.
- 3 Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*.
- 4 Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 44–8.
- 5 There is a terminological problem in the English here, given that the Oxford English Dictionary connects ‘Moor, n.’ specifically with other regions, such as North Africa and Sri Lanka (in the latter case particularly for its Muslim population); the Latin term *Maurus* is also a specific ethnonym (Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*).
- 6 Both image and epigraph are found at <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-BI-1233>. The Dutch text reads as follows: ‘Jacobus Elisa Capitein, Africaansche Moor. Beroepen Predikant aan Kassel st. George op D’Elmina. Aanschouwer zie deez’Moor! Zijn vel is zwart maar wit / zijn ziel, daar JESUS zelf als Priester voor hem bidt. / Hij gaat Geloof, en Hoop, en Liefde aan Mooren leeren. Opdat zij, witgemaakt, met hem het LAM steeds eeren.’ Translation by Grant Parker.
- 7 Harrison, *Victorian Horace*.
- 8 Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 81.
- 9 Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5, 1259a38–1260b26.
- 10 Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery*, passage no. 2; Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery*, 11–14.
- 11 *De re publica*, 1548.
- 12 Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, 27–56.
- 13 Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 97.
- 14 The link between Africa and slavery is only made at a late stage, as Goldenberg shows in an extensive intellectual history of the Genesis passage in *Black and Slave*.
- 15 Markus and Moya, *Doing Race*, 21.
- 16 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.
- 17 Markus and Moya, *Doing Race*, 21.
- 18 Baderoon, *Regarding Muslims*.
- 19 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*.

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Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (*History of the art of antiquity*, 1764)

Extracts from 'Art among the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians', in *The History of Ancient Art*, translated from the German by G. Henry Lodge.¹ Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856. Commentary by Daniel Orrells.

The Egyptians have not departed much from their earliest style of art; and it could not easily reach the height to which it arrived among the Greeks. The cause may be found partly in their physical appearance; partly in their mode of thought; and not less in their customs and laws, especially those of a religious character; and also, in the science of their artists, and the estimation in which they were held.

[. . .]

Of the causes which impressed a peculiar character upon the art of the Egyptians, the first lies in the fact of their bodies: they did not possess those excellences that could stimulate the artist by ideas of high beauty. Though Nature had made the Egyptian women remarkably fertile, it was, regarding their physique, less kind to them than to the Greeks and the Etruscans. In proof of this, statues, obelisks, and engraved gems show that the form peculiar to them somewhat resembled that of the Chinese; and Aeschylus says that the Egyptians were, in their shape, different from the Greeks.² Their artists, therefore, could not seek variety, because it had no existence. In the steady, uniform climate of this land, Nature did not deviate from her extreme shape; for as in all things, so also here, it departs from an extreme more reluctantly than from a mean. The

very same form which Egyptian statues have can be observed in the heads of the figures painted on mummies, which, as also with the Ethiopians, were probably accurate likenesses of the deceased; for the Egyptians, in the preparation of the dead body, sought to retain everything, even the hairs of the eyelids, which would render it of easy recognition. It is probable that the custom among the Ethiopians of painting the figure of the dead upon their bodies was also derived from the Egyptians; for during the reign of Psammetichus, 240,000 inhabitants went from Egypt into Ethiopia, where they introduced their national manners and usages.³ However, as eighteen Ethiopian kings, whose reign occurs in the earliest periods of the country, had ruled in Egypt, the usage of which we speak may have been made by them common to both people.

The Egyptians were, besides, of a dark brown complexion, the same which has been given to the heads on painted mummies, and hence the word Αἰγυπτίᾶσαι [*Aigyuptiasai*] signifies ‘to be burnt by the sun’. Now as the faces of the mummies have one and the same colour, there is no ground for the assertion made by Alexander Gordon,⁴ who maintains that the complexion differed in different provinces.

But when Martial expresses a desire for a beautiful boy from Egypt, for sensual purposes, he is to be understood as meaning a boy, not of Egyptian, but of Greek parentage, as the dissolute morals of the youth in that country, and especially of those at Alexandria, are well known.⁵ The poet, however, adds, that a fair face in this land of brown skins, ‘dusky Egypt’,⁶ is the more highly to be prized in proportion to its rarity. The celebrated pantomime performer, Apolaustus of Memphis in Egypt, whom Lucius Verus took to Rome, and whose remembrance is preserved in several inscriptions, was a Greek of this kind.

An attempt has been made, on the authority of a passage in Aristotle,⁷ to show that the legbone of the Egyptians bowed outwardly. Those who bordered on the Ethiopians probably had, like them, sunken noses; and the Egyptian female figures, however narrow they may be across the hips, have excessively large breasts. Now, as the Egyptian artists imitated nature just as they found it – according to the testimony of a Church Father⁸ – we might certainly draw a conclusion from their figures about the female sex in their country. The physique of the Egyptians is far from being incompatible with a sound state of health, which the inhabitants of Upper Egypt in

particular, according to Herodotus,⁹ enjoyed far above other nations; and the same conclusion may also be drawn from the circumstance, that, in the countless heads of Egyptian mummies seen by Prince Radzivil, not a tooth was wanting, not even corroded.¹⁰ Moreover, we may find in the mummy at Bologna proof of what Pausanias has stated in regard to their extraordinary size, since he says that he has seen Celts who were as large as the dead bodies of the Egyptians; and his statement is confirmed by the unusual length of this mummy, which measures eleven Roman palms.¹¹

In the second place, in regard to the disposition and manner of thinking of the Egyptians, they do not appear to have been inclined to pleasure and joy; for music – by which the earliest Greeks strove to render the laws themselves more acceptable, and in which contests were instituted, even prior to the age of Homer – was not especially cultivated in Egypt; it is, indeed, asserted that it was prohibited; and the same is said also of poetry.¹² According to Strabo, no instrument was played either in their temples or at their sacrifices.¹³ But this does not exclude music among the Egyptians generally; or it must be understood only of the earliest periods; for we know that women conducted Apis [ancient Egyptian bull cult] with music to the banks of the Nile; and Egyptians are represented playing on instruments, both in the mosaic of the temple of Fortune at Palestrina, and in two Herculaneum paintings.

Because of this turn of mind, the Egyptians sought to excite their imaginations and exhilarate their minds by violent means; and their thoughts passed beyond the natural and were occupied with the mysterious. Hence, the melancholy of this nation produced the first hermits; and a modern writer¹⁴ claims to have discovered somewhere that, at the close of the fourth century, there were 70,000 monks in Lower Egypt alone. Another consequence of this temper of mind was that the Egyptians were willing to be governed by severe laws, and positively could not exist without a king;¹⁵ this is probably the reason why Egypt is termed by Homer ‘bitter Egypt’.¹⁶ In their usages and religious forms, the Egyptians insisted upon a strict observance of the primitive ordinances, even under the Roman emperors – not only in Upper Egypt, but also at Alexandria itself; for as late as the time of the Emperor Hadrian, an insurrection broke out because no ox could be found to represent the god Apis; indeed, the enmity of one city towards another, on account of their deities, was still fresh at that time. The assertion of a few modern

authors – on testimony falsely attributed to Herodotus and Diodorus – that the religious ceremonial of the Egyptians, and their custom of embalming the dead, had been utterly and forever abolished by Cambyses, is so untrue, that even the Greeks, at a later date than this, allowed their own dead to be prepared after the Egyptian manner, as I have shown elsewhere,¹⁷ by that mummy with the word *εὐτυχί* [*eutuchi*, ‘to good fortune’] on its breast, which was formerly in the Della Valle mansion at Rome, and is at present among the antiquities in Dresden. Now, as the Egyptians, under the successors of Cambyses, revolted more than once, and elected kings from among themselves, who, by the aid of the Greeks, were enabled to maintain their authority for some time, it is probable that, during these intervals, they also returned to their former custom.

That the Egyptians, under the Roman Emperors, still adhered to their ancient religious forms, even the statues of Antinous may testify; two of them stand at Tivoli, and one in the Capitoline Museum, and they are shaped after the manner of Egyptian statues, and have the form under which he was worshipped in this country, especially in the city where he lay buried, which, from him, received the name Antinoea. A figure in marble resembling the Capitoline, and, like it, somewhat larger than life, but without its proper head, is in the garden of the Barberini palace, and a third, about three palms [66.9 cm] in height, is in the Borghese villa; these have the stiff attitude, with the arms hanging perpendicularly by the sides, which belongs to the most ancient Egyptian figures. We see, therefore, that Hadrian was obliged to give to the image of Antinous, in order that he might become to the Egyptians an object of reverence, a shape that was pleasing to them, and the only one which was popular.

The abhorrence felt by the Egyptians for Greek customs – especially before they fell under the sovereignty of the Greeks – strengthened them in their religious use of the form which they had anciently adopted for the images of their worship; and this feeling, necessarily, would make their artists very indifferent to the art of other nations; and, consequently, would check the progress of knowledge as well as of art. As their physicians would not prescribe any other remedies than those recorded in the sacred books, so their artists were not permitted to deviate from the ancient style; for their laws allowed no further scope to the mind than mere imitation of their forefathers and prohibited all innovations. Hence, as Plato informs us,¹⁸ statues which had been executed in his time in Egypt did not

differ, either in shape or in any other respect, from those which were more than a thousand years old. He is, however, to be understood as speaking of works which were wrought by native artists prior to the era of Greek rule in Egypt. The observance of this law could not be violated, because it, like the entire constitution of the Egyptian form of government, was based on their religion. For, among the Egyptians, the art of forming figures in human shape seems to have been restricted to their deities, the kings with their families, and the priests – except for the figures which were carved on public edifices; that is to say, to a single kind of image. But the gods of the Egyptians were kings by whom the country had been governed at some previous time, or at least they were regarded as deities; so too the earliest kings were priests; and if statues were erected to any other persons, no one certainly knows the fact, and no writer even mentions it.

Finally, one of the causes concurring to produce that condition of art in Egypt which I have noticed lies in the estimation and knowledge of their artists, who were viewed in the light of artisans, and were classed in the lowest rank. No one, from natural inclination, or special impulse, selected art as his pursuit, but the son followed, as in all crafts and professions, the mode of life of his father, and set his foot in the tracks of his predecessor, so that no one appears to have left a footprint which strictly could be called his own. Consequently, there cannot have been different schools of art in Egypt, as there were in Greece. In such a system of government neither the education nor the circumstances of artists could be of a kind that was able to elevate their minds to venture up the heights of art; there were, also, neither privileges nor honours to be expected when they had produced anything extraordinary. Hence the word image-cutter applies to the artists of the Egyptian statues in its proper signification; they chiselled out their figures after an established measure and form, and therefore the law not to depart therefrom was probably not a harsh law to them. The name of only one Egyptian sculptor has been preserved under a Greek pronunciation; he was called Memnon and had made three statues at the entrance of a temple in Thebes, one of which was the largest in Egypt.

Regarding science, Egyptian artists must of necessity have been deficient in one of the most important points of art, namely in knowledge of anatomy – a science which was not only uncultivated

in Egypt, as in China, but also unknown. Respect for the dead would by no means have allowed the dissection of a body to be made; indeed, as we are informed by Diodorus,¹⁹ it was regarded as homicide to make merely an incision into it. Hence even the Paraschistes,²⁰ as the Greeks termed him, or he who opened the body by an incision into the side preparatory for embalming, was obliged to flee immediately from the spot after the performance of his duty, in order to save himself from the relatives of the deceased, and from others, bystanders, who followed him with curses and stones. The slight knowledge of the Egyptian artists in anatomy shows itself, in fact, not only in the incorrect rendering of some parts, but it might also be inferred from the feeble markings of the muscles and bones. In Egypt, anatomy did not extend beyond the internal parts or entrails; and even this limited knowledge, which was transmitted from father to son in the guild of this class of persons, probably remained a secret to others; for in the preparation of the dead body, no one was present but them.

[. . .]

In the more ancient style, the drawing of the nude figure has distinct and intelligible characteristics, which distinguish it not only from the drawing of other nations, but also from their own later style. These qualities exist, and are to be defined, not only in the outline of the whole figure, but also in the drawing and form of each particular part. The general and principal characteristic of the drawing of the nude figure in this style is that of forming its contour by straight or nearly straight lines – an attribute which belongs also to their architecture, and their embellishments. Hence on the one hand the Graces – divinities unknown to the Egyptians – are wanting in Egyptian figures; and on the other, the picturesque; both of which deficiencies Strabo infers from a temple at Memphis.²¹ The attitude of the figures is stiff and constrained; but feet, placed parallel and close together – which a few ancient writers apparently indicate as a universal mark of distinction of Egyptian figures, and which exist in the earliest Etruscan figures of bronze – are found only in seated figures. Feet which are of genuine antiquity stand parallel, and not outwards; but, like parallel lines, one is extended before the other. In a male figure fourteen palms [3.12 m] in height, in the Albani villa, the distance between the two feet is more than three palms [66.9 cm]. The arms of male figures hang straight down along the sides, to which they are united, as if firmly pressed

towards them; consequently, such figures have no action at all – action being expressed principally through the movement of the arms and hands. The motionless state of these parts is no proof of a want of skill in the artists, but of a rule established and adopted in statues, according to which they must be executed after one and the same model.

[. . .]

Let it be considered that a resemblance may be traced between Egyptian art, and the form of the country at the present day; and the history of it may be compared with an extensive desolate plain, which can be overlooked from two or three lofty towers. The entire circuit of ancient Egyptian art has two periods. Works from both are remaining; and from them we can form a reasonable judgement as to the art of the age in which they were executed. On the other hand, Greek and Etruscan art may be compared with the countries of Greece and Etruria, which are full of mountain ranges, and cannot therefore be overlooked; and hence I believe that, in the present treatise, I have thrown upon Egyptian art all the light needed.

[. . .]

In conclusion, two general remarks may still be subjoined regarding the art of the Southern and Eastern nations collectively, which this second book has treated. If we consider the monarchical form of government among the Egyptians, as well as the Phoenicians and Persians, where the absolute ruler shared the highest honour with not one of the people, we can imagine that no other individual was rewarded by statues for his meritorious services to his native country, as was the case in free states, both ancient and modern; we cannot, moreover, find any account of such an expression of gratitude having been received by a subject of these kingdoms. Carthage, indeed, was a free state in the country of the Phoenicians and was governed by its own laws; but the mutual jealousy of two powerful parties would have contested the honour of immortality to any one citizen. A general stood in danger of expiating each mistake by his head; and history makes no mention of great testimonials of honour among them. Consequently, art in these nations was mostly dependent on religion, and could derive little advantage and increase from the habits of life of the common people. The artist's conceptions were, therefore, far more limited than among the Greeks, and his genius was tied by superstition to adopted forms.

No antique statues are more shattered than the Egyptian, especially those of black stone. The violence of man contented itself with striking off the heads and arms of Greek statues, and tumbling from its base the remaining portion, which was broken by the fall; but the Egyptian statues, and likewise those executed by Greek artists from Egyptian stones – as these would have suffered nothing from being thrown over – were beaten to pieces with great violence; and the heads, which would have remained uninjured by being knocked off and flung away, were found shattered into many fragments. This violence was probably occasioned by the black colour of the statue, and the idea, originating therefrom, that they were the works of the Prince of Darkness, and images of evil spirits, whom the imagination pictured as black shapes.

[. . .]

Finally, there remain to be noticed, as something singular, a few small bronze figures, shaped in the Egyptian style, but marked with Arabic letters. Three of them are familiar to me; one of them belonged to the elder Assemani,²² now dead, custodian of the Vatican library; another is in the gallery of the Roman College; each of them is about a palm in height, and seated, and the latter has Arabic writing on both thighs, on the back, and on the top of the flat cap; the third – which was in the museum of the Count Caylus²³ – is standing, and has Arabic writing on its back. The two former were found among the Druses, a tribe dwelling on Mount Lebanon; and it is probable that the third figure also may have come from the same place. They are supposed to be descendants of the Franks who took refuge there during the Crusades; they wish to be styled Christians, but still they worship certain idols, like those mentioned, very secretly, from fear of the Turks; and as they seldom allow the figures to be seen, they are consequently to be regarded as a rarity in Europe.

* * *

Commentary by Daniel Orrells

Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) was an eighteenth-century scholar. He was born as a Lutheran and son of a cobbler in a town called Stendal in the Margraviate of Brandenburg (in present-day Germany). While studying theology and taking medical classes at university,

Winckelmann immersed himself in ancient Greek literature in his spare time, an interest which was relatively unusual in the early eighteenth century. After university, Winckelmann became a schoolteacher and tutor, but he did not enjoy his duties.

In 1748, he wrote to Count Heinrich von Büнау, a statesman and historian in the Electorate of Saxony, about the value he set on ancient Greek literature. Büнау appointed Winckelmann secretary of his library in the Schloss Nöthnitz. The library contained thousands of volumes, and while Winckelmann's main duty was to assist Büнау, who was writing a book on the Holy Roman Empire, Winckelmann took advantage of the library's holdings and steeped himself in classical literature and contemporary intellectuals of the Enlightenment. During these years, Winckelmann visited Dresden, the capital of Saxony, which was not far away. He was captivated by the artistic life of this vibrant city, where artists were beginning to develop a neoclassical visual vocabulary inspired by Renaissance artists such as Raphael.

In 1754, Winckelmann converted to Roman Catholicism, probably to facilitate travel to Rome. In 1755, he published *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Thoughts on the imitation of Greek works in painting and sculpture), which exhorted modern artists to turn away from Roman-inspired baroque art and to look back to the ancient Greeks. Winckelmann's conversion and his publication, which was attracting attention, helped him win a pension from Augustus III, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, to support his studies of ancient art. Winckelmann arrived in Rome in November 1755 and lived there for the rest of his life, working for a series of cardinals and as a guide for wealthy grand tourists. In Rome, Winckelmann produced a string of antiquarian publications, the most famous being his 1764 *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (*History of the art of antiquity*). Winckelmann died only four years later. He was murdered in Trieste by a fellow traveller in his hotel bed.

Winckelmann's remarkable life story was quickly romanticised into a tale of a poor boy's rise to scholarly eminence at the centre of antiquarian learning in the eighteenth century. As classical studies was being organised and institutionalised into an academic discipline, Winckelmann would become lionised as a founding father of the subject. His 1764 *History* is certainly a remarkable work of Enlightenment scholarship: it is a thrilling read. Winckelmann took advantage of his residency in Rome to gather the relics of antiquity scattered across the city's collections into a narrative of ancient art which set out 'the origin, growth, change, and fall of art'.²⁴ Winckelmann inserted ancient artefacts

and objects in a historical narrative, according to their 'national' style – were they Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek or Roman? And then within each ancient culture, Winckelmann traced out the development and subsequent decline of artistic production. The book was clearly an important achievement: it constructed a narrative of archaic beginnings, classical achievement and decadent decline which would captivate classicists well into the twentieth century. Crucially, ancient art and archaeology were used by Winckelmann to tell a story about the character and nature of different ancient societies. And just as Winckelmann had praised the ancient Greeks in his 1755 publication, so again in his *History* he placed Greek art above that of Egypt, Rome and the rest of the Mediterranean.

Winckelmann emphasised the differences between the art of the Greeks and that of other ancient cultures. Firstly, Greece's climate was more conducive to creative, inquiring minds: 'The influence of climate must invigorate the seed from which art is to germinate, and Greece was the preferred soil for this seed.' Secondly, 'freedom', as Winckelmann put it, 'always had a seat in Greece, even beside the thrones of the kings. [. . .] [T]o be learned in the modern sense of the word was easy in their best period [fifth century BCE], and everyone could become wise.'²⁵ Winckelmann's ancient Greece was a paradise for artists, some of whom had created the most beautiful works ever. The Greeks did not just successfully imitate what they saw in the world around them, thereby producing more realistic representations than the Egyptians and the Etruscans; the Greeks produced idealised images of what the natural world had produced. Despite Socrates' critiques of mimesis in *The Republic*, Winckelmann was inspired by Plato's theory of the forms to argue that contemplating classical Greek art – sculpture especially – led the beholder to envision loftier ideas and ideals beyond the visible. Notwithstanding his conversion, Winckelmann's discussion of Greek art was profoundly influenced by his Lutheran upbringing: the Reformation had lambasted Catholic images of Jesus Christ. The physical object, for Winckelmann, provided access to a spiritual realm.²⁶

Winckelmann's picture of the free and beauty-loving Greeks relied on a contrast with Egypt, whose 'art' remained stunted and could not progress because the Egyptians were not beautiful enough physical models for Egyptian artists. As the extract shows, Winckelmann compared Egyptians to Chinese people, and he also described Egyptians as being of a 'dark brown colour'. He can tell this, he says, from Egyptian paintings from sarcophagi. Winckelmann's confused racialisation of the Egyptians reflected his reading: seventeenth-century scholars had compared Egyptian hieroglyphs to Chinese ideographs and contemporary

European scholars increasingly saw Africans as 'dark' or 'black'.²⁷ Egyptian religion was 'mysterious' rather than philosophical (and 'Protestant') like the Greek.

Egyptian bodies in Winckelmann's eyes were not beautiful and he was especially derogatory about female Egyptian bodies, in contrast to the beautiful male Greek bodies he admired. As such, he viewed Egyptian sculpture as fixed, forced and immobile.²⁸ Winckelmann never visited Greece. It was a dematerialised place of the imagination, which is reflected in his idealised view of Greek art. Winckelmann also never went to Egypt: it was a strange, foreign land which Winckelmann saw through the eyes of other writers, such as Herodotus. This frame of reference ensured that Winckelmann often had a Hellenocentric perspective which polarised the world into Greeks and non-Greeks/barbarians. When discussing Egyptian sphinxes, Winckelmann noted that Herodotus called them 'ἄνδρόσφιγγες' ('man-sphinxes', 2.175), which Winckelmann interpreted as indicating their 'double sex'. In Winckelmann's eyes, 'Egyptian sphinxes are androgynous, that is, they are female in the front, with a female head, and male in the rear, where they display testicles.'²⁹ These sorts of bodies stood in stark contrast to other androgynous bodies discussed in the *History* – the Greek male androgynes such as Apollo, Bacchus and Antinous, which Winckelmann greatly esteemed. The contrast between beautiful effete male youth and masculine women became a prevalent opposition in European art theory and philosophy: the masculine woman was a widespread figure of anxiety for male writers, worried about what they saw as the intrusion of women into male homosocial spheres of political power, socioeconomic privilege and education.

Winckelmann depicted the Egyptians as preferring monarchical rule, and not cheerful like the Greeks, but melancholic: 'Hence, the melancholy of this nation produced the first hermits.' For Winckelmann, the Egyptians wished to be kept under strict laws and they 'could not exist without a king' (Winckelmann references Herodotus, *Histories* 2.147), which he posits as 'the reason why Egypt is termed by Homer "bitter Egypt"' (see, for instance, *Odyssey* 17.448). Monarchical government did not allow for the visual representation of great men and women to flourish, unlike in 'free states, both ancient and modern', as Winckelmann put it:

In such a system of government neither the education nor the circumstances of artists could be of a kind that was able to elevate their minds to venture up the heights of art; there were, also, neither

privileges nor honours to be expected when they had produced anything extraordinary.

Egyptian artists were not granted the freedom to think and creatively roam the way Greek artists were. Winckelmann reinforced a common Enlightenment-period contrast between Oriental tyranny and European liberty. Although subsequent archaeological scholarship would supersede many of his judgements about ancient artefacts, Winckelmann's philhellenism would become profoundly influential. Between 1849 and 1873, Giles Henry Lodge (1805–88), a prominent politician in Boston, Massachusetts, translated Winckelmann's history of ancient art into English, ensuring that his contrast between Egyptian and Greek cultures would continue to influence the Western cultural imagination. It is Lodge's translation which has been reproduced above.

Winckelmann divided Egyptian art into three chronologically ordered styles, and stated: 'The Egyptians have not departed much from their earliest style of art; and it could not easily reach the height to which it arrived among the Greeks.' In the earlier, Pharaonic style, 'the attitude of the figures is stiff and constrained.' For instance, 'the motionless state of these parts [the arms and the hands] is no proof of a want of skill in the artists, but of a rule established and adopted in statues, according to which they must be executed after one and the same model.' Winckelmann thought Egyptian artists were not free to think under the pharaohs. The subsequent style reflected the rule of the Persians and then the Greeks: Winckelmann felt able to identify in some Egyptian faces that they 'approach[ed] still more a Greek form'.³⁰ The final period was the production of art in Egypt under Hadrian, when '[s]ome [artworks] are exact copies of the oldest Egyptian figures; others combine Egyptian art with that of the Greeks'.³¹ For Winckelmann, then, Egyptian art only improved once Egypt was ruled by external powers. If Winckelmann's narrative of Egyptian art was an important step in antiquarian scholarship because it was one of the first to arrange Egyptian artefacts into a chronological order by dating and distinguishing Pharaonic- and Roman-period Egyptian sculpture, Winckelmann's view of Egyptian art was also influenced by and therefore reconfirmed the racialised thinking of the Enlightenment.

It is very interesting that Winckelmann argued that it was the colonisation of Egypt by the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans which facilitated improvements in the state of Egyptian art. This can be contrasted with much contemporary eighteenth-century antiquarian scholarship, which argued, conversely, that the Egyptians taught the

Greeks various arts and sciences. Winckelmann himself admitted this possibility: '[I]t is likely that the Phoenicians, who introduced the sciences to the Greeks, also planted the arts in Greece'; 'it seems that the Phoenicians could have learned from the Egyptians'.³² Nevertheless, as we have seen above, Winckelmann emphasised the Greeks' autonomous artistic development due to the natural environment and their political culture. Winckelmann thus focused his attention instead on the move in the opposite direction: it is the Persians, the Greeks and then the Romans who colonised Egypt and taught the Egyptians, rather than the other way round.

Winckelmann's account contains two telling silences. Firstly, although he reverses the direction of the travel of the arts, thereby explicitly referring to the subject of ancient colonisation, he says nothing about modern imperial travel to the African continent and nothing about the slave trade, even though the example he uses of the more Greek-looking Egyptian body is that of Antinous, Hadrian's slave-lover. Winckelmann sums up his discussion of Egyptian art by saying that 'the history of it may be compared with an extensive desolate plain, which can be overlooked from two or three lofty towers'. There was barely anything to see. Winckelmann explicitly positions himself as an imperial-colonial ruler using his gaze to control the land he rules over. We saw above how the bodies of Egyptian sculptures – the double-sexed sphinxes – could look foreign and strange, and yet, at the same time, Egypt was yoked under the controlling power gaze of the Westerner's eye. In Edward Said's 1978 *Orientalism* and Homi Bhabha's 1995 *The location of culture*, these scholars explore the contradiction at the heart of European constructions of the 'Orient' as both mysterious and inscrutable and as subject to the increasing disciplinary powers of Western military and political hegemony.

Winckelmann only mentions modern European travel to the East in the very strange final paragraph of his chapter when he writes of the Druze – a monotheistic sect which he claims date back to the Frankish Crusaders. They live, Winckelmann says, in the Ottoman Empire and worship idols, pretending not to be the Christians they really are. Modern colonisation is only obliquely referred to, then, in connection with Ottoman imperialism over 'European' subjects. This issue would certainly have been on the minds of contemporary antiquarian scholars: in James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's 1762 volume *The Antiquities of Athens*, for example, the authors lamented the Ottoman neglect and desecration of ancient Athenian architecture and dreamed of the emancipation of Greece from the 'Orient'. Rather than any mention of modern European imperial

engagement with Asia or Africa, Winckelmann closes his discussion of Egyptian and Eastern art with a remark about an underground Christian sect, originally a Germanic tribe, living in fear of persecution by the 'Turks'.

Another topic which was of great interest in the second half of the eighteenth century is the comparison of African bodies to Hellenising European paradigms of beauty. However, Winckelmann does not discuss this, even though his account relies on a contrast between Egyptian and Greek bodies, which allows him to talk about the androgynous Egyptian sphinxes and the Greek-Egyptian Antinous. In 1765, a poem called *The Sable Venus* was published about the transportation of slaves from Angola to the West Indies. It had been penned by an Anglican clergyman, Isaac Teale (d. 1764). It was republished in 1792 and again in 1793, when it was printed in a history of the West Indies which defended the slave trade and thereby gained a wide readership. In 1794 the poem was printed yet again, along with a frontispiece parodying neoclassical representations of the goddess Venus (see [Figure 8.1](#)). The poem focalises the white male European imperial gaze and eroticised the female African body; it is a celebration of racialised sexual exploitation, rather than of black beauty. The poem describes the so-called 'Sable Venus' on her voyage from Angola to the West Indies in a sea-chariot, which is drawn by fish with wings. In the central episode of the poem, she is met and seduced by Neptune, who is disguised as a British naval captain. The scene is a racist aestheticisation of rape on board a slave ship.³³

The eroticisation of the female African body was both encouraged and mocked in European colonial discourse. The coloniser sought to civilise and Christianise enslaved African bodies and souls and to discipline Africans into European standards of beauty, whilst simultaneously emphasising the impossibility of any such improvement, thereby accentuating the differences between European and African bodies. Winckelmann was writing about the ancient colonisation of Egypt and was imagining the Egyptians improving their representation of the body in art – making it more Greek – at a time when such an idea was becoming not only an erotic fantasy but also a political and social anxiety for white European male imperial power in the late eighteenth century.

Robin Coste Lewis's 2015 *Voyage of the Sable Venus* helps us hear those silences in Winckelmann's text. Lewis's remarkable poem consists 'solely and entirely of the titles, catalog entries, or exhibit labels of Western art objects in which a black female figure is present, dating from 30,000 BCE to the present'.³⁴ The poem highlights the collusion of the Western heritage industry – the university disciplines of classical studies, archaeology and art history as well as institutions – in the colonisation

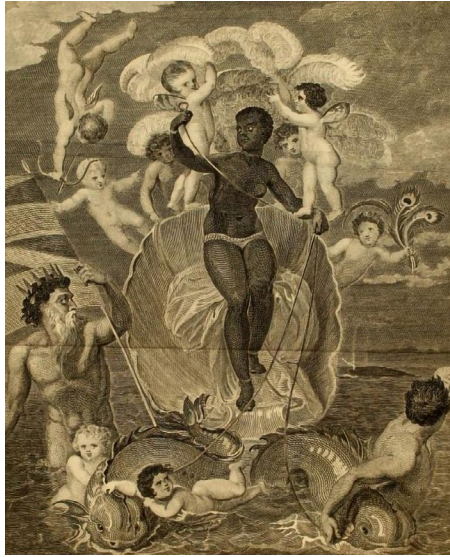


Figure 8.1: *Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies*, designed by Thomas Stothard and engraved by William Grainger, (1801). (Source: Private collection.)

of African heritage. Lewis’s poetic catalogue of labels illuminates the presence of representations of African peoples – often illegally acquired – in Western art galleries and museums.³⁵ Whereas Winckelmann was silent about the transportation of enslaved African bodies and African art from Africa to Europe and North America – in fact, as we saw, he reversed the direction of imperial-colonial travel – Lewis’s poem highlights this issue. ‘Catalog 1: ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME’, which consists of museum labels from ‘Graeco-Roman antiquity’, opens:

Statuette of a Woman Reduced
To the Shape of a Flat Paddle

Statuette of a Black Slave Girl
Right Half of Body and Head Missing

Head of a Young Black Woman Fragment
From a Statuette of a Black Dancing Girl³⁶

While it feels entirely normal to see fragmentary relics of sculptures in museum galleries, Lewis's recontextualisation of these labels produces a disturbing defamiliarisation, making these exhibits appear as a record of unbearable atrocities enacted on enslaved African peoples. Lewis sharply mocks the scholarly aesthetic discourse used since the eighteenth century – by writers like Winckelmann – to describe representations of African peoples:

inkwell
in the form of a crouching
Negro Negro
seated writing on
a scroll³⁷

Lewis reveals the long history of the objectification of Black bodies in Western art. The phrase 'crouching Negro' reminds us of the horrifying conditions Africans were forced to suffer in the hold of a slave ship or kneeling in supplication. And yet the image of a writer also attests to the history of Black authors and artists who have contested the Western, classical aesthetic frames in which they have been circumscribed.

Lewis also spotlights the politics of emphasising the similarities between African and European bodies. While Winckelmann wrote about the Greeks and Romans improving Egyptian artistic representations of the body – making them more Greek – he was writing, as we just explored, in a wider context which both eroticised and worried about the idea that African bodies could be made desirable and beautiful according to Western standards. Lewis's stitching together of museum labels highlights the affirmative and positive representations of women in art history, often illuminating the points of contact between African and Graeco-Roman artistic traditions which Winckelmann had sought to separate through contrasting Egyptian and Greek artistic traditions. For instance, this can be seen in 'CATALOG 2: ANCIENT EGYPT':

Aphro
Dite rising from the bath. I Sis Aphro
Dite clasping a garment³⁸

Following a tradition of female African American writing about aesthetics, such as work by Pauline Hopkins (see Chapter 14), Lewis spotlights the

racist politics of white Euro-American discourses of beauty. Lewis's splitting up of the names 'Aphrodite' and 'Isis' repositions the Greeks and the Egyptians as sororal partners.³⁹ If Winckelmann's analysis of Egyptian art and archaeology is a very important chapter in the history of the classical tradition, then Black feminist intellectuals like Lewis help us see how modern discourses of race have formed and shaped the history of classical scholarship.

Notes

- 1 Lodge's translation has been lightly amended for the sake of clarity.
- 2 Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 496–8.
- 3 Herodotus, *Histories* 2.30.
- 4 A Scottish antiquarian (c. 1692–1755).
- 5 Martial, *Epigrams* 4.42.
- 6 Martial, *Epigrams* 4.42.5.
- 7 *Problems*, 14.4.909a27.
- 8 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Ten Discourses on Providence* 3.
- 9 *Histories* 2.77.3.
- 10 Prince Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł was a Polish-Lithuanian nobleman who published in 1601 an account of his eventful pilgrimage to the Holy Land.
- 11 Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.35.5. Eleven Roman palms are 2.45 metres.
- 12 Winckelmann footnotes here Dio Chrysostom (11.42) who nevertheless only talks about poetry.
- 13 Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.44.
- 14 Claude Fleury (1640–1723), French historian of the Church.
- 15 Winckelmann refers to Herodotus, *Histories* 2.147.2.
- 16 *Odyssey* 17.448.
- 17 *Report on a Mummy* (1756).
- 18 *Laws* 656e–657a.
- 19 *Universal History* 1.91.4
- 20 Literally, 'ripper of corpses', i.e. for the purposes of embalming: see Diodorus, 1.91.4.
- 21 Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.28.
- 22 Giuseppe Simone Assemani (1686/7–1768).
- 23 Comte de Caylus, a French antiquarian (1692–1765).
- 24 Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 71. (All quotations from Winckelmann in the commentary essay which do not come from the excerpt of Winckelmann's text in Lodge's translation have been sourced from Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* and are referenced as such in these notes.)
- 25 Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 186, 187, 188.
- 26 Squire, *Image and Text*, 15–57.
- 27 See Bindman, *From Ape to Apollo*.
- 28 Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 131, 132.
- 29 Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 135.
- 30 Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 138.
- 31 Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 139.
- 32 Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 146–7.
- 33 See Smith McCrea, 'Dis-ordering the world' and Gilroy-Ware, 'Repairing the Sable Venus' for detailed discussions of this image (Figure 8.1) and this poem.
- 34 Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, 35.
- 35 See Hicks, *The Brutish Museums*.
- 36 Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, 43.
- 37 Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, 50.
- 38 Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, 56.
- 39 See Roynon, 'Constructing selfhood'.

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Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773)

'To Maecenas' and 'Niobe in Distress for her Children slain by Apollo, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, and from a view of the Painting of Mr. Richard Wilson', in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. (London: A. Bell, 1773). Commentary by Tracey Walters.

'To Maecenas'

- 1 Maecenas, you, beneath the myrtle shade,
Read o'er what poets sung, and shepherds play'd.
What felt those poets but you feel the same?
Does not your soul possess the sacred flame?
- 5 Their noble strains your equal genius shares
In softer language, and diviner airs.

- While Homer paints lo! circumfus'd in air,
Celestial Gods in mortal forms appear;
Swift as they move hear each recess rebound,
- 10 Heav'n quakes, earth trembles, and the shores resound.
Great Sire of verse, before my mortal eyes,
The lightnings blaze across the vaulted skies,
And, as the thunder shakes the heav'nly plains,
A deep-felt horror thrills through all my veins.
 - 15 When gentler strains demand thy graceful song,

The length'ning line moves languishing along.
When great Patroclus courts Achilles' aid,
The grateful tribute of my tears is paid;
Prone on the shore he feels the pangs of love,
20 And stern Pelides tend'rest passions move.

Great Maro's strain in heav'nly numbers flows,
The Nine inspire, and all the bosom glows.
O could I rival thine and Virgil's page,
Or claim the Muses with the Mantuan Sage;
25 Soon the same beauties should my mind adorn,
And the same ardors in my soul should burn:
Then should my song in bolder notes arise,
And all my numbers pleasingly surprise;
But here I sit, and mourn a grov'ling mind,
30 That fain would mount, and ride upon the wind.

Not you, my friend, these plaintive strains become,
Not you, whose bosom is the Muses home;
When they from tow'ring Helicon retire,
They fan in you the bright immortal fire,
35 But I less happy, cannot raise the song,
The fault'ring music dies upon my tongue.

The happier Terence all the choir inspir'd,
His soul replenish'd, and his bosom fir'd;
But say, ye Muses, why this partial grace,
40 To one alone of Afric's sable race;
From age to age transmitting thus his name
With the first glory in the rolls of fame?

Thy virtues, great Maecenas! shall be sung
In praise of him, from whom those virtues sprung:

- 45 While blooming wreaths around thy temples spread,
I'll snatch a laurel from thine honour'd head,
While you indulgent smile upon the deed.

As long as Thames in streams majestic flows,
Or Naiads in their oozy beds repose,

- 50 While Phœbus reigns above the starry train,
While bright Aurora purples o'er the main,
So long, great Sir, the muse thy praise shall sing,
So long thy praise shall make Parnassus ring:
Then grant, Maecenas, thy paternal rays,
55 Hear me propitious, and defend my lays.

**Niobe in Distress for her Children slain by Apollo, from
Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, and from a view of the
Painting of Mr. Richard Wilson**

- 1 APOLLO's wrath to man, the dreadful spring
Of ills innum'rous, tuneful goddess, sing!
Thou who did'st first th' ideal pencil give,
And taught'st the painter in his works to live,
5 Inspire with glowing energy of thought,
What Wilson painted, and what Ovid wrote.
Muse! lend thy aid, nor let me sue in vain,
Tho' last and meanest of the rhyming train!
O guide my pen in lofty strains to show
10 The Phrygian queen, all beautiful in woe.
'Twas where Maeonia spreads her wide domain
Niobe dwelt, and held her potent reign:
See in her hand the regal sceptre shine,
The wealthy heir of Tantalus divine,
15 He most distinguish'd by Dodonean Jove,
To approach the tables of the gods above:
Her grandsire Atlas, who with mighty pains

- Th' ethereal axis on his neck sustains;
Her other grandsire on the throne on high
20 Rolls the loud-pealing thunder thro' the sky.
Her spouse, Amphion, who from Jove too springs,
Divinely taught to sweep the sounding strings.
Seven sprightly sons the royal bed adorn,
Seven daughters beauteous as the op'ning morn,
25 As when Aurora fills the ravish'd sight,
And decks the orient realms with rosy light
From their bright eyes the living splendors play,
Nor can beholders bear the flashing ray.
Wherever, Niobe, thou turn'st thine eyes,
30 New beauties kindle, and new joys arise!
But thou had'st far the happier mother prov'd,
If this fair offspring had been less belov'd:
What if their charms exceed Aurora's teint.
No words could tell them, and no pencil paint,
35 Thy love too vehement hastens to destroy
Each blooming maid, and each celestial boy.
Now Manto comes, endu'd with mighty skill,
The past to explore, the future to reveal.
Thro' Thebes' wide streets Tiresia's daughter came,
40 Divine Latona's mandate to proclaim:
The Theban maids to hear the orders ran,
When thus Maeonia's prophetess began:
'Go, Thebans! great Latona's will obey,
'And pious tribute at her altars pay:
45 'With rights divine, the goddess be implor'd,
'Nor be her sacred offspring unador'd.'
Thus Manto spoke. The Theban maids obey,
And pious tribute to the goddess pay.
The rich perfumes ascend in waving spires,
50 And altars blaze with consecrated fires;

The fair assembly moves with graceful air,
 And leaves of laurel bind the flowing hair.
 Niobe comes with all her royal race,
 With charms unnumber'd, and superior grace:
 55 Her Phrygian garments of delightful hue,
 Inwove with gold, refulgent to the view,
 Beyond description beautiful she moves
 Like heav'nly Venus, 'midst her smiles and loves:
 She views around the supplicating train,
 60 And shakes her graceful head with stern disdain,
 Proudly she turns around her lofty eyes,
 And thus reviles celestial deities:
 'What madness drives the Theban ladies fair
 'To give their incense to surrounding air?
 65 'Say why this new sprung deity preferr'd?
 'Why vainly fancy your petitions heard?
 'Or say why Coeus' offspring is obey'd,
 'While to my goddessship no tribute's paid?
 'For me no altars blaze with living fires,
 70 'No bullock bleeds, no frankincense transpires,
 'Tho' Cadmus' palace, not unknown to fame,
 'And Phrygian nations all revere my name.
 'Where'er I turn my eyes vast wealth I find,
 'Lo! here an empress with a goddess join'd.
 75 'What, shall a Titaness be deify'd,
 'To whom the spacious earth a couch deny'd!
 'Nor heav'n, nor earth, nor sea receiv'd your queen,
 'Till pitying Delos took the wand'rer in.
 'Round me what a large progeny is spread!
 80 'No frowns of fortune has my soul to dread.
 'What if indignant she decrease my train
 'More than Latona's number will remain;
 'Then hence, ye Theban dames, hence haste away,

- 'Nor longer off'rings to Latona pay;
 85 'Regard the orders of Amphion's spouse,
 'And take the leaves of laurel from your brows.'
 Niobe spoke. The Theban maids obey'd,
 Their brows unbound, and left the rights unpaid.
 The angry goddess heard, then silence broke
 90 On Cynthus' summit, and indignant spoke;
 'Phoebus! behold, thy mother in disgrace,
 'Who to no goddess yields the prior place
 'Except to Juno's self, who reigns above,
 'The spouse and sister of the thund'ring Jove.
 95 'Niobe, sprung from Tantalus, inspires
 'Each Theban bosom with rebellious fires;
 'No reason her imperious temper quells,
 'But all her father in her tongue rebels;
 'Wrap her own sons for her blaspheming breath,
 100 'Apollo! wrap them in the shades of death.'
 Latona ceas'd, and ardent thus replies
 The God, whose glory decks th' expanded skies.
 'Cease thy complaints, mine be the task assign'd
 'To punish pride, and scourge the rebel mind.'
 105 This Phoebe join'd. – They wing their instant flight;
 Thebes trembled as th' immortal pow'rs alight.
 With clouds incompass'd glorious Phoebus stands;
 The feather'd vengeance quiv'ring in his hands.
 Near Cadmus' walls a plain extended lay,
 110 Where Thebes' young princes pass'd in sport the day:
 There the bold coursers bounded o'er the plains,
 While their great masters held the golden reins.
 Ismenus first the racing pastime led,
 And rul'd the fury of his flying steed.
 115 'Ah me,' he sudden cries, with shrieking breath,
 While in his breast he feels the shaft of death;

He drops the bridle on his courser's mane,
 Before his eyes in shadows swims the plain,
 He, the first-born of great Amphion's bed,
 120 Was struck the first, first mingled with the dead.
 Then didst thou, Sipylus, the language hear
 Of fate portentous whistling in the air:
 As when th' impending storm the sailor sees
 He spreads his canvas to the fav'ring breeze,
 125 So to thine horse thou gav'st the golden reins,
 Gav'st him to rush impetuous o'er the plains:
 But ah! a fatal shaft from Phoebus' hand
 Smites thro' thy neck, and sinks thee on the sand.
 Two other brothers were at wrestling found,
 130 And in their pastime claspt each other round:
 A shaft that instant from Apollo's hand
 Transfixt them both, and stretcht them on the sand:
 Together they their cruel fate bemoan'd,
 Together languish'd, and together groan'd:
 135 Together too th' unbodied spirits fled,
 And sought the gloomy mansions of the dead.
 Alphenor saw, and trembling at the view,
 Beat his torn breast, that chang'd its snowy hue.
 He flies to raise them in a kind embrace;
 140 A brother's fondness triumphs in his face:
 Alphenor fails in this fraternal deed,
 A dart dispatch'd him (so the fates decreed:)
 Soon as the arrow left the deadly wound,
 His issuing entrails smoak'd upon the ground.
 145 What woes on blooming Damasichon wait!
 His sighs portend his near impending fate.
 Just where the well-made leg begins to be,
 And the soft sinews form the supple knee,
 The youth sore wounded by the Delian god

- 150 Attempts t' extract the crime-avenging rod,
 But, whilst he strives the will of fate t' avert,
 Divine Apollo sends a second dart;
 Swift thro' his throat the feather'd mischief flies,
 Bereft of sense, he drops his head, and dies.
- 155 Young Ilioneus, the last, directs his pray'r,
 And cries, 'My life, ye gods celestial! spare.'
 Apollo heard, and pity touch'd his heart,
 But ah! too late, for he had sent the dart:
 Thou too, O Ilioneus, art doom'd to fall,
- 160 The fates refuse that arrow to recal.
 On the swift wings of ever flying Fame
 To Cadmus' palace soon the tidings came:
 Niobe heard, and with indignant eyes
 She thus express'd her anger and surprise:
- 165 'Why is such privilege to them allow'd?
 'Why thus insulted by the Delian god?
 'Dwells there such mischief in the pow'rs above?
 'Why sleeps the vengeance of immortal Jove?'
 For now Amphion too, with grief oppress'd,
- 170 Had plung'd the deadly dagger in his breast.
 Niobe now, less haughty than before,
 With lofty head directs her steps no more
 She, who late told her pedigree divine,
 And drove the Thebans from Latona's shrine,
- 175 How strangely chang'd! – yet beautiful in woe,
 She weeps, nor weeps unpity'd by the foe.
 On each pale corse the wretched mother spread
 Lay overwhelm'd with grief, and kiss'd her dead,
 Then rais'd her arms, and thus, in accents slow,
- 180 'Be sated cruel Goddess! with my woe;
 'If I've offended, let these streaming eyes,
 'And let this sev'nfold funeral suffice:

'Ah! take this wretched life you deign'd to save,
 'With them I too am carried to the grave.
 'Rejoice triumphant, my victorious foe,
 185 'But show the cause from whence your triumphs flow?
 'Tho' I unhappy mourn these children slain,
 'Yet greater numbers to my lot remain.'
 She ceas'd, the bow string twang'd with awful sound,
 Which struck with terror all th' assembly round,
 190 Except the queen, who stood unmov'd alone,
 By her distresses more presumptuous grown.
 Near the pale corpses stood their sisters fair
 In sable vestures and dishevell'd hair;
 One, while she draws the fatal shaft away,
 195 Faints, falls, and sickens at the light of day.
 To sooth her mother, lo! another flies,
 And blames the fury of inclement skies,
 And, while her words a filial pity show,
 Struck dumb – indignant seeks the shades below.
 200 Now from the fatal place another flies,
 Falls in her flight, and languishes, and dies.
 Another on her sister drops in death;
 A fifth in trembling terrors yields her breath;
 While the sixth seeks some gloomy cave in vain,
 205 Struck with the rest, and mingled with the slain.
 One only daughter lives, and she the least;
 The queen close clasp'd the daughter to her breast:
 'Ye heav'nly pow'rs, ah spare me one,' she cry'd,
 'Ah! spare me one,' the vocal hills reply'd:
 210 In vain she begs, the Fates her suit deny,
 In her embrace she sees her daughter die.
 * 'The queen of all her family bereft,
 'Without or husband, son, or daughter left,
 'Grew stupid at the shock. The passing air

- 215 'Made no impression on her stiff'ning hair.
 'The blood forsook her face: amidst the flood
 'Pour'd from her cheeks, quite fix'd her eye-balls stood.
 'Her tongue, her palate both obdurate grew,
 'Her curdled veins no longer motion knew;
 220 'The use of neck, and arms, and feet was gone,
 'And ev'n her bowels hard'ned into stone:
 'A marble statue now the queen appears,
 'But from the marble steal the silent tears.'

* This Verse to the End is the Work of another Hand.

* * *

Commentary by Tracey L. Walters

In 1761, Phillis Wheatley arrived in colonial America as human cargo to be sold in a New England slave market. A child of just seven or eight years old, Phillis was purchased by John and Susannah Wheatley. The couple christened Phillis after the schooner that had brought her from Senegambia to Boston. Within 16 months of her arrival, Phillis mastered the English language and was given a formal education. Under the tutelage of Mary Wheatley, John and Susannah's daughter, Phillis took classes in literature, history, biblical studies and Latin. The Wheatleys were impressed with Phillis's progress, so they encouraged her efforts and absolved her of household duties – an unusual privilege for a slave.

As a budding poet, Phillis mainly wrote elegies, many of which were commissioned by Susannah's friends. In 1770 Phillis published one of her first poems, an elegy to the celebrated abolitionist Reverend George Whitfield, titled 'An elegiac poem, on the death of the celebrated divine, and eminent servant of Jesus Christ, the Reverend and learned George Whitfield'. The elegy appeared in several American and British newspapers. By 1772, Phillis had produced enough poems to publish a book. The following year, with support from the Wheatleys, and an endorsement from the Countess of Huntingdon, Wheatley travelled to England with Mary's twin brother, Nathaniel Wheatley, to publish *Poems on various subjects, religious and moral* (1773).

Poems includes elegies, panegyrics, pastorals, epic and biblical poems, and neoclassical poems, two of the most famous being ‘To Maecenas’ and ‘Niobe in distress for her children slain by Apollo, from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, and from a view of the painting of Mr. Richard Wilson’. *Poems* was the first full collection of poetry by a person of African descent – woman or man – residing in colonial America. It was a moderate success and Phillis was eager to produce a second collection, but due to decreased support and illness, the opportunity never arose. Shortly after returning from England, Phillis was manumitted by the Wheatleys; she continued writing poetry until her death in 1784.

Origin story

John Wheatley provided the alleged master narrative of Phillis’s origin story. A brief biographical sketch included in the prefatory documents of *Poems* was used to prove that Phillis penned the poems in the collection. The truncated biography was effective for validating Phillis’s authorship and marketing her as an extraordinary example of black potential, but the scant details reduced Phillis’s life to a few paragraphs. Moreover, Wheatley’s statement was limited to what Phillis accomplished, not who she was as a daughter, artist or contributor to American arts and letters. Wheatley’s account of Phillis’s life was for many years the document from which all others derived, but, over time, black classicists and poets offered alternative versions, centring Phillis’s story on black subjectivity and disrupting Wheatley’s dominant narrative with what critical race studies scholars define as counterstories or critical fabulations.¹

Critical fabulation, a phrase coined by critical race scholar Saidiya Hartman, shares with black feminist epistemology the process of constructing meaning, or truth, from lived experience. Critical fabulation builds on this idea by reconsidering how we construct histories. In her scholarship, Hartman rejects the linearity of history and the privileging of those narratives deemed legitimate as defined by individuals with the power to write history and control narratives:

By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account and to imagine what might have been said or might have been done.²

Critical fabulation as a rhetorical device lends itself to this analysis of Phillis Wheatley, especially since so much of what we know about her was rooted in a racialised discourse which had very little to do with the interiority of her life. Phillis's life was certainly more complex than the brief biography written by her slave master.

The poet Honorée Fanonne Jeffers takes creative licence and acknowledges the disconnect between Wheatley's accounting of Phillis's story and the stories shared by those who knew her. In her counter-narrative, she denies John Wheatley sole authority over Phillis's biography. In 'Entreaty: Yaay: *Someplace/Someplace/Someplace*, c. 1761', Jeffers interrupts Wheatley's narrative with the imagined voice of Phillis's mother. In the poem, her words are positioned adjacent to Wheatley's. Each sentence written by Wheatley is countered with the highly emotional voice of Phillis's mother, who, in addressing Phillis, reminds readers of the maternal bond between mother and child. Moreover, she emphasises the point that her daughter is more than dates and a handful of facts, for her story begins in Senegambia, before she became Phillis, back when she was somebody's child:

small creature spinning
my hands reaching
still my child
mine
and don't forget me
or this piece of land
oh come back
my sweet girl
please don't leave
touch my hands
walk to my side
my rare seed Yaay is calling
come to me.³

Juxtaposing Wheatley's sanitised version of Phillis's life with Jeffers's sentimental counter-narrative humanises Phillis and reveals aspects of her life before she became the self-proclaimed 'Afric Muse', following in the tradition of her literary African forefather, Publius Terence.

Terence

Most scholarship on Phillis emphasises how the British poets Dryden and Pope, especially Pope's Horatian odes and translations of Homer's *Iliad*, influenced her neoclassical verse.⁴ Undoubtedly, Phillis was, like many eighteenth-century writers, impacted by neoclassicism, but her artistic development was also shaped by the output of the Roman African playwright Publius Terence Afer, who influenced her both aesthetically and existentially. To Phillis, Terence was not simply a great playwright; more importantly, he was a well-respected African writer who instilled in her a level of optimism about her potential and gave her a sense of pride in her heritage. What can be inferred from Phillis's knowledge of Terence is the belief that she too could be a great poet. To achieve this goal, Phillis pushed beyond social norms by taking on the tradition of neoclassicism, usually denied to women and blacks, which elevated her in status from a lowly slave to accomplished international poet. Recognising Terence's impact on Phillis enriches our understanding of Phillis's artistic choices and motivation for writing in the neoclassical tradition.⁵

One of the earliest accounts of Terence's life was written by Suetonius, a Roman historian.⁶ In his *Life of Terence*, Suetonius reports that Terence was enslaved by the Roman Senator Terentius Lucanus, who brought him from Carthage to Rome and gave him an education. After writing a number of acclaimed plays, Terence was emancipated and went on to become one of the most important playwrights of his day. His plays provided a bedrock for humanist education and models of the Latin language for hundreds of years. Terence is known for reworking the plays of Greek dramatists and sometimes translating Greek plays into Latin.⁷ In the eighteenth century, neoclassicists such as Phillis continued this tradition of translating and appropriating classical works.

Phillis's familiarity with Terence is revealed in the Horatian odes and epic poetry she created. John Shields speculates that it could have been Wheatley's neighbour, Reverend Mather Byles, who taught Phillis about Terence.⁸ Phillis might also have encountered Terence in Basil Kennett's *Romae antiquae notitia: or the antiquities of Rome* (1696), a standard text read by most taking the Latin curriculum. An excerpt from a section on Terence reads: 'Publius was a Syrian by Birth, but receiv'd his Education at Rome in the Condition of a Slave. Having obtained several Specimens of Wit obtained his Freedom, he set to write Mimic Pieces and acted them with wonderful Applause about the towns of *Italy*.'⁹ While Kennett's text was written in English, other primers were in Latin. It is debatable whether Phillis could truly read Latin, but even so, the access

she had to a classical education was significant.¹⁰ Learning classical Greek and Latin was a privilege for any woman at that time. In the 1700s to the late 1800s, classical education was reserved almost entirely for elite white men. Armed with a knowledge of the classics, as well as the Bible and history, Phillis would have been one of the most educated women in the community – an intellectual superior. Given the spaces she occupied, Phillis knew her achievements were rare and consequential because, similar to Terence, she was representing her race and entering social and literary spaces that were usually exclusive to whites.

Once Phillis had been introduced to Terence's work, she was intentional about calling attention to their shared African heritage and his contribution to the classical tradition. Not only does she identify him as 'one alone of Afric's sable race', but in her poem she adds a footnote explaining that Terence 'was African by birth' ('To Maecenas', footnote). Thus, Phillis insists readers acknowledge that Western classics were not the product of European ingenuity alone. When considering that Phillis would have been taught that Africans were pagan savages (language she parroted in her own poetry – see for example, 'On being brought from Africa to America'¹¹), her reference to Terence countered this narrative with one presenting Africans as civilised and erudite. Furthermore, claiming Terence racially and ethnically put Wheatley in dialogue with a burgeoning debate about Western civilisation – that is, who was and who was not black in antiquity.

Over time, the propaganda narrative of white superiority that refused to equate Western civilisation with Africanness led to the white-washing of Terence. As Teramura contends,

Well into the twentieth century, some classicists could endorse the incredible revisionist hypothesis that Terence, despite being born in Carthage, was ethnically Italian, an idea first proposed in 1933 by a historian whose theory that 'race mixture' was the undoing of the Roman Empire remains a favorite of white nationalists today.¹²

Two hundred years after Wheatley, the black classicist Frank Snowden was one of the first to call attention to Terence's black ancestry. In his groundbreaking scholarly work *Blacks in antiquity*, Snowden describes Terence as a 'dark- or black-skinned man' who 'arrived in Rome as a slave from Carthage and achieved fame as a comic poet'.¹³ Along with Snowden, artists devoted to black classicism, such as George Elliot Clarke, reclaimed Terence and put him in the canon of black literature.

Wheatley's neoclassical verse

Of the 39 poems in *Poems* (and many unpublished pieces), 20 contain references to Greek and Roman mythology. Along with a plethora of characters from Homer's *Iliad*, Aurora (goddess of the dawn) and the sun god Phoebus are mentioned throughout the collection, along with sea gods such as Neptune, and others. Phillis also appropriates stylistic elements of neoclassicism, such as invoking the nine muses in the opening stanzas of her poetry. Note, for example, the opening lines of her biblical epic, 'David and Goliath': 'Ye martial pow'rs, and all ye tuneful nine, / Inspire my song, and aid my high design'.¹⁴ Other neoclassical influences are evident in her classic odes.¹⁵

Phillis's mastery of the Horatian Ode is demonstrated in her oft-cited poem 'To Maecenas', about the limitations of her poetic ability and her admiration of Graeco-Roman writers. Phillis deviates from the standard form of two four-line stanzas with the same meter and rhyme scheme and employs a more modern neoclassical style, with stanzas of heroic couplets as long as six to ten lines. In typical fashion, Phillis acknowledges her divine inspiration from the nine muses before addressing the main objective: her desire to join the ranks of forefathers Homer, Virgil and, most importantly, Terence. In stanzas two and three, Phillis acknowledges her deep admiration for Homer and Virgil. Praising Homer, she writes,

When great Patroclus courts Achilles' aid
The grateful tribute of my tears is paid;
Prone on the shore he feels the pangs of love,
And stern Pelides tend'rest passions move. (lines 17–20)

Phillis's lionisation of Homer is audaciously followed by her lamentation of the muses' generosity toward him and Virgil and their failure to instill in her the ability to create poetry that could 'rival thine [Homer] and Virgil's page' (line 23). From a gendered perspective, Phillis might be insinuating that her gender accounts for her inability to attain a status equal to these Greek and Roman poets, but when she turns her attention to Terence, she suggests that her gender and race deny her the same accolades. In stanza seven, Phillis decries the injustice of Terence being the only poet of African descent graced by the divine nine.

Just as Terence used his prologues to address his critics and defend his artistic choices, Wheatley's polemic appears within the poem. She challenges readers to consider why only one African writer has been canonised:

The happier Terence all the choir inspir'd,
His soul replenish'd, and his bosom fir'd;
But say, ye Muses, why this partial grace,
To one alone of Afric's sable race;
From age to age transmitting thus his name
With the first glory in the rolls of fame? (lines 37–42)

Phillis's contemplation about Terence as the sole representative of African writers indicates that she had learnt only of Terence and not of other African writers, such as Apuleius and Tertullian. Regardless of her limited knowledge of African literature and history, Phillis's query about the deficit of African writers is not naïve or simply rhetorical. Rather, Phillis subversively comments on the institution of slavery, which denied most enslaved Africans literacy and opportunities for creative expression. As an ambitious poet, Phillis reflects on her future prospects as Terence's heir. Comparing herself to Terence, she laments her inability to 'raise the song' because 'The fault'ring music dies upon my tongue', but she feigns humility. Phillis believes her own poetry is worthy of recognition, which is why in another poem she boldly proclaims to be 'Afric's muse', the 'Afric poet' of her day. Thus, as 'the self-defined Afric poet', Phillis aligns herself with Terence.¹⁶ In 'To Milton by Phillis Wheatley 1773', the contemporary Canadian poet George Eliott Clarke highlights the political undercurrents of Phillis's poem, with another ode, written from Phillis's perspective, affirming Terence's significance:

Terence alone serves as nursing, *Conscience*:
He alone made Europe praise Africa's name.
(Rome, that has no rival in decadence,
Cringed, as Hannibal, to havoc Rome, came.)
I turn to Terence my 'black bro' by birth,
To bring brawling 'illiterates' to book,
And demonstrate our damned adamant worth,
Our tongues – our arms – false *History* mistook¹⁷

Here Clarke not only acknowledges that Terence's literacy proved his humanity, but also invokes the counter-narrative of black classicists who argue that ancient Egyptian knowledge (mathematics and science) was foundational to Greek and Roman civilisation, a history that has been misrepresented by Europeans.

Undoubtedly, Phillis understood the connection between artistry, representation and humanity. She knew Terence's playwriting earned him emancipation and, given the privileges she experienced (socialising with Boston's elite and being released from domestic chores), she would have desired the same. Furthermore, each poem she wrote and shared with the Boston community betrayed the fallacy of her supposed inferiority. Thus, what can also be inferred from Phillis's knowledge of Terence's work is her belief that by writing in the classical tradition, and specifically by appropriating Latin and Greek myths, just as Terence had done, she too could be a poet for the ages. Ultimately, although maybe not in her lifetime, her epic poems 'David and Goliath', 'Ocean' and 'Niobe' ensured that she received the validation she sought.

'Niobe in distress for her children slain by Apollo, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, and from a view of the painting of Mr. Richard Wilson' is one of Phillis's longest poems. It is likely that Phillis turned to Croxall's 1717 version of Niobe, published in *Dryden's Ovid's Metamorphoses in Fifteen Books*. 'Niobe' recounts the story of an arrogant queen who refuses to submit to the goddess Latona and, as punishment for her insolence, stands by helplessly as all 14 of her children are slain by Apollo and Diana. The poem is a cautionary tale about the vulnerability of humankind and the mercilessness of gods. Phillis draws on a number of conventional elements of the epic, discussed by Tracey Walters, Julian Mason and others.¹⁸ The poem starts *in medias res*, the language is elevated, and there is an epic battle – here, presented as the war of words between Latona and Niobe – resulting in the bloodshed of Niobe's children.

Phillis's reworking of the traditional epic form was complemented by her intertextual approach to Niobe's story. Just as Terence reportedly experimented with classical revisions by allegedly combining two Greek plays into one Latin play and incorporating sections from one play into another, Phillis brought a unique approach to her classical adaptations. As noted in the title of Phillis's poem, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Richard Wilson's (1714–82) artwork inspired her reworking of Niobe. Wilson's engravings of Niobe were well known to the Boston community and Wheatley's allusion to the series is recognised in the last stanza of her poem. Wilson's depiction of Apollo, poised to shoot Niobe's son, is

described by Phillis: 'With clouds incompass'd glorious Phoebus stands; / The feather'd vengeance quiv'ring in his hands' (lines 107–8). In addition to alluding to Wilson's engraving, Phillis also makes a number of adjustments to the narrative. To start, the title sets the tone of the poem. Niobe is a woman and mother in distress and she is a victim of Apollo's vengeance. Automatically, even without knowing Niobe's indiscretion, the title elicits sympathy for Niobe and allows Phillis to control how Niobe is perceived – as a grieving mother persecuted by the Gods. Like Ovid's version, Phillis's rendition of the poem acknowledges that Niobe's insouciant responses to Latona's threats account for the murderous actions of Apollo and Diana. Phillis, however, includes certain details that, once again, change the tone of the poem. In a highly sentimental stanza describing Niobe's 'Seven sprightly sons' and 'Seven daughters beauteous as the op'ning morn', so perfect that 'no words could tell them, and no pencil paint' (lines 23–24 and 34), Phillis shifts the focus from Niobe to her children and depicts them as innocent casualties of war. Thus, while Niobe's hubris is acknowledged, her children's inculpability is also emphasised. Wilson's engraving focalised the elegant beauty of Apollo's strength, reminding his audience of the Apollo Belvedere, the most famous classical sculpture in the world during the eighteenth century. Phillis's poem disrupts this celebration of classical culture.

Phillis was drawn to this particular female-centred story for a number of reasons. Phillis may have selected the poem because, similar to Terence and the neoclassicists, she saw value in appropriating Greek and Roman literature for a modern audience and making the stories her own. Considering Phillis's status as an enslaved black woman, the poem also resonated on a personal level. Firstly, Phillis's own positionality as an enslaved woman forced her to submit to her enslavers; this was an experience she knew well. Secondly, Phillis's familiarity with the theme of parental mourning, prominent in many of the elegies she published, was one she would have been painfully familiar with. Furthermore, not only did she witness black mothers and children being separated on the auction block, but she knew first-hand what it meant to be taken from one's parents. She writes about the experience:

I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatched from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd

That from a father seized his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?¹⁹

This description of her father's sorrow is revisited in 'Niobe' when she describes the anguish experienced by Amphion, who watches helplessly as his sons are murdered and resorts to taking his own life. The linkage between the two poems evidences the subversive qualities of Phillis's poetry, which were often undetected by readers who underestimated her capability. In fact, questions about Phillis's erudition were consequential for the publication of *Poems*.

Phillis's knowledge of classical literature and the technical skills she demonstrated raised suspicion among those who did not believe she had the ability or intellect to produce such poems.²⁰ Therefore, prior to publishing the collection, Phillis was required to appear before 18 of Boston's most prominent men (selected by her slave master, John Wheatley) and attest to the legitimacy of her authorship of the book. Under specific scrutiny were the neoclassical poems. In a white-supremacist patriarchal society rooted in slavery, the presumed mental aptitude of an enslaved black woman was limited and therefore authentication of her poetry was required:

Her master was there,
yet she was by herself –
the terror –
an examination of her mind.²¹

It is unknown how Wheatley proved the poems were her own creations, but her performance convinced the men that she was indeed the originator and she passed the inquisition. This validation of Phillis's poetry, along with John Wheatley's preface and Countess Huntingdon's endorsement, cemented efforts to secure a publisher for the book. The groundbreaking collection was a major accomplishment for a 20-year-old woman, let alone a black woman. The publication of *Poems* meant that, for the first time, instead of black people being objects documented by whites in scientific journals or travelogues, or debated by abolitionists, the insights of a black woman were expressed.

Wheatley's legacy

For a generation of women, Phillis was the standard of excellence – a literary foremother of black classicism inspiring generations to become poets. Chernoh Sesay's examination of Phillis's popularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries indicates that Phillis was referenced in black journals such as *Freedom's Journal*, where she was listed in 1827 among 'great historical figures of African descent'.²² In 1855 she was mentioned in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* as an exemplary writer of great importance. As Sesay argues, '[t]his theme of achievement in the face of marginalization and racial oppression constitutes a continuous thread in the fashioning, appropriation and employment of Wheatley and her legacy.'²³ Her name lives on in writing competitions, literary societies, and schools that have been named in her honour.

Phillis had an impact on black women writers, especially in the tradition of classical appropriation. For example, Ann Plato's 1841 *Essays including biographies and miscellaneous pieces, in prose and poetry* included neoclassical poetry. James W. C. Pennington, who wrote the preface for Plato's book, compared Plato to Phillis and Terence, among others. Later, in 1891, Henrietta Cordelia Ray published her version of 'Niobe'. Other black women writers, such as the novelist Pauline Hopkins and the classicist Mary Church Terrell, were also inspired by Phillis. Terrell was amongst the first black women to receive a degree in classics from Oberlin (gaining both a BA and an MA degree). In 1924, she wrote a piece honouring Phillis Wheatley's legacy. As Phillis honed in on Terence's African ancestry, Terrell does the same for her: 'This poetess was a full-blooded African so that her talent and attainments cannot be attributed to the admixture of Caucasian or any other blood in her veins.'²⁴ These women who were influenced by Phillis understood the obstacles she must have encountered as a black and enslaved woman, and knew that what she achieved for her time was remarkable. Her efforts resulted in her becoming what some might call the foremother of black classicism, and an inspiration to successive generations of black writers across the diaspora.

Notes

- 1 See the work of critical race theorists such as Richard Delgado.
- 2 Hartman, 'Venus in two acts', 11.
- 3 Jeffers, *The Age of Phillis*, 15.
- 4 Mason, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 4.
- 5 Teramura, 'Black comedy', 877–8.
- 6 Teramura, 'Black comedy', 877.

- 7 McGill, *Plagiarism in Latin Literature*, 115.
- 8 Shields, 'Phyllis Wheatley and Mather Byles', 377–90.
- 9 Kennett, *Antiquities of Rome*, 286. Note that Kennett says that Terence was Syrian rather than from Carthage as stated in Suetonius' biography. If Phillis did consult Kennett's text, she dismissed his labelling of Terence as Syrian.
- 10 Shields, 'Phyllis Wheatley and Mather Byles' debates the issue of Phillis's knowledge of Latin.
- 11 Wheatley, *Poems*, 53.
- 12 Teramura, 'Black comedy', 900.
- 13 Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 188
- 14 Wheatley, *Poems*, 60.
- 15 Wheatley, *Poems*, 'Ode to Neptune', 'On the Death of a Young Lady Five Years Old', and 'To Maecenas'.
- 16 Wheatley, *Poems*, 'Hymn to Humanity', 95.
- 17 Clarke, 'To Milton by Phillis Wheatley', 516.
- 18 See Walters, *African American Literature and the Classicist Tradition*; Mason, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*; Shields, 'Phyllis Wheatley's Use of Classicism'; and Greenwood, 'The politics of classicism in the Poetry of Phillis Wheatley'.
- 19 Wheatley, *Poems*, 'To the Right Honourable William Earl of Dartmouth', 82.
- 20 Mason, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 30–31.
- 21 'How Phillis Wheatley Might Have Obtained the Approval of Eighteen Prominent Men', in Jeffers, *The Age of Phillis*, 80.
- 22 Sesay, 'Remembering Phillis Wheatley', np.
- 23 Sesay, 'Remembering Phillis Wheatley', np.
- 24 Terrell, 'Phyllis Wheatley – An African genius', 223.

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Part III

Naming histories of race

Jules Michelet's *Histoire romaine* (*Roman history*, 1831)

Extracts from Book 2, Chapter 3 of *History of the Roman Republic* (London: David Bogue, 1847), translated from the French by William Hazlitt.¹ Commentary by Mathilde Cazeaux.

It is not without reason that the recollection of the Punic war has remained so popular and vivid in the recollection of men. That struggle was not merely to decide the fate of two cities or of two empires; the matter in hand was to determine to which of the two races, Indo-Germanic or Semitic, should belong the dominion of the world. It must be remembered that the first of these two families of nations comprehends, besides the Indians and the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Germans; in the other are included the Jews and the Arabs, the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians. On the one side the heroic genius, that of art and of legislation; on the other, the spirit of industry, navigation, and commerce. These two hostile races have everywhere encountered and everywhere attacked each other. In the primitive history of Persia and of Chaldea, the heroes incessantly oppose their industrious and perfidious neighbours. The latter are artisans, smiths, miners, enchanterers. They love gold, blood, pleasure. They raise towers of a Titanic ambition, aerial gardens, magical palaces, which the sword of the warrior dissolves and effaces from the earth. The struggle between the Phoenicians and the Greeks was reproduced on all coasts of the Mediterranean. Everywhere the latter succeeded to the factories, to the colonies of their rivals in the west, as the Romans will do in the east. Let it also be observed with what fury the Phoenicians attack the Greeks at Salamis under the auspices of Xerxes, the same year that the Carthaginians, their brothers, disembarked in Sicily the prodigious

army which Gelo destroyed at Himera. And at a later period, the Greeks, to end the matter, went in their turn to attack their eternal enemies in their own country. Alexander did far more against Tyre than Psalmanasar or Nebuchodonozzar. He did not content himself with destroying it; he took care that it should never be able to rise again, by substituting for it Alexandria, and for ever changing the route of the commerce of the world. There remained the great Carthage, and her empire far differently powerful from that of Phoenicia; Rome annihilated her. There was at that time seen a thing that is found nowhere else in history, an entire civilisation passed away at a blow, like a fallen star. The periplus of Hanno, a few medals, a score of verses in Plautus, and there is all that remains of the Carthaginian world. Many centuries were necessary before the struggle of the two races could recommence, before the Arabs, that formidable rear-guard of the Semitic, moved from their deserts. The struggle of the races became that of two religions. Fortunately these bold horsemen encountered on the east, the impregnable walls of Constantinople, on the west, the battle-axe of Charles Martel, and the sword of the Cid. The crusades were the natural reprisal of the Arab invasion, and the last epoch of that struggle between the two principal families of the human race.

In order to divine this lost world of the Carthaginian empire, and to comprehend what would have become of humanity, had the Semitic race conquered, we must collect what is known of Phoenicia, the type and metropolis of Carthage.

On the narrow beach overlooked by the cedars of Lebanon,² swarmed a numerous people, crowded into the islands, and close maritime cities. On the rock of Aradus, to cite only one example, the houses had more stories than even at Rome.³ This impure race, flying before the sword of Sesostrius, or the exterminating knife of the Jews, had found themselves driven to the sea, and had taken it for their country. The immoderate licentiousness of the modern Malabar can alone recall the abominations of these Sodomites of Phoenicia. There, generations multiplied without certain family, each ignorant who was his father, born multiplying promiscuously, like the insects and reptiles which after rain-storms crawl about in myriads on their burning shores.

They themselves said they were born of slime. Their great gods were the Cabiri, industrious workmen with immense bellies. There was Baal:

Belial came last, than whom a spirit more lewd
 Fell not from heaven, or more gross to love
 Vice for itself: to him no temple stood
 Or altar smok'd; yet who more oft than he
 In temples and at altars, when the priest
 Turns atheist, as did Eli's sons, who fill'd
 With lust and violence the house of God?
 In courts and palaces he also reigns,
 And in luxurious cities, where the noise
 Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,
 And injury and outrage: and when night
 Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
 Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.
 Witness the streets of Sodom and that night
 In Gibeah ...⁴

Night, the moon, Astaroth, was still worshipped by the Phoenicians. She was the mother of the world, and, like Isis and Cybele, she carried the palm from all the gods. The preponderance of the female principle in these sensual religions was found at Carthage, where a goddess presided at the councils. Every year Isis embarked from Pelusium for Byblos,⁵ and, carrying the head of a man in a mysterious veil, went in search of the limbs of her husband.

There the spouse, taking the name of Adonis, was lamented by the daughters of Phoenicia. His blood ran from the mountains in the red sand of a river. Then there were lamentations, funeral dances during the night, and tears mixed with disgraceful pleasures. But the god arose, and they terminated in furious intoxication this festival of life and death. In spring, more especially, when the sun, resuming his power, gave the type and signal of universal renewal; at Tyre, at Carthage, perhaps in all cities, a pyre was prepared, and an eagle, in imitation of the Egyptian phoenix, sprang from the flame to heaven. This flame was Moloch⁶ himself. The greedy god demanded human victims; he loved to embrace infants with his devouring tongues; and frantic dances, songs in the harsh language of Syria, redoubled blows of the barbarous tambourine, prevented the parents from hearing the cries.

The Carthaginians, like the Phoenicians, from whom they sprang, seem to have been a rugged and mournful people, sensual and covetous, adventurous without being heroic. At Carthage, accordingly, the religion was atrocious and full of fearful practices. In public calamities, the walls of the city were hung with black cloth.⁷ When Agathocles besieged Carthage, the statue of Baal, all red with the internal fire that they illumined in it, received into its arms as many as two hundred children; and three hundred people afterwards cast themselves into the flames. It was in vain that Gelo, their conqueror, forbade them to immolate human victims. Even Roman Carthage, in the time of the emperors, secretly continued these frightful sacrifices.

Carthage represented its metropolis, but upon an enormous scale. Situated in the centre of the Mediterranean, commanding the coast of the west, oppressing her sister Utica, and all the Phoenician colonies of Africa, she mingled conquest with commerce, everywhere establishing herself at the sword's point, founding factories in spite of the natives, imposing duties and taxes upon them, forcing them at one time to buy, and at another to sell. To understand fully how oppressive was this mercantile tyranny, one should look at the government of Venice, and read the statutes of the state inquisitors;⁸ one must understand the despotic and whimsical manner in which the Spanish monopoly was exercised at Peru, when the luxurious merchandise rejected by Europe was taken there, when the poor Indians were forced to buy what Spain no longer wanted, when they made a man without a shirt take an ell of velvet, or a labourer without bread buy a pair of spectacles. There is a fine chapter in the '*Esprit des Lois*'⁹ upon the monopoly of Carthage and her commercial empire, which I must lay before you: 'The law of nations which obtained at Carthage was very singular; all strangers, who traded to Sardinia and towards Hercules' pillars, this haughty republic sentenced to be drowned.¹⁰ Her civil polity was equally extraordinary; she forbid the Sardinians to cultivate their lands, upon pain of death. She increased her power by her riches, and afterwards her riches by her power. Being mistress of the coasts of Africa, which are washed by the Mediterranean, she extended herself along the Hanno, by order of the senate of Carthage, distributed thirty thousand Carthaginians from Hercules' pillars as far as Cerne. This place, he says, is as distant from Hercules' pillars, as the latter is from Carthage. This

situation is very remarkable. It lets us see, that Hanno limited his settlements to the 25th degree of north latitude, that is, to two or three degrees south of the Canaries.

'Hanno being at Cerne, undertook another voyage, with a view of making further discoveries towards the south. He took but little notice of the continent. He followed the coast for twenty-six days, when he was obliged to return for want of provisions. The Carthaginians, it seems, made no use of this second enterprise. Scylax¹¹ says, that the sea is not navigable¹² beyond Cerne, because it is shallow, full of mud and sea-weeds: and, in fact, there are many of these in those latitudes.¹³ The Carthaginian merchants, made mention of by Scylax, might find obstacles, which Hanno, who had sixty vessels of fifty oars each, had surmounted. Difficulties are at most but relative; besides, we ought not to confound an enterprise, in which bravery and resolution must be exerted, with things that require no extraordinary conduct.¹⁴

'The relation of Hanno's voyage is an excellent fragment of antiquity. It was written by the very man that performed it. His recital is not mingled with ostentation. Great commanders write their actions with simplicity; because they receive more glory from facts than from words.

'The style is agreeable to the subject: he deals not in the marvellous. All he says of the climate, of the soil, the behaviour, the manners of the inhabitants, correspond with what is daily seen on this coast of Africa; one would imagine it the journal of a modern sailor.

'He observed from his fleet, that in the day-time there was a prodigious silence on the continent,¹⁵ that in the night he heard the sound of different musical instruments, and that fires might then be everywhere seen, some larger than others. Our relations are conformable to this; it has been discovered, that in the day the savages retire into the forests to avoid the heat of the sun, that they light up great fires in the night to disperse the beasts of prey, and that they are vastly fond of music and dancing.

'The same writer describes a volcano with all the phenomena of Vesuvius; and relates that he took two hairy women, who chose to die rather than follow the Carthaginians, and whose skins he carried to Carthage. This has been found not void of probability.

'This narration is so much the more valuable, as it is a monument of Punic antiquity; and from hence alone it has been looked upon as

fabulous. For the Romans retained their hatred to the Carthaginians, even after they had destroyed them. But it was victory alone that decided whether we ought to say, the Punic or the Roman faith.

‘Some moderns¹⁶ have imbibed these prejudices. What is become, say they, of the cities described by Hanno, of which even in Pliny’s time there remained not the least vestiges? But it would have been a wonder, indeed, if any such vestiges had remained. Was it a Corinth or Athens that Hanno built on those coasts? He left Carthaginian families in such places as were most commodious for trade, and secured them as well as his hurry would permit against savages and wild beasts. The calamities of the Carthaginians put a period to the navigation of Africa; these families must necessarily then either perish or become savages. Besides, were the ruins of these cities even still in being, who is it that would venture into the woods and marshes to make the discovery? We find, however, in Scylax and Polybius, that the Carthaginians had considerable settlements on those coasts. These are the vestiges of the cities of Hanno; there are no other, from the same reason that there are no other of Carthage itself.¹⁷

‘The Carthaginians were in the high road to wealth; and had they gone so far as four degrees of north latitude, and fifteen of longitude, they would have discovered the Gold-coast. They would then have had a trade of much greater importance than that which is carried on at present on that coast, at a time when America seems to have degraded the riches of all other countries. They would there have found treasures, of which they could never have been deprived by the Romans.

[[. . .]]

‘We see in the treaty which put an end to the first Punic war, that Carthage was chiefly attentive to preserve the empire of the sea, and Rome that of the land. Hanno, in his negotiation with the Romans,¹⁸ declared that they should not be allowed even to wash their hands in the sea of Sicily; they were not permitted to sail beyond the *promontorium pulchrum*; they were forbid to trade in Sicily,¹⁹ Sardinia, and Africa, except at Carthage; an exception that lets us see there was no design to favour them in their trade with that city.

‘In early times there had been very great wars between Carthage and Marseilles²⁰ on the subject of fishing. After the peace they

entered jointly into the economical commerce. Marseilles at length grew jealous, especially as, being equal to her rival in industry, she was become inferior to her in power. This is the motive of her great fidelity to the Romans. The war between the latter and the Carthaginians in Spain was a source of riches to Marseilles, which was now become their magazine. The destruction of Carthage and Corinth still increased the glory of Marseilles, and had it not been for the civil wars, in which this republic ought on no account to have engaged, she would have been happy under the protection of the Romans, who had not the least jealousy of her commerce.'

The vast commercial empire²¹ of the Carthaginians, spread over the coasts of Africa, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, Gaul, Spain, and even on the shores of the great ocean, cannot be compared to the compact possessions of the English and the Spaniards in America; but rather to that chain of forts and factories which constituted the Portuguese and Dutch empire in the East Indies. Like these, the Carthaginians did not establish themselves in their colonies without hope of returning. It was the poor part of the people whom they sent thither, to enrich themselves by the quick profits of a tyrannical commerce, and who hastened to return to the mother country to enjoy the fruits of their robberies, somewhat as the merchants of Amsterdam formerly did, and as the English nabobs now do. There were rapid and colossal fortunes, unheard of robberies and exactions, there were Clives and Hastings, who might boast also of having exterminated millions of men by a monopoly more destructive than war.

This dominion rested upon two ruinous bases, a navy, which at this period of art other nations could easily equal,²² and mercenary armies as exacting as they were faithless. The Carthaginians were anything but warriors personally, although they had constantly speculated in war. They went in small numbers, protected by heavy and rich armour.²³ If they appeared, it was doubtless less to fight in their own persons than to overlook their hired soldiers, and to make sure that they earned their pay. And even the few Carthaginian troops that we do find in their armies, must have been composed chiefly of native Africans, either Lybians of the desert, or mountaineers of Atlas. In this way we may account for the frequent confusion of the conquering Arabs of these countries, with the Moors their subjects. However, this duality of race frequently betrays itself in the history of Carthage: the military genius of the Barcas belonged, as the name

of Barca seems to indicate, to the warlike nomads of Lybia, more than to the Phoenician merchants. The true Carthaginians are the Hannos, covetous administrators and incapable generals.²⁴

The life of an industrious merchant, of a Carthaginian, was too valuable to be risked, when he could advantageously substitute a poor Greek, or a Spanish or Gaulish barbarian in his stead.²⁵ Carthage knew almost to a drachma how much the life of a man of such or such a nation would fetch. A Greek was worth more than a Campanian, and a Campanian more than a Gaul or a Spaniard. This tariff of blood being thoroughly known, Carthage commenced a war as she would a mercantile speculation. She undertook conquests, either in the hope of finding new mines to work, or to make markets for her merchandise. She could expend fifty thousand mercenaries in this enterprise better than in that. If the returns were good, they did not regret the capital; they again bought men, and all went on well.

It may be supposed that in this kind of commerce, as in every other, Carthage would select her merchandise with discernment. She did not use many Greeks, who had too high a spirit, and did not allow themselves to be led easily. She preferred the barbarians; the skill of the Balearic slinger; the fury of the Gallic horseman (*la furia francese*); the swiftness of the Numidian, meagre and ardent as his horse; the intrepid coolness of the Spanish foot soldier, so temperate and robust, so firm in the fight with his red sagum and his two-edged sword.²⁶ These armies were not unlike those of the Condottieri of the middle ages. But the soldiers of the Carthaginians not learning to carry gigantic arms, like the companions of Hawkwood or of Carmagnola, were without a certain advantage over the national troops. A long war might render the soldiers of Syracuse or of Rome equal to the mercenaries of Carthage. The latter, like those of the middle ages, could at any moment change sides, except that in making war upon poor nations they must have had less temptation to treason. Sforza might fluctuate between Milan and Venice, and betray them by turns; but what could have persuaded the army of Hannibal to join with the Romans? The troops in the service of Carthage seldom served in their own country; they were carefully kept from it; the different bodies of the same army were isolated from each other by difference of language and religion; they often depended for provisions upon Carthaginian fleets; add to this, that the generals, not being at the same time magistrates, as at Rome,

had fewer opportunities of oppressing liberty; finally, the terrible tribunal of the Hundred kept watch near them, and on the slightest suspicion crucified them. This state inquisition, like that of Venice, ended by absorbing the entire public power. It was recruited from among the administrators of finance who had left office. Nominated for life by the people, the Hundred ruled over all the ancient powers, the senate and the two *sophetim* or judges. A financial oligarchy thus holding the entire state in its hands, money was the king and god of Carthage. Money alone gave magistracies, caused the foundation of colonies, formed the sole bond of the army. The course of the history will amply show all the inconveniences of this system.

When the Romans, conquerors of Tarentum and masters of Magna Græcia, arrived on the shores of the strait, they found themselves front to front with the Carthaginian armies [...]²⁷ Three powers, Carthage, Syracuse, and the Mamertini, shared Sicily. Rome, called on by one faction of the latter, hesitated not to protect at Messina those whom she had just punished at Rhegium. The consul Appius passed legions into Sicily, part in Greek vessels, part upon rafts. Hiero, the tyrant of Syracuse, was conquered by the Romans, as he himself says, *before he had had time to see them*. He reflected that, after all, he had less to fear from a people without a navy, and he became the most faithful ally of Rome.

In less than eighteen months the Romans, favoured by the natives, seized sixty-seven places, and the large city of Agrigentum, defended by two armies of fifty thousand men. But, to remain masters of an island, it was necessary to be masters of the sea. The Romans, who seem hitherto to have had scarcely any navy,²⁸ took as a model a wrecked galley of Carthage; at the end of sixty days they put to sea a hundred and sixty vessels, attacked the Carthaginian fleet, and conquered it. During the construction, they exercised their rowers on dry land, making them manoeuvre on the shore. To compensate for their inferiority of address and practice, they invented iron hards (*corvi*), which, falling on the Carthaginian vessels, rendered them immovable, and facilitated boarding. The conqueror, the consul Duillius, had, for life, the privilege of being attended home at night by torches and flute-players. Besides the tediousness of this life-long triumph, he had, for a trophy of his victory, a column ornamented with heads of vessels, the pedestal of which still exists. The inscription engraved upon it is one of the most ancient monuments of the Latin tongue.²⁹

Rome easily gained possession of Sardinia and Corsica, where the barbarous monopoly of the Carthaginians had hitherto forbidden the cultivation of land. New successes in Sicily gave her hope of accomplishing in Africa what Agathocles had attempted. But the Roman soldiers feared the dangers of a long voyage³⁰ and an unknown world. The consul Regulus had to threaten a legionary tribune with rods and the axe before he could effect the embarkation. One of the first enemies they encountered in Africa was a boa-constrictor, one of those monstrous serpents whose species seems to have greatly diminished.

Two victories gave two hundred cities to the Romans. Regulus would not grant peace to Carthage if she kept more than one armed vessel. Fear had almost made her agree to anything, when a Lacedæmonian mercenary, named Xantippus, who was at Carthage, declared that there remained too many resources for them to give in as yet. Placed at the head of the army, he contrived to draw the Romans into the plain, and beat them by his cavalry and elephants. Regulus entered Carthage, but it was as a captive, and the new reverses experienced by the Romans fixed the war in Sicily.³¹

The Carthaginians having, in their turn, however, met with ill success, sent Regulus to Rome to treat for peace and an exchange of prisoners. They reckoned on the interest he himself had in speaking for them. All the historians, except Polybius, the gravest of all, assert that Regulus gave the senate the heroic counsel to persist in the struggle, and leave to die as captives those who had not been able to remain free.

If we credit the testimony of the Romans – a testimony of dubious verity, but agreeing with what we otherwise know of the cowardly barbarism of the Carthaginians – Regulus, on his return, was abandoned by them to the torments of a lingering death; they exposed him to an African sun, after having cut off his eyelids; they deprived him of rest and light by confining him in a barrel stuck with iron spikes. The indignant Roman senate, it is added, gave up the Carthaginian prisoners to the children of Regulus to undergo the same punishment.³²

For eight years the Romans were conquered in Sicily. They successively lost four fleets.

[[. . .]]

Meanwhile, the greatest general Carthage then had, Hamilcar, father of the famous Hannibal, threw himself upon Mount Eryx, between Drepanum and Lilybæum. [[. . .]] And yet, amidst the successes of Hamilcar, Carthage suddenly deemed herself reduced to ask peace of the Romans. She had sent him money and provisions in a fleet of four hundred vessels. These vessels were without soldiers; they were to be armed by Hamilcar himself. Meanwhile the Roman fleet, so many times shattered by storms, had just been equipped afresh by voluntary contributions of the citizens. This fleet of two hundred quinqueremes encountered that of Hanno before it reached Sicily (at the Ægates' islands), and destroyed one fourth of it. This check served to take away the courage of the Carthaginians. Their Hamilcar was conqueror; they had lost, indeed, five hundred galleys in the course of the war, but Rome had sacrificed seven hundred. It occurred to the merchants of Carthage that the cessation of their commerce did them more harm than the most successful war could compensate. They calculated with affright what the boundless recompence which Hamilcar had promised to his army would cost them,³³ after so many expenses; and they preferred ceding Sicily to the Romans, engaging further, to pay them three thousand talents (seven hundred and twenty thousand pounds) within ten years. As a matter of commerce, the Carthaginians, in concluding this treaty, doubtless made a good bargain. But they did not perceive that their political power, once compromised in a struggle with Rome, must, unless supported by every possible means, carry away in its ruin both their commerce and their opulence, to which they so readily sacrificed their honour.

* * *

Commentary by Mathilde Cazeaux

Jules Michelet (1798–1874) is one of the most famous and influential French historians of the nineteenth century. He is the author of a considerable body of work that mixes history, philosophy of history, political thought and naturalism, all borne along by brilliant and eloquent writing. He was a scholar at prestigious institutions, such as the École normale supérieure de la rue d'Ulm and the Collège de France, and a member of important research establishments.

Histoire romaine, which was translated into English by William Hazlitt as *History of the Roman Republic*, is one of Michelet's first works: he wrote it at the age of 33. It was written essentially to prove his authority in the subject that he chose as his domain; it allowed him to show his mastery of classical material, his erudition and his critical instincts. The work is a synthesis of ancient historians and a discussion of the German scholars who preceded him, in particular Reinhold Niebuhr. The book, which recounts the history of Rome from its origins to the battle of Actium, was initially intended to be the first volume of a work extending all the way to the end of the Roman Empire, but Michelet did not go further with his enterprise and became completely preoccupied with his monumental history of France (*Histoire de France*). The *History of the Roman Republic* closes with the death of Cleopatra and the triumph of Octavian, the 'triumph of the West over the East'.³⁴

The *History of the Roman Republic* was the result of a course given in 1829–30 at the École normale supérieure, an institution dedicated to the training of secondary school teachers. Under the Restoration, the programme of the fourth grade was dedicated to Republican Rome. Michelet's ideas had a great impact, through his lectures as well as his writings: Gustave Flaubert, for example, was taught by Adolphe Chéruel, who was a student of Michelet and a young professor of history at the time, and his *Salammô* was inspired by the story of the Mercenary War.

The *History of the Roman Republic* appeared in the wake of the July Revolution, a few months after another text by Michelet was published, a theoretical and programmatic treatise entitled *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (*Introduction to World History*). This text and *History of the Roman Republic* both defend a vision of history teleologically directed towards freedom, conceived as a way out of determinism, what Michelet calls 'the fate of race and climate'.³⁵

In the *Introduction to World History*, Michelet elaborates a story of humanity that is born in India and then entirely delivered to nature, to matter, to fate, and he writes of the long fight of humankind and spirit towards an ideal of freedom, represented in the end by France. France is presented here as the 'intimate fusion' of races, which is successful thanks to the French Revolution. ('Your race is 89', he writes later in the *Bible de l'Humanité*.³⁶) It does not constitute a pure race, but a people purified of race and of the conditioning it implies, precisely by mixture (whereas Germany remains a race, Italy a juxtaposition of races): 'The crossing of races, the mixing of opposite civilizations is ... the most powerful aid to freedom. The various fates that they bring into this mixture cancel each other out and neutralize each other.'³⁷ In his view the evolution of humanity

depends on an agonistic principle: humans against nature, spirit against matter, freedom against fate. In this perspective, history is humankind's struggle to nullify race through mobility, mixing and the forces of spirit.

In this vast timeline, ancient Rome is one of the great stages in the mixing of races, 'the crux of the immense drama whose adventure France directs', he writes, still in the *Introduction to World History*.³⁸ In reality the word 'race', in Michelet's work, as in the majority of French texts written in the nineteenth century, is used in a completely plural way, without a very fixed definition: it evokes any kind of lineage or filiation suggesting a community of characters, from the scale of the family to a people or a gathering of peoples.

In these years from 1820 to 1830, the idea of race enjoyed a great success. It was an epistemological category that allowed for the formation of a new national history: it represented a national community and made it possible to affirm the deep identity of a people by tracing a historical evolution. It allowed the masses to be presented as collective heroes. To go back to antiquity seemed the most natural way to identify and express a race. This is, in particular, what Amédée Thierry attempted in his *Histoire des Gaulois (History of the Gauls, 1828)*, which assumes the existence of a community of innate characteristics, physical and moral, tied to the same origin, 'prior to any mixing of foreign blood',³⁹ characteristics which persist in spite of historical events and social and cultural changes. Natural history, which is concerned with a similar desire to understand and classify human societies, plays a role in this desire to categorise peoples. The work of William Frédéric Edwards, who was close to Michelet and the Thierry brothers, and the author of a treatise entitled *Des caractères physiologiques des races humaines considérées dans leur rapport avec l'histoire (Physiological characteristics of human races considered in their relation to history)*, goes in this direction: even the change of climate, according to him, does not alter the dispositions proper to a human group.

In 1831 Michelet wrote to distance himself fundamentally from these determinist conceptions. In 1866, in the preface to the third and last edition of his *Histoire romaine*, he would describe his earlier position in these words: 'The environment, climate, and race certainly do a lot (and I have taken this into account). But the element of race on which Thierry insisted is increasingly secondary, increasingly subordinate to the work of transformation that any society carries out on itself.'⁴⁰

This volume seems thus to be witness to an intermediate stage: just as the ancient conceptions of the *imperium Romanum* could only function by postulating the possible absorption of foreign peoples, even

'barbarians', thus, by the possible passage from barbarism to *Romanitas*, the historian, although impregnated with the notion of race, keeps it at a distance for the time being by arguing that the very nature of the human is precisely to detach itself from this material fatalism. This fluidity is facilitated by the view that the races are not founded on a physiological or spiritual basis: they are distinguished by their temperament (an idea which is quite close to ancient categorisations of populations) and by their religion and language, which are expressions of this temperament (which is specific to modern conceptions).

Moreover, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, the scholarly world was in a state of flux: Orientalist knowledge and scholarly networks were gradually being institutionalised and, with the first studies on Sanskrit, comparative philology and linguistics were taking off. Creuzer's work on religions, including Hinduism and Zoroastrian dualism, was also a turning point.

Antiquity, then, opens up to a world beyond Athens and Rome: India, Persia, Phoenicia, Egypt. And at that point the concept of 'Indo-European', or 'Indo-Germanic', or 'Aryan' – the different names are interchangeably attributed to it – begins to be developed. From the observation of linguistic affinities between Latin, Greek and Sanskrit, one slides to the idea of a people determined by a common origin. Ernest Renan, in his *Histoire générale et Système comparé des langues sémitiques* (*The general history and comparative system of the Semitic languages*, 1855), speaks of 'linguistic races'.

At the time when Michelet wrote his *History of the Roman Republic*, the systematisation and, above all, hierarchisation developed by Renan, which would characterise the 'Semitic race' in terms of its immobility and sterility, had not yet been reached. However, there is a long passage in the *History* where Michelet uses the concept of race in a particularly systematic way and where this system resonates particularly with ancient historiography: it is the account of the Punic Wars – that is, the three wars that involved Rome and Carthage, and numerous Mediterranean peoples, between 264 and 146 BCE.

Michelet presents the Punic Wars as a confrontation between 'two enemy races'. The chapters devoted to the wars open with a kind of preface that resonates with the beginning of Book 21 of Livy's history, where Livy evokes the hatred between the two cities and the political and military reasons for their conflict (the loss of Sicily and Sardinia and the tribute imposed by Rome).⁴¹ Michelet also has in mind other passages that present the conflict, and in particular its climax at the Battle of Zama, as a struggle for world domination, and he recalls the stereotypes that the

Romans usually applied to the Carthaginians. But it is striking how the use of the notion of race leads Michelet to naturalise the conflict further: 'That struggle was not merely to decide the fate of two cities or of two empires; the matter in hand was to determine to which of the two races, Indo-Germanic or Semitic, should belong the dominion of the world.'⁴² He defines what he means by 'Indo-Germanic' (Indians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Germans) and 'Semitic' (Jews, Arabs, Phoenicians and Carthaginians). Race is defined by analogy with the family: the Indo-Germanic and Semitic are the 'two principal families of the human race'. Michelet draws genealogies and groups the peoples into two traditions: he writes, firstly, of hostility between Chaldaea, ancestor of Phoenicia and therefore of Carthage, and Persia, ancestor of Greece and Rome; secondly, he posits the Crusades as an avatar of the Punic Wars, by virtue of a supposed lineage that equates Arabs with Carthaginians, and Byzantines and Franks with Romans. Race then incorporates a religious dimension (Christians versus Muslims).

The text, in the extract reproduced above, presents a picture of Phoenician and Carthaginian civilisation in a racial logic that affirms the permanence of a 'type' beyond migrations, mutations and encounters: 'In order to divine this lost world of the Carthaginian empire, and to comprehend what would have become of humanity, had the Semitic race conquered, we must collect what is known of Phoenicia, the type and metropolis of Carthage.' We can also see that the idea of the struggle and domination of one race over the other seems inescapable.

The Carthaginians appear as 'a rugged and mournful people, sensual and covetous, adventurous without being heroic', practising a religion that is 'atrocious and full of fearful practices'. This portrayal is partly based on stereotypes from ancient historiography. Thus, we find the motifs of treachery (*perfidia*) and cruelty (*saeuitia*). Michelet is indignant about the torture inflicted on Regulus by the Punic people, while declaring that he is basing himself on 'the testimony of the Romans – a testimony of dubious verity, but agreeing with what we otherwise know about the cowardly barbarism of the Carthaginians', without it being clear what this 'otherwise' means.

In the same vein, Michelet reads Polybius' considerations on the constitution of Carthage, which are actually rather nuanced (Polybius considered the state to be well organised).⁴³ But he sums them up in a very pejorative way: 'This dominion rested upon two ruinous bases, a navy, which at this period of art other nations could easily equal, and mercenary armies as exacting as they were faithless.' The grievance of greed (*avaritia*) is omnipresent: the city is dominated by money, 'the king

and god of Carthage'. Surprisingly, the historian does not explicitly relate the Carthaginian to the stereotype of the mercantile and usurious Jew. But the Punic metropolis appears as an oppressive nation, which Michelet compares with various modern imperial powers (England in India and Spain in America, the Portuguese and Dutch empires in the East Indies). The representation of Carthage as a maritime and commercial power is obviously fed by an anti-British ideology that was widespread at the time. Moreover, the motif of the mercenary system, which is recurrent in ancient descriptions, is turned into an accusation of slavery.

Human sacrifice, especially child sacrifice, serves to embody the pinnacle of barbarism in Carthage. Michelet relies on Diodorus and, once again, loads an originally rather neutral account – Diodorus relates these customs to Greek myths – with moral judgements.⁴⁴ His striking description fired the imagination (in particular that of Flaubert in the famous 'grillade des moutards' or 'roasting of the kids' in *Salammbô*) and left a lasting impression on the collective representation of Carthage.

Finally, there is a passage that shows how tautological the definition of race is. Michelet distinguishes two races in North Africa; the Libyans, who are indigenous, and the Carthaginians, descendants of the Phoenicians. Having deduced from the use of mercenaries that the Carthaginians were not warriors, the historian anticipates the objection: What is to be done, then, with generals such as Hamilcar and Hannibal, whose value has been noted since antiquity? He replies: '[T]he military genius of the Barcas belonged, as the name of Barca seems to indicate, to the warlike nomads of Libya, more than to the Phoenician merchants. The true Carthaginians are the Hannos, covetous administrators and incapable generals.' Only those who correspond to the definition given above can be called 'Carthaginians'.

Thus, this chapter of the *History of the Roman Republic* is the one in which the notion of race is applied most often, because the conflict between Carthage and Rome allows us, if one assumes a continuity of race, to think of more recent power relations, in particular the Crusades and, contemporary with Michelet, the establishment of colonial empires. The rest of the *History of the Roman Republic* develops an organic vision of the world: the destruction of Carthage allows the assimilation of the East, which will be completed at Actium.

However, it may be noted that it is this passage that has remained in our memories perhaps because it is more binary and easier to grasp than the rest and perhaps also because it contains the seeds of the vision that Michelet himself would develop throughout his life. Indeed, his conception of race evolved radically, with a turning point occurring

around the 1850s, no doubt under the influence of Renan's work, the linguistic work of Emile Burnouf and probably also Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (*Essay on the inequality of the human races*). In 1864, approaching his 70th birthday, Michelet published a work entitled *Bible de l'Humanité* (*Bible of humanity*), described by Léon Poliakov as the 'Aryan Bible'. It systematically and sharply divided the 'Peoples of the Light' (India, Persia, Greece) and the 'Peoples of the Twilight, of the Night and of the Light Reflecting against the Darkness' (Egypt, Syria, the Jews), concluding that it was necessary to expel the Semitic tradition, represented by Judaism and Christianity. Other peoples were not taken into consideration, as they were deemed 'savage' or 'eccentric'.⁴⁵

In this sense, it is revealing that Michelet's preface to the *History of the Roman Republic*, written in the same years as the *Bible of Humanity*, refers to the account of the Punic Wars as the best passage of the work, 'the important, solid part, and which I believe shall endure'.⁴⁶ It is also revealing that it is to this passage that the Orientalist Hermann Zotenberg referred in 1868 when he said that Michelet was the initiator of a 'revolution ... in the study of history' in so far as he was 'the first to bring to light this fact of great importance for history and philosophy', namely 'the position of inferiority, especially moral, of the Semitic race in relation to the Indo-European race'.⁴⁷

These ideas of the essence and permanence of peoples, conveyed through the notion of race, have nourished, in various forms and to varying degrees, French historiography of the colonial period and, in particular, historiography concerned with the antiquity of North Africa (one thinks of the writings of Adolphe Dureau de la Malle, Ernest Renan, Gaston Boissier, Gustave Boissière, Ernest Mercier, Stéphane Gsell, to name just a few of the important figures). It is this historiography that was read, on the other shore of the Mediterranean, by Algerian and Tunisian intellectuals who were working to found their nations on a historical narrative. These historians, such as Mubarak al-Mili or Tawfiq al-Madani, writing in French or Arabic, were dependent on a historiography that was presented as doubly colonial (brought to them by the French, who proclaimed themselves the heirs and successors of Rome in Africa) but which alone they considered to be legitimate; they selected and reconfigured the materials that they found. Consider just one example of this continuity mixed with subversion: in 1947, Mohand-Cherif Sahli published a pamphlet entitled *Le Message de Yougourtha*, which tried to show that the struggle for freedom had secular roots in Algeria. In a text which recalls Michelet, he shows Carthage, that 'imperialist cancer on the flank of the Maghreb', inflicting terrible oppression on the locals, who are

named, in anticipation, Tunisians and Algerians. The parallel is drawn with France, not with England. However, the notional system is the same, as shown in the introduction to the pamphlet, which makes heavy use of the concept of race: by using this concept, Sahli assumes a continuity between the Berbers of antiquity and the Maghrebi of his time, just as between the Romans and the French, and thus authorises the analogies.

Commentary translated from the French by Phiroze Vasunia

Notes

- 1 We have made a few small changes to Hazlitt's translation (though we have retained its nineteenth-century flavour out of historical interest), expanded some of the abbreviations in the notes and given more detailed citations in a few instances.
- 2 When Lebanon still had cedars. See Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*.
- 3 Tabulata tibi jam tertia fumant.
Tu nescis: nam si gradibus trepidatur ab imis,
Ultimus ardebit quem tegula sola tuetur.
Juvenal III.199–201
[the third floor where you live is already smoking. But you don't know anything about it. After all, if the alarm is raised at the bottom of the stairs, the person protected by only a little roof tile . . . will be the last to burn. (trans. S. M. Braund)]
Augustus forbade the Romans to build houses of more than 70 feet high.
- 4 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, i. 496–503. (Michelet's text leaves out a few lines from Milton's poem.)
- 5 Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, c. 7. (Michelet refers also to the French translation, published between 1825 and 1851, of G. F. Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (1810–1812). He adds: 'On the religion of Phoenicians and Carthaginians, see the interesting chapter added by the translator' – that is, the Hellenist J.-D. Guigniaud.)
- 6 Doubtless the same with the Melkarth of Tyre, to whom every Phoenician colony and Carthage herself paid tithe. It is said that the Tyrians, when besieged by Alexander, chained the statue of Apollo to that of Melkarth, to prevent her going over to the enemy.
- 7 Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica*, xix.
- 8 See Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise, Pièces Justificatives*, where we find, amongst other things, that the mechanic who had transferred any useful trade from Venice to some other country was first invited to return, and on his refusal, poniarded by the agents of the senate. (Hazlitt omits the end of Michelet's note: 'These atrocious laws, locked up in the mysterious cassette, remained unknown to those they affected, until the day the French armies came to put an end to this'.)
- 9 The reference is to Chapter 11 of *De l'esprit des Lois* (*The Spirit of Laws*, 1748) by Montesquieu.
- 10 Eratosthenes, ap. Strabo, *Geography*, xvii.19.
- 11 See his *Periplus*, under the article of Carthage.
- 12 See Herodotus in Melpomene (i.e. Book 4; see Herodotus 4.43), on the obstacles which Sataspes encountered.
- 13 See the charts and relations in the first volume of voyages that contributed to the establishment of an East India company, part i, p. 201. This weed covers the surface of the water in such a manner as to be scarcely perceived, and ships can only pass through it with a stiff gale.
- 14 The passage 'Scylax says ... extraordinary conduct' is missing in Michelet's text and restored by Hazlitt.
- 15 Pliny tells us the same thing, speaking of Mount Atlas: 'Noctibus micare crebris ignibus, tibiurum cantu timpanorumque sonitu strepere, neminem interdiu cerni.' (The note contains a slightly garbled quotation of the Latin in Pliny's *Natural History*, 5.7.)
- 16 Mr Dodwell. (*Dissertation on Hanno's Periplus*, Henry Dodwell [1641–1711], *Arriani periplus Ponti Euxini*).
- 17 This and the following paragraph are missing in Michelet's text and restored by Hazlitt.
- 18 Frienshemius's *Supplement to Livy*, 2nd Decad. (Book vi).

- 19 In the parts subject to the Carthaginians.
- 20 Justin, *Epitome historiarum Trogi Pompeii*, lib. 43, Ch. 5.
- 21 As to the articles in which the Phenicians traded – doubtless analogous, for the most part, with those in which the Carthaginians dealt – see Ezekiel, xxvii. xxviii., the most ancient document of commercial statistics extant.
- 22 Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica*, xiii. The Syracusans considered the Carthaginians very indifferent sailors.
- 23 Plutarch, *Life of Timoleon*, on the Crimesus (Chapter 28). The merchants of Palmyra were armed in like manner in their battles against Aurelian. See Zozimus, and my article *Zénobie* in the *Biographie universelle*.
- 24 Polybius, *Histories*, i.
- 25 Hazlitt omits the note: ‘The Italians of the Middle Ages thought the same way: “The service of the citizens, says Matteo Villani [Italian chronicler of the early fourteenth century], is useless and often fatal”.’
- 26 Hazlitt omits the note: ‘Polybius, *passim*, and in particular in the narration of the battle of Cannae.’
- 27 Hazlitt here quotes a long passage from Polybius, *Histories*, 3.22–24, which Michelet presents in a note.
- 28 See Freret (Nicolas Fréret, a French historian and linguist who wrote in the first half of the eighteenth century).
- 29 Appendix XXVII (Michelet refers to the explanations he added at the end of the volume.)
- 30 Hazlitt omits the note: ‘See in Joinville [Jean de Joinville (1224–1317), chronicler of the seventh crusade] how the heroes of the crusades feared the sea.’
- 31 Hazlitt omits the note: ‘The disaster of Charles V in Algiers, the difficulty with which the French fleets maintained themselves in 1830 in these dangerous areas, explain the loss of so many fleets that the Romans and Carthaginians made in a few years.’
- 32 See the various versions of Tudetanus and Tubero in Aulus Gellius, vii.4); of Livy, *Epit.* 18.7; of Cicero, *Off.* iii.26,7; and *Contra Pisonem* 19; Florus, *Roman history*, ii.2; Appian, *Pun.* 1.4, etc. (Michelet goes on: of Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica*, 24. Fr.16, of Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 9.2 ext.1, of Aurelius Victor, *De uiris illustribus*, 40, of Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 2.14, of Orosius, *Adversus Paganos*, 4.10.1, of Zonaras, *Epitome*, 8.13–15, of Saint Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*, 1.15.)
- 33 Hazlitt omits the note: ‘Polybius, I.62. One of the reasons that made the Italian republics prefer the service of the condottieri for a long time was that they could stop all military expenses the same day they signed the peace.’ (Jean de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen-Âge*, 1808, viii, p. 63.)
- 34 Michelet, *Histoire romaine*, 549. All quotations in this commentary from French-language sources have been translated by Phiroze Vasunia.
- 35 Michelet, ‘L’Introduction à l’histoire universelle’, 363.
- 36 Michelet, *Bible de l’humanité*, 341.
- 37 Michelet, *Philosophie de l’histoire*, 396.
- 38 Michelet, ‘Introduction à l’histoire universelle’, 258.
- 39 Thierry, *Histoire des Gaulois*, iii.
- 40 Michelet, *Histoire romaine*, 2.
- 41 Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita* 21.1–12.
- 42 Michelet, *Histoire romaine*, 124 ff.
- 43 Polybius, *Historiae*, 4.52.
- 44 Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica*, 20.14.
- 45 Michelet, *Bible de l’humanité*, preface.
- 46 Michelet, *Histoire romaine*, 3.
- 47 Quoted by A. Aramini in Michelet, *Philosophie de l’histoire*, 538.

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Thomas Staunton St Clair's *A Soldier's Recollections of the West Indies and America* (1834) and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Journal of a West-India Proprietor* (1816–8)

St Clair's *A Soldier's Recollections of the West Indies and America: With a narrative of the expedition to the island of Walcheren*, Vol. 1, Chapter 13; Lewis's *Journal of a West-India Proprietor*, kept during a residence in the island of Jamaica, January to March 1816. Commentary by Margaret Williamson.

St Clair, *A Soldier's Recollections*, Vol. 1, Chapter 13

The morning after the arrival of the slave-ship mentioned in the preceding chapter was ushered in as usual with a brilliant sky; and, after partaking of an early breakfast, Captain Yates, myself, and one or two other officers, proceeded early up to the town, in order to witness this traffic in human flesh, of which some of my companions had frequently before been spectators, although I had never yet seen it. When we arrived, I found myself just in time to hear the extravagant shouts of delight set up by these poor wretches, and their loud halloos and clapping of hands on again touching terra firma. As each boat landed her cargo, they were immediately marched up by one of the seamen from the schooner to an open space in rear of the Government-House, where the sale was intended to take place: and it struck me as a most extraordinary sight to see a number of white planters examining these captives, limb after limb, as they stood before them, just as the dealers do with horses in our fairs in England.

The prices demanded for them were high, as this cargo was the last that could be admitted, and a great number of purchasers were present. It was curious to see, when a bargain was concluded, the new slave jog off with a veteran from his master's plantation, without even bidding farewell to any of his unfortunate companions, or showing the slightest feeling for his own situation. Some few stout, young, able-bodied men sold for £150 each, others at £100, and boys at from £40 to £50. My friend Yates took a fancy to two of the latter, whom he immediately purchased. These little black urchins were about eleven or twelve years of age — but more of them hereafter. Women far advanced in pregnancy sold at nearly double price.

The extreme attachment which these unfortunate people entertain for an attentive and kind master was, upon this occasion, shown in a most extraordinary manner to a good-natured little man, Mynheer Catz, who was owner of a valuable coffee-plantation, at a short distance up the Canje river. He had brought with him two of his field Negroes, that they might please themselves in making choice of two women out of this cargo, not having been able to suit themselves with wives among those on the plantation.

Old Catz, turning round to his Negroes, pointed out two rather good-looking girls, and said: "Will these do for you?" One of them immediately replied: "Si Massera," and took hold of one of the girls' hands. The other, who was a stout, well-made, good-looking Black, answered his master thus: "No, no, Massa, me no want wifree for handsome; me want him for workee for Massa and workee for me." "Well then," said his master, "make your choice." In about five minutes the fellow strutted up to his master, leading by the hand a well-made young woman, of exceedingly plain countenance; who afterwards turned out much better in every respect than the other, though her superior in personal strength and abilities.

Among the crowd of bidders and purchasers was an elderly Dutch lady of enormous size and corpulence, who thoroughly disgusted me with her indecency in examining the males who were for sale. She was, as I understood, the owner of a plantation up the river above the town, and arrived just in time to examine and purchase a few of this cargo, whom she required on her estate. We could not help cutting our jokes on her conduct, which had no effect in raising her wrath against us. At last the whole of the slaves were sold and the ground cleared of them; and be it recorded that, among these

numerous bargains, no mother was separated from her child; nor did I see male or female manifest the least sorrow on being parted from their companions.

When seated in our boat, on our way back to Fort St. Andrews, my ideas turned to the scene of which I had just been a spectator; and again I felt all the disgust and horror of slavery, which I had only the day before experienced on board the schooner.

How different are the feelings of these ignorant beings, whom I had just seen disposed of to the highest bidder, from ours! They, poor wretches, danced and sung during the sale; cheerfulness was depicted on all their countenances; and, when they became the property of a stranger, they trotted off with all the demonstrations of sincere pleasure. How fortunate that their ignorance is so complete!

It has been asked by many: "Will you, for the sake of drinking rum and sweetening your tea with sugar, persevere in this unjust and execrable barbarity?" I say to you, my friends, take heed, lest your humanity may, at the expence of your neighbours, and perhaps yourselves induce you to give up the advantages which you now possess, without the smallest chance of benefit or improvement to those unfortunate beings, whom I most heartily join with you in calling "our brethren."

Almost all the female slaves whom I observed in these colonies appeared to me to be as happy as the day was long. Early up in the morning, they accompanied their husbands to the field, at the signal given by the overseer; and were generally allowed to return a little before them to prepare their meal, which had been left in readiness. In the evening, at the conclusion of the day's work, these poor creatures were seen running home from the field in search of their little children, who were too young to take part in their labours; and, placing them astride, with their legs across their hips, away they hurried off to the orchards, which were generally situated at the back of the estate, and they were soon seen returning with baskets on their heads filled with all sorts of delicious fruits, such as pine-apples, shaddocks, forbidden fruit, &c., to refresh themselves and their families in the cool of the evening.

I observed, throughout this country, that the women had much more the appearance of happiness and vivacity than the men: perhaps this cheerfulness of manner may be peculiar to their sex.

On landing at Fort St. Andrews, the two Negro boys followed us to our barracks, where Yates immediately gave them Roman names. He called the ugliest of the two Nero, and said to me, "I will keep him, and give you Scipio to educate." I was delighted with the charge, and also with the poor boy, whose face was expressive of good-nature and mildness, which I afterwards found him to possess in a considerable degree. The next morning, having made them bathe and wash themselves well in the river, we dressed them in white canvass trowsers and shirts, and, at the hour of mess, strutted off with our two black boys behind us; they grinning at each other, as pleased as my lord-mayor on a show-day.

The first, second, and third day we kept them during dinner standing behind our chairs. On the third day we made them begin to wait upon us, and such ridiculous scenes now took place as nearly killed us all at table with laughter. Yates began with Nero. "Nero, the mustard!" Poor Nero knew nothing more than the sound of his name, and stood, staring at his master, with his mouth open. "The mustard, Nero!" he again vociferated, pointing to the sideboard. Off flew Nero, and the mess-waiter, who was near, pointed to the mustard-pot; but, poor Nero, not giving himself time to observe the direction of his finger, seized a bottle of vinegar, and carried it to his master, who pretended to be in a great passion, and sent him back with it, calling out "Mustard! mustard!" This time the poor boy was more fortunate in catching the direction of the waiter's finger, and he succeeded in carrying back the article for which he was sent; when Yates, with the determination of impressing these ingredients more strongly on his memory, made him open his mouth, and put into it a spoonful of the contents, calling out, "Mustard, mustard," while the poor boy was spitting and sputtering, and dancing on the floor, from the effects of this hot substance. I practised the same discipline with Scipio, who had made a similar mistake with the cayenne pepper which I had called for. I, therefore, gave him a small portion of it for the same purpose of impressing it on his memory; which it did so completely that he never afterwards forgot its name.

These two boys, from being our constant companions in boating, fishing, and shooting, soon became strongly and faithfully attached to us; and it was wonderful to see their readiness in finding out our wishes and the rapidity with which they learned our language.

Lewis, *Journal of a West-India Proprietor*

January 2, 1816

The distance was about thirty miles, and soon after nine o'clock we reached Savannah la Mar, where I found my trustee, and a whole cavalcade, waiting to conduct me to my own estate; for he had brought with him a curricule and pair for myself, a gig for my servant, two black boys upon mules, and a cart with eight oxen to convey my baggage. The road was excellent, and we had not above five miles to travel; and as soon as the carriage entered my gates, the uproar and confusion which ensued sets all description at defiance. The works were instantly all abandoned; every thing that had life came flocking to the house from all quarters; and not only the men, and the women, and the children, but, "by a bland assimilation," the hogs, and the dogs, and the geese, and the fowls, and the turkeys, all came hurrying along by instinct, to see what could possibly be the matter, and seemed to be afraid of arriving too late. Whether the pleasure of the negroes was sincere may be doubted; but certainly it was the loudest that I ever witnessed: they all talked together, sang, danced, shouted, and, in the violence of their gesticulations, tumbled over each other, and rolled about upon the ground. Twenty voices at once enquired after uncles, and aunts, and grandfathers, and great-grandmothers of mine, who had been buried long before I was in existence, and whom, I verily believe, most of them only knew by tradition. One woman held up her little naked black child to me, grinning from ear to ear; — "Look, Massa, look here! him nice lilly neger for Massa!" Another complained, — "So long since none come see we, Massa; good Massa, come at last." As for the old people, they were all in one and the same story: now they had lived once to see Massa, they were ready for dying to-morrow, "them no care."

The shouts, the gaiety, the wild laughter, their strange and sudden bursts of singing and dancing, and several old women, wrapped up in large cloaks, their heads bound round with different-coloured handkerchiefs, leaning on a staff, and standing motionless in the middle of the hubbub, with their eyes fixed upon the portico which I occupied, formed an exact counterpart of the festivity of the witches in Macbeth. Nothing could be more odd or more novel than the whole scene; and yet there was something in it by which I could not help being affected; perhaps it was the consciousness that all these

human beings were my *slaves*; — to be sure, I never saw people look more happy in my life; and I believe their condition to be much more comfortable than that of the labourers of Great Britain; and, after all, slavery, in *their* case, is but another name for servitude, now that no more negroes can be forcibly carried away from Africa, and subjected to the horrors of the voyage, and of the seasoning after their arrival: but still I had already experienced, in the morning, that Juliet was wrong in saying “What’s in a name?” For soon after my reaching the lodging-house at Savannah la Mar, a remarkably clean-looking negro lad presented himself with some water and a towel: I concluded him to belong to the inn; and, on my returning the towel, as he found that I took no notice of him, he at length ventured to introduce himself, by saying, — “Massa not know me; *me your slave!*” — and really the sound made me feel a pang at the heart. The lad appeared all gaiety and good humour, and his whole countenance expressed anxiety to recommend himself to my notice; but the word “slave” seemed to imply, that, although he did feel pleasure then in serving me, if he had detested me he must have served me still. I really felt quite humiliated at the moment, and was tempted to tell him, “Do not say that again; say that you are my negro, but do not call yourself my slave.”

Altogether, they shouted and sang me into a violent headache. It is now one in the morning, and I hear them still shouting and singing. I gave them a holiday for Saturday next, and told them that I had brought them all presents from England; and so, I believe, we parted very good friends.

January 16, 1816

My visit to Jamaica has at least produced one advantage to myself. Several runaways, who had disappeared for some time (some even for several months), have again made their appearance in the field, and I have desired that no questions should be asked. On the other hand, after enjoying herself during the Saturday and Sunday, which were allowed for holidays on my arrival, one of my ladies chose to *pull foot* [run away], and did not return from her hiding-place in the mountains till this morning. Her name is Marcia; but so unlike is she to Addison’s Marcia, that she is not only as black as Juba (instead of being “fair, oh! how divinely fair!”) but, — whereas Sempronius complains, that “Marcia, the lovely Marcia, is left behind”, the complaint against my heroine is, that “Marcia, the lovely Marcia,” is

always running away. In excuse for her disappearance she alleged, that so far was her husband from thinking that “she towered above her sex,” that he had called her “a very bad woman,” which had provoked her so much, that she could not bear to stay with him; and she assured me, that he was himself “a very bad man;” which, if true, was certainly enough to justify any lady, black or white, in making a little incognito excursion for a week or so; therefore, as it appeared to be nothing more than a conjugal quarrel, and as Marcia engaged never to run away any more (at the same time allowing that she had suffered her resentment to carry her too far, when it had carried her all the way to the mountains), I desired that an act of oblivion might be passed in favour of Cato’s daughter, and away she went, quite happy, to pick hog’s meat.

January 24, 1816

This was a day of perpetual occupation. I rose at six o’clock, and went down to the Bay to settle some business; on my return I visited the hospital while breakfast was getting ready; and as soon as it was over, I went down to the negro-houses to hear the whole body of Eboes lodge a complaint against one of the book-keepers¹ [managers], and appoint a day for their being heard in his presence. On my return to the house, I found two women belonging to a neighbouring estate, who came to complain of cruel treatment from their overseer, and to request me to inform their trustee how ill they had been used, and see their injuries redressed. They said, that having been ill in the hospital, and ordered to the field while they were still too weak to work, they had been flogged with much severity (though not beyond the limits of the law); and my head driver, who was less scrupulously delicate than myself as to ocular inspection of Juliet’s person (which Juliet, to do her justice, was perfectly ready to submit to in proof of her assertions), told me, that the woman had certainly suffered greatly; the other, whose name was Delia, was but just recovering from a miscarriage, and declared openly that the overseer’s conduct had been such, that nothing should have prevented her running away long ago if she could but have had the heart to abandon a child which she had on the estate. Both were poor feeble-looking creatures, and seemed very unfit subjects for any severe correction. I promised to write to their trustee; and, as they were afraid of being punished on their return home for having thrown themselves on my protection, I wrote a

note to the overseer, requesting that the women might remain quite unmolested till the trustee's arrival, which was daily expected; and, with this note and a present of cocoa-fingers and salt fish, Delia and Juliet departed, apparently much comforted.

They were succeeded by no less a personage than *Venus* herself — a poor, little, sickly, timid soul, who had purchased her freedom from my father by substituting in her place a fine stout black wench, who, being *Venus's locum tenens*, was, by courtesy, called *Venus*, too, though her right name was “Big Joan;” but, by some neglect of the then attorney, *Venus* had never received any title, and she now came to beg “massa so good as give paper;” otherwise she was still, to all intents and purposes, my slave, and I might still have compelled her to work, although, at the same time, her substitute was on the estate. Of course, I promised the paper required, and engaged to act the part of a second *Vulcan* by releasing *Venus* from my chains: but the paper was not the only thing that *Venus* wanted; she also wanted a petticoat! She told me, that when the presents were distributed on Sunday, the petticoat, which she would otherwise have had, was, of course, “given to the *other Venus*;” and though, to be sure, she was free now, yet, “when she belonged to massa, she had always worked for him well,” and “she was quite as glad to see massa as the other *Venus*,” and, therefore, “ought to have quite as much petticoat.” I tried to convince her, that for *Venus* to wear a petticoat of blue durant, or, indeed, any petticoat at all, would be quite unclassical: the goddess of beauty stuck to her point, and finally carried off the petticoat.

Venus had scarcely evacuated the premises, when her place was occupied by the minister of Savannah la Mar, with proposals for instructing the negroes in religion; and the minister, in his turn, was replaced by one of the Sunday-night thieves, who had been caught while in the actual possession of one of my sheep and a great turkey-cock; and, to make the matter worse, the depredator's name was *Hercules*! *Hercules*, whom *Virgil* states to have exercised so much severity on *Cacus*, when his own oxen were stolen, was taken up himself for stealing my sheep in *Jamaica*! The demi-god had nothing to say in his excuse: he had just received a large allowance of beef: — therefore, hunger had no share in his transgression; and the committing the offence during the very time that I was giving the negroes a festival, rendered his ingratitude the more flagrant.

I perfectly well understood that the man was sent to me by my agent, in order to show the absolute necessity of sometimes employing the cart-whip, and to see whether I would suffer the fellow to escape unpunished. But, as this was the first offender who had been brought before me, I took that for a pretext to absolve him: so I lectured him for half an hour with great severity, swore that on the very next offence I would order him to be sold; and that if he would not do his fair proportion of work without being lashed, he should be sent to work somewhere else; for I would suffer no such worthless fellows on my estate, and would not be at the expense of a cart-whip to correct him. He promised most earnestly to behave better in future, and Hercules was suffered to depart: but I am told that no good can be expected of him; that he is perpetually running away; and that he had been absent for five weeks together before my arrival, and only returned home upon hearing that there was a distribution of beef, rum, and jackets going forward; in return for all which, he stole my sheep and my poor great turkey-cock.

But now came the most puzzling business of the day. About four years ago, two Eboes, called Pickle and Edward, were rivals, after being intimate friends: Pickle (who is an excellent faithful negro, but not very wise) was the successful candidate; and, of course, the friendship was interrupted, till Edward married the sister of the disputed fair one. From this time the brothers-in-law lived in perfect harmony together; but, during the first festival given on my arrival, Pickle's house was broken open, and robbed of all his clothes, &c. The thief was sought for, but in vain. On Monday last I found Pickle in the hospital, complaining of a pain in his side; and the blood, which had been taken from him, gave reason to apprehend a pleurisy arising from cold; but, as the disorder had been taken in its earliest stage, nothing dangerous was expected. The fever abated; the medicines performed their offices properly; still the man's spirits and strength appeared to decline, and he persisted in saying that he was not better, and should never do well. At length, to-day, he got out of his sick bed, came to the house, attended by the whole body of drivers, and accused his brother-in-law of having been the stealer of his goods. I asked, "Had Edward been seen near his house? Had any of his effects been seen in Edward's possession? Did Edward refuse to suffer his hut to be searched?" No. Edward, who was present, pressed for the most strict scrutiny, and asserted his perfect ignorance; nor could

the accuser advance any grounds for the charge, except his belief of Edward's guilt. "Why did he think so?" After much beating about the bush, at length out came the real *causa doloris* — "Edward had *Obeahed* him!" He had accused Edward of breaking open his house, and had begged him to help him to his goods again; and "Edward had gone at midnight into the bush" [i.e. the wood], and "had gathered the plant whangra,² which he had boiled in an iron pot, by a fire of leaves, over which he went puff, puffie!" and said the sautee-sautee; and then had cut the whangra root into four pieces, three to bury at the plantation gates, and one to burn; and to each of these three pieces he gave the name of a Christian, one of which was Daniel, and Edward had said, that this would help him to find his goods; but instead of that, he had immediately felt this pain in his side, and therefore he was sure that, instead of using Obeah to find his goods, Edward had used it to kill himself. "And were these all his reasons?" I enquired. "No; when he married, Edward was very angry at the loss of his mistress, and had said that they never would live well and happily together; and they never *had* lived happily and well together."

This last argument quite got the better of my gravity. By parity of reasoning, I thought that almost every married couple in Great Britain must be under the influence of Obeah! I endeavoured to convince the fellow of his folly and injustice, especially as the person accused was the identical man who had detected the Obeah priest harboured in one of my negro huts last year, had seized him with his own hands, and delivered him up to my agent, who had prosecuted and transported him. It was, therefore, improbable in the highest degree, that he should be an Obeah man himself; and all the bystanders, black and white, joined me in ridiculing Pickle for complaints so improbable and childish. But anger, argument, and irony were all ineffectual. I offered to christen him, and expel black Obeah by white, but in vain; the fellow persisted in saying, that "he had a pain in his side, and, *therefore*, Edward must have given it to him;" and he went back to his hospital, shaking his head all the way, sullen and unconvinced. He is a young strong negro, perfectly well disposed, and doing his due portion of work willingly; and it will be truly provoking to lose him by the influence of this foolish prejudice.

March 16, 1816

Hercules, the poor paralytic runaway, has neither moved nor spoken since his being brought into the hospital. For the two last days he refused all sustenance; blisters, rubbing with mustard, &c. were tried without producing the least sensation; and in the course of last night he expired without a groan.

Another offender, by name Charles Fox, is also under the doctor's hands, suffering under the effects of his own transgressions. Having been Pickle's shipmate, he professed the strongest attachment to him, and was perpetually at his house; till Pickle's wife made her husband aware that love for herself was the real object of his shipmate's visits. Finding her story disbelieved, she hid Pickle behind the bed, when he had an opportunity of hearing the solicitations of his perfidious Pylades; and, rushing from his concealment, he gave Fox so complete a thrashing, that he was obliged to come to the hospital. Here is another proof that negroes, "our unfortunate fellow-creatures," are not without some of the luxuries of civilised life; old men of sixty keeping mistresses, and young ones seducing their friends' wives; why, what would the Reporter of the African Institution have?

It is only to be wished, that the negroes would content themselves with these fashionable peccadilloes; but, unluckily, there are some palates among them which require higher seasoned vices; and besides their occasional amusements of poisoning, stabbing, thieving, &c., a plan has just been discovered in the adjoining parish of St. Elizabeth's, for giving themselves a grand fête by murdering all the whites in the island. The focus of this meditated insurrection was on Martin's Penn, the property of Lord Balcarras, where the overseer is an old man of the mildest character and the negroes had always been treated with peculiar indulgence. Above a thousand persons were engaged in the plot, three hundred of whom had been regularly sworn to assist in it with all the usual accompanying ceremonies of drinking human blood, eating earth from graves, &c. Luckily, the plot was discovered time enough to prevent any mischief; and yesterday the ringleaders were to be tried at Black River.

February 19, 1818

Neptune came this morning to request that the name of his son, Oscar, might be changed for that of Julius, which (it seems) had been that of his own father. The child, he said, had always been

weakly, and he was persuaded, that its ill-health proceeded from his deceased grandfather's being displeased, because it had not been called after him. The other day, too, a woman, who had a child sick in the hospital, begged me to change its name for any other which might please me best: she cared not what; but she was sure that it would never do well, so long as it should be called Lucia. Perhaps this prejudice respecting the power of names produces in some measure their unwillingness to be christened. They find no change produced in them, except the alteration of their name, and hence they conclude that this name contains in it some secret power; while, on the other hand, they conceive that the ghosts of their ancestors cannot fail to be offended at their abandoning an appellation, either hereditary in the family, or given by themselves.

* * *

Commentary by Margaret Williamson

Thomas Staunton St Clair (1785–1847) and Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775–1818) were among the many writers who travelled to the West Indies during the era of slavery and described their experiences for audiences back in Britain. Though both members of the British elite, their backgrounds were very different.

Thomas Staunton St Clair was born in Gibraltar to a military family of Scottish descent. He became a commissioned officer in 1803 and in 1805 was posted to Demerara and then Berbice in South America, both previously Dutch colonies but recently ceded to Britain. He spent two and a half years there and wrote about his experiences in his memoir *A Soldier's Recollections*. He was a close and curious observer of landscapes, flora and fauna, and supplemented his verbal descriptions with watercolour paintings. He also describes frequent encounters with both enslaved and indigenous people.

Matthew 'Monk' Lewis was a member of the London establishment. Educated at Westminster School and Oxford, he held a series of government posts, including that of Member of Parliament for Hindon in Wiltshire. He was also a prominent literary figure who wrote short stories, novels and plays, many in the Gothic horror mode; it was his 1796 Gothic novel *The Monk* that gave rise to his nickname. He inherited two plantations in Jamaica and travelled twice to the island to oversee their management. His *Journal* focuses mainly on his first visit, in 1815–16; he returned in 1817 but died of yellow fever on the homeward voyage.

Lewis's narrative is far more literary than St Clair's: particularly in the early stages, it is laden with literary allusion, especially classical, and interspersed with poems of his own composition. His reaction to the landscape is noticeably aestheticised, and his favourite adjective of appreciation is 'picturesque'. His main focus, however, is life on his westernmost plantation, Cornwall, and on the enslaved Africans in his possession. His interest in language and culture, including that of the enslaved, is evident: he renders some of his encounters in dramatic form, and reproduces some of the West African trickster stories – 'Nancy [Ananse] stories' and 'Neger-tricks' – that have been told to him.

Both authors' visits to the West Indies took place in a period of abolitionist agitation. The slave trade was outlawed in 1807 and St Clair witnessed the arrival of the last legal slave-trading ship in Berbice, but slavery itself was not abolished by Britain until 1833. No traveller to the West Indies could avoid the issue, and both writers discuss abolition in their narratives.

St Clair represents himself as having given little thought to slavery before his posting, and he records his thoughts and impressions with sometimes disarming honesty. He often expresses sympathy with enslaved individuals, deploring the 'tyranny and oppression' they suffer and lamenting his countrymen's complicity in trading and working them like animals. Yet his sympathy can turn into distaste in individual encounters, and early in his narrative a nightmare reveals his deep fear of those whom, as a soldier, he is employed to oppress: he dreams of a 'huge black man' attacking him. In comments added between the journal's composition and its eventual publication, he rehearses many standard pro-slavery arguments, including the suggestion that contact with European 'civilisation' must always be an asset for a 'wild savage [...] unaided by a single ray of religion or morality', even at the price of enslavement.

Lewis, however, was no naïve observer of slavery. In London he was friendly with his abolitionist neighbours Lord and Lady Holland, and in his narrative he explicitly supports abolition – albeit gradual. He travelled to Jamaica with an agenda to improve the lives of his human property, and records his introduction of improvements such as extra days off, increased safety precautions and the curtailment of flogging. Such 'over-indulgence to [...] negroes' evidently alarms his fellow slaveholders and the powers that be, leading the chief magistrate in his parish to declare in court that 'the established laws of the island' must be strictly enforced, lest any infringement should 'promote disorder and confusion'.³

He describes frequent interactions with 'his negroes', especially when they are sick, or brought before him on disciplinary matters. Like St Clair, he insists that they seem happy in their work, declaring that he has not 'omitted any means of satisfying [his] negroes, and rendering them happy and secure from oppression'.⁴ The slaves in turn express exuberant appreciation, which Lewis savours despite being aware of the performative aspects of what he calls their 'palaver'.

But like St Clair's, his attitude is full of contradictions. Always conscious of his own interests as a slaveowner, he devotes little space to describing the backbreaking and dangerous labour performed by slaves on a sugar estate. His introduction of a rewards system for childbearing women is driven by the need to maintain a workforce that could no longer be replenished through the slave trade. When his slaves respond to his attempts to lighten their load by producing less sugar, he comments ruefully on their ingratitude, denying the fundamentally exploitative and violent structure of his relationship to them. His frequently paternalistic attitude to individuals – he represents them as creatures of limited desires and understanding – echoes assumptions about the childlike, primitive nature of Africans that were often taken to justify enslaving them.

The violence underpinning slavery, and the fears it arouses, break the surface of the narrative only occasionally. White slaveholders in Jamaica were outnumbered nine to one by enslaved Africans, and the threat of uprisings was constant. Lewis describes several plotted or actual attacks, and although they are reported with a curious lack of affect, the danger they represent seems to result in a kind of nervously defensive irony. A typical example is the description, dated 16 March 1816 and reproduced above, of a planned uprising in the neighbouring parish of St Elizabeth. Lewis has been describing the attempted seduction of one slave's wife by another, offering it as proof that 'negroes [. . .] are not without some of the luxuries of civilised life', including 'sexual peccadilloes' such as this. He then frames the threatened uprising in similar terms, describing 'poisoning, stabbing and murdering' as 'occasional amusements' and the murder of all the whites in the island as 'a grand fête'.

This would-be humorous rendering of the planned uprising ironically overlays the mortal danger represented by the slaves' plans with the lighter aspects of European 'civilisation': this enables him to mask anxiety while also reinforcing the contrast between the two. His fears can only have been increased by his belief that the rebellious slaves had, like his own, always 'been treated with peculiar indulgence' and that the overseer was 'an old man of the mildest character'.

Both authors record their encounters with a phenomenon widespread in the Anglophone Atlantic: that of giving distinctive names to enslaved people.⁵ Naming, and especially renaming, is a way of asserting ownership: just as branding a slave's flesh marks the body with the sign of ownership, so renaming marks his or her identity, erasing an individual's previous culture and identity by replacing it with one usually drawn from the culture of the enslaver. It was common to rename newly acquired slaves; many of the names used follow distinct patterns, including, for example, European place names such as London or Lincoln, diminutive versions of British personal names – Tom, Dick, Harry, Bess, Prue, Kitty, for example – and West African day-names such as Cudjoe, Quaco, Benneba and Quasheba.⁶ These patterns were repeated across the world of Atlantic slavery with only minor variations; for example, Biblical names are more common in the American South than in the Caribbean.

Another substantial subset of names is those of powerful or divine figures from Graeco-Roman history and mythology, such as Caesar, Pompey, Cato, Diana and Venus, and here there is a further twist. These names have clear roots in the contemporary British practice of giving such names to animals like pets, racehorses and pedigree cattle. Giving them to the enslaved not only points up the disparity between the names' connotations and the status of their bearers; it also carries the racist implication that enslaved humans of African origin resemble animals more than they do white Europeans. There is, however, a much sharper demarcation between these names and those chosen by white Europeans for themselves.

Animal naming in eighteenth-century Britain was a form of communication between namers, a medium for displaying wit and whimsy, as when for example the offspring of the stallion Regulus were given other names from Roman Republican history.⁷ But when those named are not animals but enslaved humans, the joke acquires extra edge. Characters and historical models from Graeco-Roman antiquity pervaded the literary culture of the time, and familiarity with them would have been part of the cultural capital acquired by men like St Clair and Lewis through their education. And though the pre-eminence of these ancient societies as pinnacles of civilisation was not uncontested by the early nineteenth century, they were still thought of as superior to all others, as were the European civilisations that inherited and imitated them. This claimed superiority was then taken to justify the enslavement of Africans.

In giving the names of powerful figures from classical antiquity to slaves, the enslavers deployed cultural knowledge mockingly to exclude those who lacked it (the enslaved were for the most part denied even the

possibility of learning to read or write). They also reinforced the bonds between namers by playing on knowledge shared between them but not with enslaved Africans.

In the scene described by St Clair we can see this 'in-joke' aspect drawing in both those present and his readers. Chapter 13 of the first volume, reproduced above, in which he describes the purchase and naming of two enslaved boys, opens with a description of the sale of slaves off the ship which illustrates, in St Clair's words, 'all the disgust and horror of slavery'. Yet the scene in which he now participates clearly demonstrates the coercive dynamics of renaming. The two newly purchased boys are given names connoting the power of their Graeco-Roman precursors, in an act that denies their new bearers any such power. They are then inducted into their new servility through being given orders in a language not their own, mocked when they fail to understand and tormented through the infliction of pain at the site of speech – the mouth. The 'merriment' shared by St Clair with his fellow officers plays on the contrast between their shared knowledge and power, on the one hand, and the ignorance of the boys themselves, on the other, and it mirrors the contrast between the boys' elevated 'Roman' names and their actual status.

This scene allows us to trace the way in which racialising the object of enslavement also racialises the observing subject. In her discussion of Hemingway's *To have and have not*, Toni Morrison demonstrates the lengths to which he goes to avoid fully representing 'a speaking black'.⁸ The black character who enters the novel after a mere 10 pages, and who is referred to using a racial slur, remains nameless throughout the first part of the narrative and speaks only rarely, though his reactions at key moments are observed and articulated by a white character, for whom he is a foil. St Clair's narrative exhibits a similar blindness to the independent reality of the Africans it describes. Not only are the only names borne by the enslaved Africans bestowed by him and Yates, but they too do not speak – and are not even shown as having a language of their own before their sadistic induction into that of their enslavers.

The same triangular relationship between enslavers, enslaved and readership is present in Lewis's more extensive treatment of names and naming. Lewis describes christening his slaves several times. He is well aware of the potency of the act and assumes the prerogative of choosing the names given, despite the occasional intervention by the enslaved. His purpose includes what he calls 'displac[ing] black Obeah by white' – that is, replacing not only African names but African religious culture with European culture. The names he chooses, however, are not those his white

contemporaries would have chosen for their own 'Christian' forenames, but names with high cultural European connotations: Shakespeare, Wellington, Navarre.

Lewis's focus on his enslaved property is reflected in the fact that he records over 50 individual slaves' names, while omitting those of any white plantation managers. Of those names almost one in five is classical – a fairly typical proportion. Classical names in particular – here including Cupid, Psyche, Minerva, Venus and Hercules – tend to provoke Lewis into flurries of literary and mythological allusion that both echo the underlying irony of classical naming and resonate with his defensive and obfuscatory use of irony elsewhere.

Excerpted here are encounters with three classically named slaves: Marcia, Venus and Hercules. In two of these cases Lewis is being called upon to decide about punishment: for running away in Marcia's case and for theft in Hercules', though Hercules also turns out to be a runaway. As always, Lewis wishes to represent the transaction as a personal one in which he shows benevolence and the enslaved are satisfied with the outcome; thus the scene with Marcia ends with the typical formulation that 'away she went, quite happy'.

But of course this is all too good to be true. Lewis's own narrative provides evidence that the leniency he exercises in these scenes was neither the norm nor effective – as Hercules' eventual fate shows. The offences of Marcia and Hercules strike at the root of the entire system of slavery. As Lewis acknowledges by referring to his 'advantage', losing enslaved workers meant forfeiting not only their labour (and, in the case of women, their reproductive capacity) but also their exchange value: plantation inventories regularly record the value of runaways as zero. Hence the punishments for escaping were often severe, including not only flogging but also shackling, branding, mutilation, even death. Nonetheless Hercules, we learn later, takes such risks in his determination to escape that he eventually denies all 'advantage' in him to Lewis by dying – a more serious and permanent blow to Lewis's interests than the theft of food.

Venus' request for documentary proof of her freedom also turns on the defining central relationship of ownership and exploitation, and shows astute understanding of her situation. No white member of Jamaican society would accept her manumitted status without written evidence, and even freedmen with documentation would never be free from the threat of arbitrary capture and re-enslavement.

But Lewis's account glosses over such unpleasant realities and his own complicity in them. Not only does he reduce the relationship to a personal one in which he can play the benefactor; the resolution he claims

to have brought about is made possible by reducing the slaves' needs to immediate and personal ones. Marcia, according to him, is suffering not from her enslavement but from marital disharmony, and Hercules merely from hunger or greed. Even Venus' explicit demand for freed status is immediately overlaid in his narrative by her request for something meant to be laughably petty: a petticoat. This not only associates her with her previous, enslaved status but also, as with Marcia and Hercules, represents her as childish and as having only basic, bodily needs – a view which, as we have seen, plays into justifications of slavery.

Such trivialisation of his slaves' needs and desires is heightened by Lewis's satirical tone and by his play on their elevated 'Roman' names. Marcia's name occasions a flurry of playful allusion to Joseph Addison's 1712 play *Cato*, featuring Marcia as the wife of Sempronius; this association enables Lewis to present this Marcia's escape as merely 'a little incognito excursion' and 'nothing more than a conjugal quarrel'. Similarly, the enslaved Venus and Hercules are teasingly associated with their mythical forebears. Venus becomes 'the goddess of beauty' and Hercules 'the demi-god', and both phrases are set in ironical counterpoint to the apparent triviality of their needs.

The associations of Venus' name again Lewis allow to dissociate himself from his power and responsibility as a slaveowner. Evoking the mythical episode in which Vulcan ensnares his wife Venus in an adulterous embrace with Mars, Lewis distils the entire institution of slavery into a personal transaction in which he is the gallant liberator. Lewis's offer to 'act the part of a second Vulcan by releasing Venus from [his] chains' does, it is true, represent him as responsible for her captivity. But Lewis's avatar, Vulcan, forged the chains only in response to Venus' adultery. Thus, ultimate responsibility for the existence of the chains – and, by analogy, for this Venus' enslavement – is diverted from Lewis onto her.

As in St Clair, the humour of these scenes depends on the cultural knowledge shared between Lewis and his readers, and implicates them in his multilayered attempt to deny the realities of slavery. Key to this attempt is the polarity between the civilised and European, on the one hand, and the African, barbaric and slavelike on the other – a polarity on which 'Roman' names in general pivot.

But the move does not come without cost. Encounters in what Mary Louise Pratt called 'the contact zone'⁹ leave neither side unchanged. Just as classical names eventually became associated with slavery (and were discarded by the newly emancipated), so Lewis's irony ends by contaminating the cultural purity it was designed to uphold. The passage in which he exclaims at the disparity between the enslaved 'depredator'

and his heroic European counterpart is based on a deformed reading of the Virgilian passage to which it alludes. Far from having been robbed of 'his own oxen', as Lewis puts it, Hercules in Virgil has himself only recently plundered them from Geryon, in an act of what looks remarkably like colonial appropriation. Where Virgil shows victim (Cacus) and avenger (Hercules) as remarkably similar – both violent appropriators of others' property, both displaying *furor* and bestial aspects – Lewis's irony requires that Hercules the Virgilian hero and Hercules the thieving slave fit neatly into an opposition between civilisation and its opposite, in a way that plays out the logic of classical naming. In the end, then, the real relations of slavery distort and belie the claims to cultural superiority that have so often been deployed to justify enslavement.

Notes

- 1 Book-keepers and overseers were free white resident managers on a plantation. Attorneys and trustees, agents who were often responsible for multiple estates, were not normally resident.
- 2 *Sesamum orientale*, used in the practice of obeah, a West African-derived set of cultural, religious and medical practices, viewed as akin to witchcraft by Europeans.
- 3 Lewis, *Journal*, 221. (A modern edition was published in 1999 by Oxford University Press, edited with an introduction and notes by Judith Terry, as part of the Oxford World Classics series, but all citations in this commentary refer to the 1834 edition.)
- 4 Lewis, *Journal*, 203.
- 5 Williamson, "Nero, the mustard!"
- 6 For more examples of all these name types see the Jamaican Slave Names Project at <https://jamaicanslavenames.com/>.
- 7 *General Stud Book* 187 (Brutus, Cato, Romulus, Remus, Young Cato).
- 8 Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 59.
- 9 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 8.

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Luiz Gama's *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getulino* (First burlesque ballads by Gaetulian, 1861)

Various poems from *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getulino*. Translated from the Portuguese by Andrea Kouklanakis. Commentary by Andrea Kouklanakis.

Who am I? (Quem sou eu?)

*Who am I? Why does it matter?
I am a proscribed troubadour,
Inscribed on my forehead
The word 'Nobody' I bore.
(Augusto Emílio Zaluar, 'Dores e Flores')¹*

I love the poor, ignore the rich,
I live like a *Tico-tico*² finch;
I get involved in no trouble,
I keep to myself in my little hovel
Away from luxury and wealth
Just as poor monks dwell
Friends, I have a few to mention,
But good ones, and ancient
I flee from hypocrisy
From nobility and foolery,
What of the herd of barons?
Blessed Angel, I'd take tornados!

I make verses, I'm no poet
I mixed things up, and you know it,
But I only pay obedience
To virtue and intelligence:
Here he is, the Gaetulian,
On his plectrum, sad and sullen.
One is mad, foolish, I know it
Whoever tries to be a poet;
In the century of enlightenment,
Rustic scoundrels, no refinement,
Can buy negros and entitlement,
Coats of arms, no – on the Kalends,
With trickery and winking
They gallop up their ranking!
They are bold and each one plunders
For Vieira's art, one wonders.³
With dealings and protections
They get status satisfaction,
I keep my eye on all this mob
Poking fun on those who rob
Dealers, wheelers, good and bad,
I do it gladly, I'm not sad,
I'm tough on pedants and the snob
Who make pills as a day job
Who boast their art as though divine,
With sulphate and quinine,
All kinds of mixing and cough syrup,
And a thousand other stirrups,
Without a dash of shame or *pudor*,
He tells everyone he is a DOCTOR!
I cannot stand the magistrate,
With his careless, vain mandate,
He sells the law, and betrays justice

And causes all to feel injustice
His harsh hand lands on the poor
But offers shelter to grandeur,
He only sees crime, and transgression
In the beggar, whom he trashes.
This type I mock twice as much.
Till his slyness loses its crutch.
From the merchant, I verily run,
From the pious sacristan.
Crocodiles in disguise
Feigning honor, otherwise
But when the time seems propitious
Wilder than lions, vicious.
I flee from the blind sycophant,
Just like a willow tree branch,
He has no firmness, easily bends
Follows nature's laws and ends
Going where the winds will take him,
Turning round and round on whim.
What I am and how I think,
Here it goes with sense, succinct,
'Cause I see how mad they're getting
All those nitwits full of bragging,
Throwing up maledictions,
Aimed against my meditations.
I know well that I'm a lowlife,
With poor style and quite trife.
Men with power, might, and reach
Fearing my long speech
Will call me an idle fellow,
A goat, a negro, *Mongibelo*,⁴
But I don't fret about it soon,
I'll go on playing this my tune

With attitude, drum, and flair
Tricking people everywhere.
If I'm Black or if a goat
It matters little, what's the boast?
There are goats of all castes,
For the species is mighty vast [. . .]
There are grey, and striped ones,
Brown, coloured, also, freckled,
Black goats and white goats,
And, let's be straight in our notes,
Some plebeian, some are noble,
Wealthy goats, goats in trouble,
Wise and important goats alike,
And crooked ones all right [. . .]
Here in our good land
Everyone bleats, and all o' them blend
Nobles, Counts, and Duchesses,
Rich ladies and Marquesses,
Deputies and senators,
Gentlemen and councillors;
Beauty queens, haughty dames,
Strutting their noble manes,
Well-fed little princes,
Prideful lordlings, how he minces,
Friars, bishops, cardinals,
Party revellers and imperials,
Poor folk, noble folk,
I have relatives from both.
Among brave military –
Goatery shines and tarry;
Guards, commanders, quartermasters,
Brigadiers, colonels, officers,
Bold and fearless army Marshalls,

Brave and brightly leading Generals,
 Captains at sea and wars,
 Everyone one bleats, all lock horns –
 In supreme eternal realms,
 Where Divinity dwells,
 There are sanctified goats,
 All Adored by us folks
 In the choirs of cherubins,
 There are little goatish kins,
 And the lover of Syrinx
 Had furry hair and much stink;
 The god Mendes, from the back,
 Showed a head with two-horn track;
 The god of Memphis, as they say
 Had horns sprouting up a way.
 Jove, when he was a boy,
 Suckled caprine milk with joy,
 And according to ancient myth,
 Faun was also kid misfit.
 In the land of Pluto, not a man,
 But a goat guards the Koran,
 In *lundus*⁵ and melodies
*Bodinhas*⁶ are sung like ditties;
 If everyone has caprine tails,
 Why so many capricious tales?
 Let there be peace, let there be glee,
 Enjoy and play the *goatery*;
 Stop all matinals and drama,
 Because all is *goat-a-rama!*

Coleirinho [Double-collared seedeater bird]

Thus, the fettered bird also sings
(Tibullus)

Sing, sing Coleirinho,
Sing, sing, end these ills;
Sing, drown this great sorrow
– greater still
In this voice shattered by pain;
Weep, slave, in your cage.
Weep for your tender wife, your child
Fatherless, and nested in the wild,
Without you, living in vain.

When purple dawn would break
Softly, softly, beyond the mountains
Painting gold the horizons
Blending into the surfing sea;
Then with son and tender wife
Did you sing so sweetly
And bathed in light bright and sunny
Fine feathers – on other seas.

Today, sadly, your singing ends,
Unlike other times in *palmares* lands
Today, enslaved in farmhouses,
The gentle breeze no longer soothes,
Nor does it mate to your songs.
The murmuring of bright dew drops,
Running through dark hollow rocks,
Sliding down from waterfalls.

Your sweet son kisses you no more,
Pleasant springs do not inspire,
Nor does the moonlight turn all quiet,
Or bathe in silver the iron bars
Now immersed in the shadows,
From the aviary to the perches,
Slavery and captivity lurch,
Comes to rise sorrows and tears.

Sing, sing Coleirinho,
Sing, sing, end these ills;
Sing, drown this great sorrow
– greater still
In this voice shattered by pain;
Weep, slave, in your cage.
Weep for your tender wife, your child
Fatherless, and nested in the wild,
Without you, living in vain.

Healer of vine disease (Curador do Mal das Vinhas)

*Cease all that the ancient Muse sings,
For a higher valour now rises and rings!*
(Camões, Os Lusíadas, I)⁷

In this dark hollow cave where I dwell here,
Surrounded and oppressed by poverty;
Fatally ignorant of its crushing weight,
Like a defendant involved in criminality:

Disremembered by the world, like the shadow
Of an unknown Shepherd in a solitary valley;
Suffering atrocious casualties and setbacks,
Steeped in evil bitterness as I sally.

Prostate and succumbing to winning sleep,
Which renders thus the race of mortal men,
Suddenly I wake up to a frightening sound,
Stridently loud shouts – clamorous, battle din!

Fearlessly rushing, I make fast on my way,
Searching for unexpected success,
Which the upper air thundering announces,
Like wild Adamastor,⁸ shouting in distress!

Falling over myself, tripping over my feet,
Suddenly I find myself face to face,
– he stirred up, and moved, though not frightened
With ugly, dirty Brontes, that disgrace.

His bushy, furry hair was frayed, and thin,
It fell on his curved shoulders, wide, un-kempt,
His mouth was pulled and twisted, his teeth, green.
His head was fully rounded but quite empty.

He wore a cloak that would cause envy, spite
To Judah, Locust, evil, mean grasshopper,
A gift given him as a farewell token,
From his old boss, the pilot of that chopper.

He boldly mounted on a great wine jar,
Decorated from the front with grapefruit vines.
Brandishing a syringe in his right hand,
On the left, he already held cured wines.

Ahead of the hero, there they came, leaping,
A multitude of Bacchuses with cornets;
There also came Priapus full of fury,
Among those crossed-eyed men with crooked gait!

Gripped by fear, I did dare ask him:
Who are you, mortal, who walks in this way?
That colossal, madman heroically he answered:
‘The great healer of grapevine fungus pain!’

Then blowing on my forehead, of a sudden,
He almost made me throw my wits asunder!
He raised himself aloft with airs and flaring,
And opened wide his coat, bold and daring.

As soon as he was far above the earth,
He scattered over our heads, poured from his girth:
A shower of advertisements in gazettes,
Impressive articles filled with lying jests,
Red sulphate water, spikes, and turpentine,
Tobacco essence, essence of quinine,
Small butts of cigars already smoked,
Dead rats conserved in wine, all cured and soaked,
Fat, and endless flatteries in periodicals,
Seeds for producing, raising animals,
A tract on memorabilia, collections,
And some other forgotten little chachkas!
Neither Caesar, Bonaparte, nor Mavors,
And others over whom death had no force,
Could equal in wisdom this all-around dealer,
Who proclaims himself a vine fungus healer.
On his account let us all forget, yes, we humans,
About the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Romans;
For him whose heightened glory will be sung
Who reaches and involves the golden sun.

An excerpt from 'There Goes the Verse!' (Lá Vai o Verso!)

*I too want to be a poet,
Very little or nothing else matters,
Whether my style is muted,
Or the path I follow, crooked*
(Faustino Xavier de Novais)⁹

Deep in the night, feeling my head heavy,
Like a volcano burning with ardent flame,
I took up a pen, I could not refrain,
The thread of ideas I began to sketch.

I invoked the nymphs so that they could witness
The voracious passion of my creation,
And flying back over the constellation,
The name of this poet they would there inscribe.

Oh! Muse of Guinea, colour of dark amber,
Statue of oft-denigrated dark granite,
Before whom the Lion surrenders unfit,
Stripped of his fury and of bloody bravery;
Lend me, then, the *cabaço d'urucungo*¹⁰
Teach me how to shake the *marimba*,¹¹
Inspire me with the science of *candimba*.¹²
Lead me up to paths of highest heights.

Down with the glory of all those ancient poets,
And the times of heroes, armed and potent;
Down with Homers, Camões brightly golden!
Let me sing of the Barons of my *patria*!
I want to record on light vivid columns
The shadowy power of short-sightedness,
And broadcast afar the fame of vile dimness
To the farthest reigns of aged Bactria!

I want the world to face me and behold
A thundering kinky-haired Orpheus,
Who does reject the lyre, though notorious,
And sings to the sound of august *marimba*,
And just as Arion among the Dolphins,
Embarrassing pirates, crew of greedy fiends,
Plucking on his flute, wielding just like this,
With style that suits and values dark Libya.

Pouring out my wisdom I go on singing
The glorious deeds of the luminous folks,
Whose ever-shifting deceit and potent hoax
Frightens the mind, does stuns nature's domain!
Clever electorate tailored for sale:
Deputies, and Ministers, and Senators,
Officers, Diplomats – sycophant, and more,
Versed in the prayer book of confidence men.

[. . .]

Astute and shrewd traffickers – patriots
Quick *manganões*,¹³ they steal with fast hands,
Ambushing judges, who swindle and joke,
Others whose honours are thin like smoke,
Refined and slick tricksters and fraudulent men.

Even I will not escape this grand party;
With airs of African wanna-be royal,
Mounted on high horse and looking all noble –
To the rhythm of drumming and *zabumbas*,¹⁴
At the sound of endless echoing applause,
With Ginga's grandsons, all my relatives,
Jumping with pleasure, content, positive –
I'll step into dances of high *caiumbas*.¹⁵

An excerpt from 'Protasis' (Prótase)

*Although a left-handed poet
May add to the list of madmen,
Be he swan or a grasshopper,
No one can resist those verses,
In readings they entertain,
As they amuse but cause pain!*
(Faustino Xavier de Novais)

In my small hovel,
All in a bundle,
Quiet and muffled,
Feeling so frightful

Of the vile world,
Sinister, cold,
In such cold prose,
Ever morose –
All that I see,
Paint to a tea.
If from a square
I draw a sphere
In this I prove
New writer's fare.

Sitting just on the edge of Parnassus,
As I could not climb all the way to the top,
Like a poor man at a monastery door,
I wove this volume with *troubadour* pop.

Verses with no wisdom, without learning,
There is no Ariosto or Lamartine,
Nor do they smell of the sweet ambrosias
Of famous Lamiras or Aritine.

The rhymes are bad, confusing, mixed-up verses,
No metre, no good cadence, and no rule.
They make some zig-zag scratches on the paper,
Like a limping, mistepping, lame fool.

Rude productions from an uncultured mind,
Composed during lazy and idle times;
But daughters of a mind that pays no courtesy,
Nor vain or false flattery to vicious lives.

They're dangerous foliage that scorch and burn,
They're remedies for the poverty of excellence,
That affects those who yield to frenzied rapture,
Who aspire from below to highest eminence.

And let us leave behind us, in the back
Those veteran and wisemen full of influence;
For this troubadour respects and submits,
To honour, country, virtue, intelligence.

With gusto he cuts into *malandros*,¹⁶
Who turn their nation their Monte-Pio,
Into them who leave their duty, all the scoundrels,
The half-wit, the prankster, idle *tío*.

Leading all those fools are heroes and Quixotes,
Rotund Barons of the trafficking rings
To the great Summanus' temple I wish to take¹⁷
These treasures weighted down with ignorant triflings.

An excerpt from 'In the album of my friend, J. A. da Silva Sobral' (No Álbum Do meu amigo J. A. da Silva Sobral)

*Friend,
you ask me for a song on the lyre,
I, who can only strum tired
Sounds on popular guitar?
Why insist this far?
Don't you see the disgrace in this?
No matter how hard one insists
To try and be poet, it's all in vain?
Or perhaps, it is not wrong, that refrain:
He gets the pray whoever persists.
(Faustino Xavier de Novais)*

If you want, my dearest friend,
Some charming thoughts for your book,
Finessed with elegant phrases
Woven by talent, fine look
Do not count on me,
I'm poor, and I'm rude.
As to charming verses,
I'm clumsy, so crude.

I don't speak of flowers,
I don't tread on meadows,
No sounds of church bells;
They've got their own bellows!

Nor of turtle doves
At the edge of their nest,
Nor of narrow brooks,
That flow slow, not fast;

Nor yet of the pranks
Of sweet tender Cupid

Who causes the blessed,
To become so stupid.

But if you'd like me to weave
Words both confused and scrambled,
My apologies, be patient with
These foolish rhymes, quite shamble.

Loosen your spirit,
Begin the festivities,
Biting, and cutting
With all liberties.

Follow the Muse,
That one, the slim kind,
With flaming, flash phrases,
From dull feeble mind

And such as a student,
So clever and smart,
Who holds up his glasses,
His stargazing art.

I take up my pen
And write what I feel,
Following the doctrine
Of that great man Phil.¹⁸

But what am I saying?
Condemn vices fast?!
Attack proper customs?!
Luiz, mind your task [. . .]

Don't struggle so hard
You're working in vain,
Don't step on them toes
Of some big wig man.

Go back to your shop,
Your shoe-making awl,
Go sew you some shoes,
With yellow thread yarn.

Go bite on your soles,
Pick up your own hammer,
Don't play with them whites,
Don't be such a yammer,

The white man can bite.
He's got bluish blood,
If you mess with him,
You'll end up in mud.

Don't stain any books,
So fine and so charming;
Don't be such a dope
Pretending at smarting.

Science and letters,
Are not for your ear;
A Black man from Guinea
Is nobody here.

.....

Hearing this counsel,
From my very reason,

I muted the impulse,
Of my heart's passion.

If all that I feel
I cannot say or muse,
The little I know
To write, I refuse.

People may talk,
Say that I'm bold,
Meddling with science,
Though 'No!' I am told.

I'm sorry, my friend,
I've nothing to offer,
Where all white men rule,
You can't think, can't author.

Under the weight of bondage
We lost reason and rhyme
Suffering under barbarities
In the name of the Divine.

But on the horizon,
There comes Liberty,
Breaking our iron cuffs
In the name of Equality
Then I'll be able
To forge a free mind,
And beautiful songs
In me you will find.

An excerpt from 'In Captain João Soares' album' (No Álbum do Sr. Capitão João Soares)

*Write in an Album! . . . God forbid!
Expose myself to austere criticism of learned men!
What if they should turn around and condemn
Me to a penalty of long exile!
No . . . no, I am deadly afraid to seem vile
To end up displeasing someone;
Don't mention my name to anyone
Who have talent and science;
Friend, be patient, don't show defiance:
Those who don't have it can give none.
(Faustino Xavier de Novais)*

In the book of poets
I want to write
But how should I do it?
Not being bright

[. . .]

No, No, Sir,
I won't fall for this.
I don't want people saying
Look at that foolish Luiz!

I have no learning
As some proper author,
I count myself
As whole idle talker.

As to foreign languages,
I haven't learnt a wee
In our parlance,
I'm *Kikiriki*!¹⁹

From Euclides, the lines,
From Schiller, some history,
I read them for a lark;
And kept none in memory . . .

[. . .]

As much as I force it
I cannot compose
Whoever reads this book
What questions will he pose?
[. . .]

If he's a *literati*
A quick wit and clever,
He'll solve the issue:
A shoemaker as ever

[. . .]

And so I do beg you,
My dearest Señor,
Don't wish any evil,
For this sad *cantor*²⁰

In the book of a poet
Of such learned might,
A poor fellow like me
He just cannot write

An excerpt from 'The gluttons' (Os Glutões)

Oh, you hefty, fully decorated Muse
Supreme and sovereign queen of digestion
Insatiable, rotund, and ample matron,
With corpulent body and gut largesse

[. . .]

The chorus of thundering Bacchantes
Deliriously clamoring, Oh *Evohe*!
And on a corner is dancing black death,
Chewing tobacco powder – Brazilian *rapé*.

Oh, Muse, enrich, and raise my creation,
Scatter my songs through the universe,
May your hymn be sacred among your followers,
If so sublime a price fits in this verse!

I read of those gluttons of time long past,
In the pages of a sixteenth-century text.
I see gluttony sharpening its metal jaws,
So as to better make war and conquest.

It's you, brave Clodius, and feral Hannibal,
Leading in the front of all that throng,
Showing the power of gluttonous throats.
Among the drinkers and eaters along.

[. . .]

That Melon Crotoniense, just for fun,
Devoured an ox, only four years old.

Theogenes, too, the famous athlete,
As a bet ate a whole entire bull.

At a rich and wealthy table paid by others,
Phagon into his paunch three pigs, he gobbled.

[. . .]

Cambyses from Lydia, on a certain night,
Attacked his wife with such an appetite,
That he stuffed her whole into his belly,
Like a banana wolfed down, fast, outright.

[. . .]

The drunken Philoxenus did lament,
That his neck did not go farther and far,
Where wine could be decanted drip and drop
Like a funnel runs along from wine jar

[. . .]

Many other heroes does history tell,
But I will pass over them.

[. . .]

Let the curtain fall on the ruins of the past,
Over famous names in foreign lands abroad
Dust-off and place in the temple of victory
Brazilian heroes who eat chicken broth.

Come Nymphs with the aroma of other times!

[. . .]

May you inscribe these names
In the vast pantheon of crimes,
The enlightened heroes of my country.

[. . .]

Let Celts, Greeks, and Romans hold their piece,
Silence, oh Ionians and Lusitanians!
Rise up, gluttons of my land!
We have coconut, cashew, bananas.

[. . .]

Be it a Clodius, or indeed prodigious Milo,
Heroic deeds of Philoxenus, loose and drunken,
They all now lack their sheen, their colour fade,
Down to earth, and into dust, they all have fallen.

Over them a bold and brave one now towers:
Smiling wide the deputy's all offer,
Plus his four supporters so vociferous,
Serve themselves from the National coffer.

A tall and lanky clumsy diplomat,
With skinny legs and feet reaching so far,
In Europe makes himself so deep, so wise,
In the dealing of tobacco and coffee bars.

[. . .]

Let us leave behind the ancient glory
Of the powerful, greedy and hungry mouths

Let us rather sing the hymn to furious paunch,
The modern and sublime national guts.

An excerpt from 'My mother' (Minha Mãe)

She was beautiful and lovely,
The finest Black woman,
Queen of dark Lybian region,
And in Brazil, poor and enslaved!

Oh, what *saudades*²¹ I harbour!
Of her tender sweet care . . .
[. . .]

Her smiling teeth were white like snow,
They were the freedom the myth lied,
On her face only pain and affliction
Black was the colour of slavery.

Her eyes, dark, and proud,
They shone like two shining stars;
They descended bright from afar
Falling onto her body.
They were shining mirrors
Of our very first lives,
They were the last light
Of our lost faith and rite.
[. . .]

* * *

Commentary by Andrea Kouklanakis

Long before Marcel Camus's 1959 film *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*), based on the Brazilian play *Orfeu da Conceição* (1956) by Vinicius de Moraes, there was Luiz Gama (1830–82), the self-proclaimed 'kinky-haired Orpheus' ('orfeu da carapinha'). Luiz Gama (born Luiz Gonzaga Pinto da Gama) was an Afro-Brazilian poet, journalist and abolitionist lawyer whose outspoken self-presentation as a Black author was unprecedented in Brazilian literature. His poem 'Lá Vai o Verso!' (There goes the verse!)

is part of Gama's single poetic collection, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getulino* (*First burlesque ballads by Gaetulian*) published in 1859 and 1861 (henceforth *Trovas Burlescas*, 'Burlesque ballads'). An eclectic collection of mostly satires, *Trovas Burlescas* comprises 39 rhyming poems that offer valuable social commentary on Gama's world. Gama added the pseudonym *Getulino* to the title of his book, a reference to ancient Gaetulia, the region in western Africa encompassing modern-day Algeria and Tunisia. Gama would likely have associated Gaetulia with Guinea, a place to which he often refers in his poems to underscore his own racial identity. While Gama was a prolific newspaper writer, the publication of *Trovas Burlescas* guaranteed his place in the literary world and he was able to publish the second edition in Rio de Janeiro, the imperial capital.

Scholarship on Gama as a literary figure has expanded in the last 20 years, including studies on his transgressive satires²² and scholarly editions of his text.²³ Gama has traditionally been grouped with the second generation of Romantic writers in Brazil, and considered part of the Portuguese and Brazilian satirical literary tradition from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, along with famous satirists such as Gregório de Matos (1636–96), Manuel du Bocage (1765–1805) and Faustino Xavier de Novais (1820–69).²⁴

In her commentary on Gama's poems, Ferreira also suggests that his satires can be compared to Roman authors, being closer to the Roman poet Horace in their comedic sentiment than to Juvenal's more caustic style.²⁵ Although Gama makes no direct reference to Horace or Juvenal in the *Trovas Burlescas*, the suggestion inspires a useful discussion. For example, in Horace's *Satires*, the poet complains that the wicked are afraid of his verses, even though his words are *propiora sermoni*, 'closer to common speech'.²⁶ Likewise, Luiz Gama, in the poem 'Sortimento de gorras para a gente do grande tom' ('Assortments of hats for people of good taste'), says that though he can just spell his ABC's ('Apenas soletrando o b-a-bá'), people may have cause to fear his verses because: 'Like a wasp [. . .] bitterly stinging / I will go on biting wide and far, / If so help me sting and art!'²⁷ Horace and Gama play with ironies and ironic self-deprecation that would be legible to readers conscious of the intersection between social class and letters, recalling their respective social positions, Horace being the son of a freedman and Gama a freedman himself. The comparison also raises questions about Roman satire as a possible influence on Gama.

Critical reception of Gama's poetry included immediate positive appraisal of his humour, and it is surprising that the modernist writer Oswald de Andrade did not include him in his 1945 study *A Sátira na literatura Brasileira* (Satire in Brazilian literature), as Lígia Ferreira points

out.²⁸ This common thread between Gama's humour and the irreverence of the modernist movement also extended to cultural cannibalism as the aesthetic centrepiece of the modernist programme (the eating and digesting of both the domestic and the foreign other to create something new). Cannibalism manifests itself in *Trovas Burlescas* through Gama's social and racial critique, incorporating the plurality and contradictions inherent in myths to represent the absurdities of Empire, Church and slavery in Brazilian society.

Gama's satirical vein notwithstanding, some critics tended to approach his creative work primarily as abolitionist writing and a symbol of Black resistance within the framework of race and identity discourse. Examples include Zilá Bernd's 1987 *Negritude e literatura na América Latina* (Negritude and literature in Latin America) and Roger Bastide's 1943 *A poesia afro-Brasileira* (Afro-Brazilian poetry). But even from the perspective of race and identity, the connection with Horace is especially relevant to Gama's persona as a Black Orpheus. In Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Orpheus is characterised as one responsible for rescuing people from a state of violence,²⁹ a characterisation that applies to Gama's poetry and legal practice. That is, Orpheus decries oppressive and corrupt systems of power (monarchy, slavery, the law and the Church) and Gama rescues those most directly oppressed by the inherent brutality of that system which kept them in a state of bondage and ignorance. Indeed, in *Obras Completas de Luiz Gama* (Complete works of Luiz Gama), published in 2021, Bruno Rodrigues de Lima makes it clear that Gama's legal strategies had a significant impact on the practice of the law in Brazil, in recognition of which he was awarded the posthumous title of Doctor of Law from the University of São Paulo, also in 2021.

Luiz Gama was born free in the northern state of Bahia, the son of a Portuguese-Brazilian man and Luiza Mahin, an enslaved African woman from the Gulf of Guinea. In a letter to his friend Lúcio de Mendonça, dated 1880, Gama writes: 'I am the natural son of a Black woman, free, African, pagan, from the Gold Coast (of the Nagô Nation) who always refused baptism and the Christian doctrine.'³⁰ In the poem 'My mother' ('Minha Mãe'), Gama describes her as 'beautiful and lovely / The finest Black woman / Queen of dark Libyan region', by which he means the Graeco-Roman area of Libya in the region of modern-day Tunisia. Gama contrasts Brazil, the land of captivity, with Africa, the ancient land of freedom: 'Queen of dark Lybian region, / And in Brazil, poor and enslaved!' Luiza Mahin was an icon of Black resistance for her participation in the Malê Revolt (*Revolta dos Malês*), also known as the Great Revolt and the Ramadan Revolt led by African Muslims in Bahia in 1835 against slavery

and the supremacy of Catholicism. Due to her activities in such rebellions, Mahin was deported to Rio de Janeiro, and Gama's father sold his son into slavery to settle financial debts. Gama was sent to São Paulo and handled by a merchant whom he describes as a 'contraband dealer'. This dealer kept Gama to serve in his own home, where he met a student residing there, Antonio Rodrigo Prado Junior, from whom he learnt his 'first letters' at the age of 17.

In 1848 Gama obtained proof of his freeborn status and escaped from his master's house. He enlisted in the army in the same year, but in 1854 he was let go under the charge of insubordination for threatening an 'insolent officer' who had insulted him.³¹ He was imprisoned for 39 days and wrote that he spent most of his time reading. Afterwards he worked as a copyist for the department of police and, through this clerkship, he learned law. On the eve of a promotion, he was again dismissed, this time charged as 'turbulent and seditious', an accusation Gama attributed to his affiliation with the abolitionist movement.³² From that point on, Gama would argue and defend legal cases as a provisional lawyer.

Gama's interest in law was always directed towards cases of illegal enslavement, especially after the abolition of the slave trade in 1850. He actively sought out such cases and even announced his services in newspapers, some of which he founded, such as the satirical *Diabo Coxo* (The lame devil) in 1864. Gama received financial support from the 'American House' (*Loja da America*), the Masonic order where he held high offices. The organisation helped Gama establish a free school for children, an evening elementary school for adults and a free library, and it funded Gama's efforts to procure the freedom of many illegally enslaved people. Over the course of his life, Gama would free approximately seven hundred and fifty persons. Aware of the impact and reach of his work, Gama even signed some of his editorial letters as Spartacus, the Thracian leader of a slave revolt in Rome in 72 BCE, or John Brown, the American abolitionist active in the Border War in Kansas in the 1850s.

Luiz Gama was an auto-didact whose writings show extensive and eclectic reading on a variety of subjects, including abundant references to classical material. In the nineteenth century the classics as a scholarly and academic discipline did not yet exist in Brazil, except for Latin and Greek taught in exclusive and private secondary schools, such as the Colégio Pedro II, founded by the emperor himself. Given Gama's background, it is unlikely that he would have learnt classical languages. As he quips in the poem 'In Captain João Soares' album' ('No Album do Sr. Capitão João Soares'):

As to foreign languages
I haven't learnt a wee
In our parlance
I am *Kikiriki*.

Classical authors existed primarily as material for the highly valued practice of literary translations, which is how Gama read the classics. In general, the literary elite was much more attached to the prestige conferred by French language, literature and culture than to the Graeco-Roman classical tradition. When Brazilian poets, especially the so-called Parnassians, permeated their writings with Graeco-Roman pastoral imagery, they gestured towards the French receptions of the classics, steeped in conventional formalism. In one of his poems 'In the album of my friend, J. A. da Silva Sobral' ('No Album do meu amigo J. A. da Silva Sobral'), Gama satirises one such Parnassian luminary, the poet Filinto Elísio (1734–1819) thus:

I take up my pen
And write what I feel
Following the doctrine
Of that great man Phil.

Unlike Parnassian poets, however, Gama used classicisms to heighten the comic effect of his satires while foregrounding his own position as a Black author. Gama's classicisms constitute a poetic device, a conduit to criticise the political and ideological status quo in an expressive, direct and open way. Ferreira remarks that Gama adds an element of difference in his denunciation of the various paradoxes in the imperial society of his time, because he speaks from the position of a Black intellectual and a reader.³³ But another element of difference includes Gama's inventive handling of classicisms, stylistically drawn to overlap with Africanisms and the sociological particularities and peculiarities of the Brazilian imperial colony. Readers of Gama learnt various curiosities from the ancient world; they did not have to be formally educated to understand the satirical intersection between ancient and colonial mythologies. For readers familiar with Gama's classical references, the poet offered an irreverent conception of myths as both fantastical and trivial, such as an infant Zeus nursing on caprine milk in the poem 'Who am I?' ('Quem sou eu?'). This is a mythological tale no more fantastical than passing

and racial whitening as we find in the poem ‘Assortment of hats for good people’ (‘Sortimento de gorras para gente do grande tom’):

If light-skinned mulattos passing for whites,
Now think of themselves so mighty refined,
They bend to nobility in their usual demeanour,
But disdain their granny that hails from Guinea.³⁴

In addition to myths, classical or colonial, we also find figurative language for slavery in Gama’s poetic collection *Trovas Burlescas*. In the lyric poem ‘Coleirinho’ (a type of tropical bird), Gama presents an elegy to a slave imagined as a caged bird, deploying a double metaphor whereby the caged bird and the enslaved are one. The word *coleirinho*, a diminutive of *coleiro*, resembles the Portuguese word *coleira*, an animal or slave collar. It also calls to mind the ornithological metaphor in work by other African diasporic writers, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar’s 1899 poem ‘Sympathy’ and Maya Angelou’s 1983 adaptation of Dunbar in her collection of poems, *Shaker, Why Don’t You Sing?* Dunbar and Angelou, along with Gama before them, convey quite movingly the pain of one who yearns for freedom from inside the cage. The bird in Dunbar’s poem sings about this liberatory feeling: ‘When the sun is bright on the upland slopes; / When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass, / And the river flows like a stream of glass’. But Dunbar’s caged bird also sings ‘when his wing is bruised and his bosom sore’.³⁵ The freedom of the natural world is echoed in Maya Angelou’s poem, where

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wings
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.³⁶

Angelou’s contemplation of nature resembles Gama’s landscape in the second stanza of ‘Coleirinho’:

When purple dawn would break

Softly, softly, beyond the mountains
 Painting gold the horizons
 Blending into the surfing sea
 Then [. . .] did you sing so sweetly
 And bathed in light bright and sunny
 Fine feathers – on other seas.

Altogether, these authors' poetics of the caged bird show a Pan-Diasporic language of longing.

Gama appended an epigram to 'Coleirinho': 'Thus, the fettered slave also sings.' He attributes this epigram to the first-century BCE Roman poet Tibullus. Like other epigrams, the verse is meant to set the tone for Gama's poem, but it also recalls the poetic trope of *servitium amoris* ('slave to love') – the male lover as enslaved to his indifferent mistress, such as Tibullus' Delia.³⁷ It is unclear whether Gama was aware of the trope of *servitium amoris* and was obliquely exploring the irony of a Roman elite man playing the part of a 'slave to love' compared to the lived experience of enslaved people in service not to love, but to a master, a *servitium domini* ('slave to the master'). This sort of irony created by the intertextual tension between epigram and poem is also present in Gama's mock-epic poem 'Curador do Mal das Vinhas' (Healer of vine disease), meant to satirise an actual, self-proclaimed medicine man who was famous among his contemporaries. In the epigram for this poem, Gama quotes the sixteenth-century Portuguese epic poet Luis de Camões, who rivalled the Graeco-Roman epic muse to eulogise the Portuguese maritime valour and imperial exploits: 'Cease all that the ancient Muse sings, / For a higher valour now rises and rings!' Gama's mock-epic indirectly plays with the Homeric and Vergilian muses through the mediation of Luis de Camões' reception of the ancient epics. Gama's farcical healer-hero challenges the ancient heroes, just as Camões before him, thereby creating a comedic take on Camões own emulation of the Graeco-Roman heroes.

Receptions of the classics in African, Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American literature show the extent to which the classics have been appropriated, dislocated and reimagined in the intersection between modernity and antiquity; it also shows the racialised meanings that these terms take on in the colonial and postcolonial contexts (antiquity becomes Greece, and modernity, Europe). Building on previous studies, such as Lorna Hardwick's *Translating worlds, translating cultures*, Rizo and Henry highlight the transgressive qualities of classical reception in their collection of essays, *Receptions of the Classics in the African*

Diaspora of the Hispanophone and Lusophone Worlds: Atlantis otherwise. They explain that Latin American writers underscore their resistance against both colonialism and neocolonialism. With this context in mind, *Trovas Burlescas* offers an early and fitting illustration of such resistance through satire.

Gama's satires lay bare the irrationality of the political and social dynamics of the imperial colony, with its manifestations (slavery, racism) stylistically underscored by the satirical deployment of classicisms. Classicisms not only helped Gama in drawing caricatures of his own society by way of seemingly disparate comparisons between Brazilian and mythical realities; they also helped shape his double poetic personae. The first reveals Gama as a poet, reader, author and intellectual; the second reveals a low-life, poor fool and rogue who speaks from the margins. We see the latter persona in the opening poem of the collection, 'Prótase' ('Protasis'), a *recusatio* ('refusal') in which Gama writes that his humble station prevents him from climbing Mount Parnassus, the Graeco-Roman site of poetic inspiration:

Sitting just on the edge of Parnassus,
As I could not climb all the way to the top,
Like a poor man at a monastery door,
I wove this volume with *troubadour* pop.

Gama's literary presentation as living on the margins of poetic society and his persona as a 'kinky-haired Orpheus' both translate the burlesque nature of his work and emphasise his authorial personality, full of expressiveness and confidence. The creative transgressiveness of *Trovas Burlescas* recalls Rizo and Henry's reference to the concept of 'transversal movements', the social and aesthetic theory of performance that proposes transgressive actions to resist imposed subjectivity. This theory was elaborated by theatre scholar Brian Reynolds, and Rizo and Henry borrow this concept to describe the mode of classical receptions proposed in their collection of essays, namely 'the trespassing of the limits defined for Africa and its diasporic subjects since the Middle Passage'.³⁸ Gama's self-affirming performance of Blackness, drawn with the mediation of the classics (Gama as Orpheus), creates what Reynolds calls 'transversal poetics' – that is, the possibility that 'we can define utterances, words, and symbols, signs, events, life [. . .] through a process of positive differentiation, and thus emphasize emergence, presence, and potential'.³⁹

The edge of Mount Parnassus becomes the margins from which Gama satirises those who make it to the top. At the apex sit poets influenced by the French Parnassian School, whose poetry dwells in Graeco-Roman pastoral imagery, meant as a *locus amoenus* ('pleasant place') removed from the realities of Brazilian society. Unlike the Parnassians – or the Romantics, who grafted European heroic narratives onto indigenous people – Gama opted for the satirical burlesque so he could 'sting' people everywhere. Again, in 'Assortment of hats for good people', we find corrupt lawyers and money that evaporates from the National Guard like 'evil from Pandora's box' ('Mal da boceta de Pandora', from 'Sortimento de gorras para gente do grande tom').⁴⁰ There are also fraudulent doctors whose skills put even Asclepius and Apollo to shame in 'A um fabricante de pílulas' (To a pill maker). Likewise, in Gama's mock epic 'Os glutões' (The gluttons) he presents us with power-hungry judges and clergy, and those whose glory surpasses all ancient gluttons, from the Persian ruler Cambyses to Philoxenus of Leucas (a Greek cookbook writer). Gama's satires carnivalise the exalted and the trivial, the ancient, the modern, the mythological and the national. The parade of vices reveals social distortions engendered by imperial colonialism and slavery, which are a recurrent refrain in each stanza of 'Sortimento de gorras para gente do grande tom' (Assortment of hats for good people': 'Do not fear, dear Reader, all these novelties. / For indeed in Brazil all is rarities' (Pois que tudo no Brasil é raridade).⁴¹

Nowhere is the satirical carnivalisation of social relations based on race clearer than in the poem 'Quem sou eu?' ('Who am I?'), in which Gama plays with the word 'goat' (*bode* in Portuguese), a racial slur used at the time. *Bodarrada*, as the poem is more commonly known, is the colloquial and collective form of *bodes* (goats). With great comedic effect, Gama presents half-animal demigod creatures, such as Syrinx and Faun. Yet, as humorous as *Bodarrada* is, the interactions between goats and humans allegorise the thorny issue of miscegenation in Brazil, often embodied by the mulatto. Gama was aware that the mulatto was a racialised social category characterised as a symbol of racial degeneracy, or racial whitening, or as a symbol of racial democracy, the concept associated with Gilberto Freyre's emblematic 1933 book *The masters and the slaves*. Freyre claimed racial exceptionalism for Brazil, an argument with historical precedents in the early colonial period. Gama, however, points to a different sort of exceptionalism based on racism in 'No Álbum do Meu Amigo J.A. da Silva Sobral' (In the album of My Friend, J. A. da Silva Sobral):

Science and letters,
Are not for your ear;
A Black man from Guinea
Is nobody here.

According to Gama, if the Black man cannot learn science and letters, and if the Black poet cannot climb Mount Parnassus, he can dwell in other places where he can summon African rhythms and instruments. In 'Lá Vai o Verso!' (There goes the verse!) he plays with epic motifs: his muse 'from Guinea' with the 'colour of dark amber' (*cor de azeviche*) initiates him into the mysteries of *candimba* (African religious rites). The narrator shuns the 'ancient poets', 'heroes', 'Homers and Camões' and assumes instead the figures of Orpheus and of Arion, mythic singers who accomplished amazing feats with their songs. In the Orpheus myth, the hero-singer not only gained access to the underworld in his attempt to rescue his bride Eurydice, but also led his community to freedom. Likewise, Arion saved himself from death at sea at the hands of pirates with his singing. Thus, in 'Lá Vai o Verso!' it is clear that Gama adopted both Orpheus and Arion as playful and self-affirming representations, not as disparaging epithets.⁴²

Commenting on the unprecedented nature of Gama's self-presentation as a Black author in *Trovas Burlescas*, Ferreira interprets the epithet 'kinky-haired Orpheus' as an acknowledgement of Gama's African roots, a posture she describes as indifferent to Western civilisation because Orpheus is a mythological character.⁴³ Myth does indeed exist outside the boundaries of historical realities, and Gama is affirming his African roots in this poem. Yet he was not so much indifferent to non-mythological classicisms. Rather, Gama cannibalised and carnivalised both classical and non-classical antiquities for their potential to represent the strange histories of Black subjectivities and Black self-referentiality, thus offering a model of racial critique through a carnivalisation of satire. Ferreira does not comment on Arion appearing in the same stanza as Orpheus, but when Gama chose to represent himself as 'another Arion' (*outro Arion*), he recalled the adventures of this mythic Greek singer who tricked pirates with his song. Gama too plans to trick the would-be pirates of his time and he accomplishes this feat in the following stanzas of the poem, in which he satirises every segment of society.

In sum, my analysis of Gama's satires has exposed various intersections between *Trovas Burlescas* and the classics, such as the creative and inaugural presentation of Black authorship – Gama as a Getulian, as Black Orpheus, as another Arion, and as a poet. Writing from his specific

vantage point as a Black author, he reveals the fault lines in Brazil's imperial and colonial society in the mid- to late nineteenth century, and he does so through his innovative satirical word-work, his cannibalising and carnivalising of the culture, his refashioning of satire and his repurposing of classicisms. Gama's classicisms leap outside the bounds of the imperial colony of Brazil towards mythological terrains: from Greece to the Gulf of Guinea as Africa itself, the geographic centre of his racial poetic identity. Gama's *Trovas Burlescas* takes readers into the novel terrain of this Black Orpheus, whose brand of 'transversal poetics' resists what Rizo and Henry described as the 'epistemic impositions' of colonialism.

Notes

- 1 Augusto Emílio Zaluar (1826–82) was a Portuguese-born poet and journalist who emigrated to Brazil in 1850. He published the book of poems *Dores e Flores* ('Sorrows and Flowers') in 1851.
- 2 *Tico-tico* refers to a sparrow and is also a colloquial term for a person of lowly status.
- 3 According to critic Manuel Bandeira (1886–1968), this is a reference to the satirical text *Art of Theft* (1652), which is generally attributed to Father Antônio Vieira (1608–97).
- 4 *Mongibelo* is an antonomasia for the words *mount* and *Gibel*, or *monte* and *bello*; it refers to Mt Aetna.
- 5 *Lundus* refers to Afro-Brazilian music and dance.
- 6 *Bodinhas* refers to Afro-Brazilian music.
- 7 This poem is a mock epic satirising Francisco Gomes de Freitas, a healer and traditional medicine man. He was both famous and derided, and the phrase 'vine disease' or 'powdery mildew disease' (*o mal das vinhas*) became synonymous with traditional healing itself.
- 8 Adamastor is a mythological monster invented by Luis de Camões in the *Lusíadas*. He was conceived as the personification for the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa.
- 9 Xavier de Novaes (1820–69) was a Portuguese poet. Along with Luis de Camões, he is the most quoted poet in Gama's epigrams.
- 10 *Urucungo* is an African musical instrument made out of a gourd.
- 11 *Marimba* are percussion instruments that consist of wooden bars struck by mallets.
- 12 *Candimba* are religious mysteries of *candomblé*, Afro-Brazilian religion.
- 13 *Manganões* are hustlers.
- 14 *Zabumbas* are large drums; cf. *zaaiumbas* are dances.
- 15 *Caiumba* is a ritual dance rite of Bantu origin. It also means a party or ancestral celebratory meeting.
- 16 *Malandro* refers to an urban hustler, traditionally represented in samba songs and literature as a charming, sweet and fast-talking trickster. In the period of the Belle Époque (c. 1870–1930), he was represented as a stereotypical figure of urban Rio de Janeiro, often a *sambista* (samba player) with a dapper sense of fashion (e.g. white suit, white shoes, large-brimmed hat). As a mixed-race (*mulatto*, or *mestiço*) young man, the *malandro* is ultimately a figure of the margins who has been both romanticised and villainised in Brazilian cultural discourse.
- 17 Luis de Camões identifies Summanus, a Roman god of thunderbolts (Ovid, *Fasti* 6.731), as a god of the underworld (Canto IV. 33).
- 18 Filinto Elísio is a pseudonym of Arcadian (Parnassian) poet Father Francisco Manuel do Nascimento (1734–1819).
- 19 Kikiriki is onomatopoeia for the rooster sound.
- 20 I chose to leave the word *cantor* (singer) in the original Portuguese, both to rhyme with *Señor* (two verses earlier) and to evoke the English 'chant', from Latin *cantus* (from the verb 'to sing', *canō, canere*).
- 21 *Saudades* is a Portuguese word that conveys a wide semantic range, from nostalgia to melancholic pleasure derived from nostalgia.
- 22 Azevedo, *Orfeu da Carapinha*.

- 23 Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*; Ferreira, *Com a palavra*, Luiz Gama.
- 24 Critics such as Manuel Bandeira, *Antologia dos poetas brasileiros da fase romântica*, and Paulo Franchetti, 'O Riso Romântico'.
- 25 Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*, xlv–xlv. For reprinted editions, see Luís [sic] Gama: *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getúlio* (2010) in the series *Coleção Biblioteca Básica da Literatura Baiana* by the publisher P55; *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getúlio* (2015) by Biblioteca Digital; *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getúlio* (2021) by the publisher Principis. To date, there are no full translations of Luiz Gama's *PTB* into English.
- 26 Horace, *Satires* 1.4.40–43; 1.420.
- 27 'Novo sortimento de gorras para a gente do grande tom', in Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*, 142.
- 28 Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*, lxvi.
- 29 Horace, *Ars Poetica* 391–2.
- 30 Ferreira, *Com a Palavra*, Luiz Gama, 199.
- 31 Ferreira, *Com a Palavra*, Luiz Gama, 202.
- 32 Ferreira, *Com a Palavra*, Luiz Gama, 203.
- 33 Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*, lxvi.
- 34 Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*, 18.
- 35 Dunbar, *Lyrics of the Hearthside*, 40.
- 36 Angelou, 'Caged bird', 16–17.
- 37 See, for example, Tibullus, *Elegies* 1.1. 55–57.
- 38 Rizo and Henry, *Receptions of the Classics*, 1.
- 39 Courtney, 'Interview with Brian Reynolds', 14.
- 40 'Sortimento de gorras para a gente do grande tom', in Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*, 20.
- 41 'Sortimento de gorras para a gente do grande tom', in Ferreira, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas e Outros Poemas*, 20.
- 42 These epithets were sometimes used by white writers to mock Black authors, as in the case involving Caldas Barbosa (1740–1800), an earlier Afro-Brazilian poet who lived in Portugal. See Costigan, 'Domingos Caldas Barbosa', 175.
- 43 Ferreira, *Com a palavra*, Luiz Gama.

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Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South* (1892)

Extracts from 'Higher education of women', 'Woman versus the Indian' and 'What are we worth?', in *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth Century Black Women Writers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Commentary by Shelley Haley.

Higher education of women

Pages 48–50

In the very first year of our century, the year 1801, there appeared in Paris, a book by Silvain Marechal, entitled 'Shall Woman Learn the Alphabet'. The book proposes a law prohibiting the alphabet to women, and quotes authorities weighty and various, to prove that the woman who knows the alphabet has already lost part of her womanliness. The author declares that woman can use the alphabet only as Moliere predicted they would, in spelling out the verb *amo*; that they have no occasion to peruse Ovid's *Ars Amoris*, since that is already the ground and limit of their intuitive furnishing; that Madame Guion would have been far more adorable had she remained a beautiful ignoramus as nature made her; that Ruth, Naomi, the Spartan woman, the Amazons, Penelope, Andromache, Lucretia, Joan of Arc, Petrarch's Laura, the daughters of Charlemagne, could not spell their names; while Sappho, Aspasia, Madame de Maintenon, and Madame de Stael could read altogether too well for their good; finally, that if women were once permitted to read Sophocles and work with logarithms, or to nibble at any side of the apple of knowledge, there would be an end forever to their sewing on buttons and embroidering slippers.

Please remember this book was published at the *beginning* of the Nineteenth Century. At the end of its first third (in the year 1833) one solitary college in America decided to admit women within its sacred precincts, and organized what was called a 'Ladies' Course' as well as the regular B. A. or Gentlemen's course.

It was felt to be an experiment—a rather dangerous experiment—and was adopted with fear and trembling by the good fathers, who looked as if they had been caught secretly mixing explosive compounds and were guiltily expecting every moment to see the foundations under them shaken and rent and their fair superstructure shattered into fragments.

But the girls came, and there was no upheaval. They performed their tasks modestly and intelligently. Once in a while one or two were found choosing the gentleman's course. Still no collapse; and the dear, careful, scrupulous, frightened old professors were just getting their hearts out of their throats and preparing to draw one good free breath, when they found they would have to change the names of those courses; for there were as many ladies in the gentlemen's course as in the ladies', and a distinctively Ladies' Course, inferior in scope and aim to the regular classical course, did not and could not exist.

[. . .]

Pages 62-3

Now you will argue, perhaps, and rightly, that higher education for women is not a modern idea, and that, if that is the means of setting free and invigorating the long desired feminine force in the world, it has already had a trial and should, in the past, have produced some of these glowing effects. Sappho, the bright, sweet singer of Lesbos, 'the violet-crowned, pure, sweetly smiling Sappho' as Alcaeus calls her, chanted her lyrics and poured forth her soul nearly six centuries before Christ, in notes as full and free, as passionate and eloquent as did ever Archilochus or Anacreon.

Aspasia, that earliest queen of the drawing-room, a century later ministered to the intellectual entertainment of Socrates and the leading wits and philosophers of her time. Indeed, to her is attributed, by the best critics, the authorship of one of the most noted speeches ever delivered by Pericles.

[...]

Page 66

We have seen how the pendulum has swung across our present century. The men of our time have asked with Emerson, 'that woman only show us how she can best be served'; and woman has replied: the chance of the seedling and of the animalcule is all I ask – the chance for growth and self-development, the permission to be true to the aspirations of my soul without incurring the blight of your censure and ridicule. 'Audetque viris concurrere virgo'.

[...]

Page 68

Now, as to the result to women, this is the most serious argument ever used against the higher education. If it interferes with marriage, classical training has a grave objection to weigh and answer.

[...]

Page 69

She can commune with Socrates about the *daimon* he knew and to which she too can bear witness; she can revel in the majesty of Dante, the sweetness of Virgil, the simplicity of Homer, the strength of Milton. She can listen to the pulsing heart throbs of passionate Sappho's encaged soul, as she beats her bruised wings against her prison bars and struggles to flutter out into Heaven's æther, and the fires of her own soul cry back as she listens. 'Yes; Sappho, I know it all; I know it all'. Here, at last, can be communion without suspicion; friendship, without misunderstanding; love without jealousy.

[...]

Pages 73–5

The high ground of generalities is alluring but my pen is devoted to a special cause: and with a view to further enlightenment on the achievements of the century for THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF COLORED WOMEN, I wrote a few days ago to the colleges which admit women and asked how many colored women had completed the B. A. course in each during its entire history. These are the figures returned: Fisk leads the way with twelve; Oberlin next with five; Wilberforce, four; Ann Arbor and Wellesley three each, Livingstone two, Atlanta one, Howard, as yet, none.

I then asked the principal of the Washington High School how many out of a large number of female graduates from his school had chosen to go forward and take a collegiate course. He replied that but one had ever done so, and she was then in Cornell.

Others ask questions too, sometimes, and I was asked a few years ago by a white friend, 'How is it that the men of your race seem to outstrip the women in mental attainment?' 'Oh,' I said, 'so far as it is true, the men, I suppose, from the life they lead, gain more by contact; and so far as it is only apparent, I think the women are more quiet. They don't feel called to mount a barrel and harangue by the hour every time they imagine they have produced an idea.'

But I am sure there is another reason which I did not at that time see fit to give. The atmosphere, the standards, the requirements of our little world do not afford any special stimulus to female development.

[...]

Pages 76-8

My readers will pardon my illustrating my point and also giving a reason for the fear that is in me, by a little bit of personal experience. When a child I was put into a school near home that professed to be normal and collegiate, i.e. to prepare teachers for colored youth, furnish candidates for the ministry, and offer collegiate training for those who should be ready for it. Well, I found after a while that I had a good deal of time on my hands. I had devoured what was put before me, and, like *Oliver Twist*, was looking around to ask for more. I constantly felt (as I suppose many an ambitious girl has felt) a thumping from within unanswered by any beckoning from without. Class after class was organized for these ministerial candidates (many of them men who had been preaching before I was born). Into every one of these classes I was expected to go, with the sole intent, I thought at the time, of enabling the dear old principal, as he looked from the vacant countenances of his sleepy old class over to where I sat, to get off his solitary pun – his never-failing pleasantry, especially in hot weather – which was, as he called out 'Any one!' to the effect that '*any one*' then meant '*Annie one*'.

Finally a Greek class was to be formed. My inspiring preceptor informed me that Greek had never been taught in the school, but

that he was going to form a class *for the candidates for the ministry*, and if I liked I might join it. I replied – humbly I hope, as became a female of the human species – that I would like very much to study Greek, and that I was thankful for the opportunity, and so it went on. A boy, however meager his equipment and shallow his pretensions, had only to declare a floating intention to study theology and he could get all the support, encouragement and stimulus he needed, be absolved from work and invested beforehand with all the dignity of his far away office. While a self-supporting girl had to struggle on by teaching in the summer and working after school hours to keep up with her board bills, and actually to fight her way against positive discouragements to the higher education; till one such girl one day flared out and told the principal ‘the only mission opening before a girl in his school was to marry one of those candidates’. He said he didn’t know but it was. And when at last that same girl announced her desire and intention to go to college it was received with about the same incredulity and dismay as if a brass button on one of those candidate’s coats had propounded a new method for squaring the circle or trisecting the arc.

[...]

Woman versus the Indian

Pages 90–91

She thinks she is quiet and unobtrusive in her manner, simple and inconspicuous in her dress, and can see no reason why in any chance assemblage of *ladies*, or even a promiscuous gathering of ordinarily well-bred and dignified individuals, she should be signaled out for any marked consideration. And yet she has seen these same ‘gentlemanly and efficient’ railroad conductors, when their cars had stopped at stations having no raised platforms, making it necessary for passengers to take the long and trying leap from the car step to the ground or step on the narrow little stool placed under by the conductor, after standing at their posts and handing woman after woman from the steps to the stool, thence to the ground, or else relieving her of satchels and bags and enabling her to make the descent easily, deliberately fold their arms and turn round when the Black Woman’s turn came to alight – bearing her satchel, and bearing besides another unnamable burden inside the heaving bosom and tightly compressed lips. The feeling of slighted

womanhood is unlike every other emotion of the soul. Happily for the human family, it is unknown to many and indescribable to all. Its poignancy, compared with which even Juno's *spretae injuria formae* is earthly and vulgar, is holier than that of jealousy, deeper than indignation, tenderer than rage. Its first impulse of wrathful protest and proud self[-]vindication is checked and shamed by the consciousness that self[-]assertion would outrage still further the same delicate instinct. Were there a brutal attitude of hate or of ferocious attack, the feminine response of fear or repulsion is simple and spontaneous. But when the keen sting comes through the finer sensibilities, from a hand which, by all known traditions and ideals of propriety, should have been trained to reverence and respect them, the condemnation of man's inhumanity to woman is increased and embittered by the knowledge of personal identity with a race of beings so fallen.

I purposely forbear to mention instances of personal violence to colored women travelling in less civilized sections of our country, where women have been forcibly ejected from cars, thrown out of seats, their garments rudely torn, their person wantonly and cruelly injured. America is large and must for some time yet endure its out-of-the-way jungles of barbarism.

[...]

What are we worth?

Pages 244-5

It is a heavy investment, requires a large outlay of money on long time and large risk, no end of labor, skill, pains. Education is the word that covers it all – the working up of this raw material and fitting it into the world's work to supply the world's need – the manufacture of men and women for the markets of the world. But there is no other labor which so creates value. The value of the well[-]developed man has been enhanced far more by the labor bestowed than is the iron in the watch springs. [. . .]

Education, then, is the safest and richest investment possible to man. It pays the largest dividends and gives the grandest possible product to the world – a man. The demand is always greater than the supply – and the world pays well for what it prizes.

Now what sort of workmanship are we putting on our raw material? What are we doing for education? The man-factories among our people make, I think, a fairly good showing. Figures are encouraging things to deal with, and too they represent something tangible in casting up our accounts. There are now 25,530 colored schools in the United States with 1,353,352 pupils; the colored people hold in landed property for churches and schools \$25,000,000. 2,500,000 colored children have learned to read and most of these to write also. 22,956 colored men and women are teaching in these schools. There are sixty-six academics and high schools and one hundred and fifty schools for advanced education taught by colored teachers, together with seven colleges administered by colored presidents and faculties. There are now one thousand college[-]bred Negro ministers in the country, 250 lawyers, 749 physicians; while according to Dr. Rankin, there are 247 colored students preparing themselves in the universities of Europe.

[...]

Pages 258-61

And we owe it to humanity, we owe it preeminently to those of our own household, to enlarge and enrich, so far as in us lies, the opportunity and grasp of every soul we can emancipate. Surely there is no greater boon we can bestow of our fellow-man in this life, none that could more truly command his deepest gratitude and love, than to disclose to his soul its possibilities and mend its opportunities – to place its rootlets in the generous loam, turn its leaves towards the gracious dews and warm sunlight of heaven and let it grow, let it mature in foliage, flower and fruit for GOD AND THE RACE! Philanthropy will devise means – an object is not far to seek.

Closely akin to the value that may be said to have been wasted through the inclemency and barrenness of circumstance, through the sickness, sin and death that wait on poverty and squalor, a large item of worth has undoubtedly been destroyed by mistaken and unscientific manufacture – foolhardy educators rashly attempting to put in some theoretically desirable *crack* – the classical crack, or the professional crack, or the artistic-aesthetic-accomplishments crack – into material better fitted for household pottery and common every-day stone and iron ware. I want nothing I may say to be construed into an attack on classical training or on art

development and culture. I believe in allowing every longing of the human soul to attain its utmost reach and grasp. But the effort must be a fizzle which seeks to hammer souls into preconstructed molds and grooves which they have never longed for and cannot be made to take comfort in. The power of appreciation is the measure of an individual's aptitudes; and if a boy hates Greek and Latin and spends all his time whittling out steamboats, it is rather foolish to try to force him into the classics. There may be a locomotive in him, but there is certainly no foreshadowing evidence of either the teacher or preacher. It is a waste of forces to strain his incompetence, and smother his proficiencies. If his hand is far more cunning and clever than his brain, see what he can best do, and give him a chance according to his fitness; try him at a trade.

Industrial training has been hitherto neglected or despised among us, due, I think, as I have said elsewhere, to two causes: first, a mistaken estimate of labor arising from its association with slavery and from its having been despised by the only class in the South thought worthy of imitation; and secondly, the fact that the Negro's ability to work had never been called in question, while his ability to learn Latin and construe Greek syntax needed to be proved to sneering critics. 'Scale the heights!' was the cry. 'Go to college, study Latin, preach, teach, orate, wear spectacles and a beaver!'

Stung by such imputations as that of Calhoun that if a Negro could prove his ability to master the Greek subjunctive he might vindicate his title to manhood, the newly liberated race first shot forward along this line with an energy and success which astonished its most sanguine friends.

This may not have been most wise. It certainly was quite natural;
[. . .]

Wealth must pave the way for learning. Intellect, whether of races or individuals, cannot soar to the consummation of those sublime products which immortalize genius, while the general mind is assaulted and burdened with 'what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed'. Work must first create wealth, and wealth leisure, before the untrammelled intellect of the Negro, or any other race, can truly vindicate its capabilities. Something has been done intellectually we all know. That one black man has written a Greek grammar is enough to answer Calhoun's sneer; but it is leisure, the natural outgrowth of work and wealth,

which must furnish room, opportunity, possibility for the highest endeavor and most brilliant achievement. Labor must be the solid foundation stone – the *sine qua non* of our material value.

* * *

Commentary by Shelley Haley

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (10 August 1858 to 27 February 1964) was born into enslavement in Raleigh, North Carolina. In an undated autobiographical note, Cooper describes her parentage in this way: ‘My mother was a slave & the finest woman I have ever known [. . .] Presumably my father was her master, if so I owe him not a sou and she was always too modest and shamefaced ever to mention him.’¹ Ironically, enslavement by the Haywood family afforded some privileges to Cooper.

When the Board of Missions of the Episcopal Church established the St Augustine Normal School and Collegiate Institute in 1868 for formerly enslaved people, under the principalship of Dr J. Brinton Smith, young ‘Annie’ Julia Haywood was among the first group who enrolled. She was about nine and a half years old and soon became a tutor and teacher at St Augustine’s. She would stay there for 14 years, during which time she complained about the sexism of the educational paradigm which excluded women from the classical curriculum. Social conventions of the time offered only one path to women and that was marriage and motherhood. Despite her discomfort with the restrictive opportunities, Anna Julia did marry her colleague and a candidate for the ministry, George A. C. Cooper, in 1877. George Cooper died two years later.

In 1881, Anna Julia entered Oberlin College, a land-grant college dedicated to educating Black and white women and men. In line with educational conventions of the time, the dominant curricular paradigm at Oberlin was a classical course and included subjects such as Latin, Greek and mathematics. Fannie Jackson Coppin, an earlier graduate from Oberlin, described the curriculum as having ‘plenty of Latin and Greek in it and as much mathematics as one could shoulder’.² Cooper was not the first African American to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Oberlin College; that distinction belongs to Mary Jane Patterson, who graduated from the institution in 1862. Nevertheless, Cooper was a member of the trailblazing class of 1884, which contained not one but three Black women graduates with a BA.³ Cooper herself remarks upon how revolutionary that was:

It was felt to be an experiment – a rather dangerous experiment – and was adopted with fear and trembling by the good fathers, who looked as if they had been caught secretly mixing explosive compounds and were guiltily expecting every moment to see the foundations under them shaken and rent and their fair superstructure shattered into fragments.

But the girls came, and there was no upheaval. [. . .] Once in a while one or two were found choosing the gentlemen's course. Still no collapse.⁴

In 1887, after teaching at Wilberforce University and St Augustine's, Cooper was recruited to teach mathematics and science in Washington, DC, at the M Street school, the only college preparatory school in the city for Black youth. At the same time, Cooper returned to Oberlin to work on her master's degree and in 1888 she was awarded a master's in mathematics, becoming one of only two Black women in the United States with an advanced degree at the time.⁵ By 1892, she was active in the Black women's club movement in Washington and was engaged with the intellectual elite of that city.

In that same year Cooper published *A Voice from the South*, which has become a foundational text of Black feminist thought and a prescient expression of the concept of racialised gender. The fact of its existence addresses the erasure of Black women in the discourses around civil rights, including the right to secondary and tertiary education. Since classics was the dominant curricular paradigm at the time, Cooper was stalwart in her belief that the success of Black students – girls and boys alike – in the classical paradigm was the foremost weapon in proving the humanity of her race and gender.

It was during the 1890s that a full-throated debate was occurring among the Black intellectual and anti-intellectual elite. The debate is often formulated today as a 'war' between the educational philosophies of two men: W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Du Bois argued vigorously for an educated elite, dubbed the 'Talented Tenth', who saw education as the key to political, economic and personal independence and who would uplift the race through preaching and teaching. Washington, on the other hand, argued just as vigorously that a classical education was impractical and remarked in his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, that teaching the newly emancipated enslaved people Latin and Greek created 'a very superior human being [. . .] something bordering

almost on the super natural'.⁶ Underlying this statement is Washington's internalisation of what today would be described as a deficit mindset. This mindset implies that most formerly enslaved people do not have the intellectual capacity to learn Greek and Latin, and it frames this limited capacity as a result of individual or collective characteristics rather than any systemic or structural inequities.

Cooper herself was very pragmatic. Even before Washington rose to prominence, she was publicly supporting vocational education as a *choice* of curricula Black students might pursue. In her essay 'What are we worth?' in *A Voice from the South*, Cooper remarks:

I want nothing I may say to be construed as an attack on classical training or on art development or culture. I believe in allowing every longing of the human soul to obtain its utmost reach and grasp. [. . .] The power of appreciation is the measure of an individual's aptitudes; and if a boy hates Greek and Latin and spends all his time whittling out steamboats, it is rather foolish to try and force him into the classics.

For a time, many African Americans in the general population agreed with Cooper's position. They felt that their people needed all forms of education – classical, basic school, industrial and normal – in order to fully engage and fight for their full rights of citizenship.

By 1902, Cooper was appointed principal of M Street and she found herself thrown into a sexist and racist cesspool. Mary Helen Washington notes that:

At the time Booker T. Washington's program of vocational and industrial training was emerging as *the* model for black education and consequently was playing into the prejudices of whites who believed in black intellectual inferiority. By contrast, Cooper staunchly maintained M Street's orientation toward preparing black youth for college.⁷

Such a position necessarily entailed offering and even privileging the classical curriculum. One could argue that Cooper's work 'should be seen as a powerful inaugural formulation of an antiracist pedagogy, detailing the concomitant understanding of the interconnection of race, gender and class', inclusive of classical and vocational curricula.⁸ However, that stance culminated in her dismissal from M Street in 1906 because,

according to Louise Hutchinson, 'she had refused to compromise her convictions and principles in exchange for expediency and the approval of her superiors'.⁹ Annette Eaton, a former student at M Street and a professor of classics herself, commented on the situation in which Cooper found herself:

You must also remember that as far as the Negro population of Washington was concerned, we were still a small southern community where a woman's place was in the home. The idea of a woman principal of a high school must account in some part for any reaction Dr. Cooper felt against her.¹⁰

In 1906, Cooper left Washington, DC, and went to teach languages at the Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City, Missouri. In the 1909 *Class Letters '84 Oberlin College* Cooper described what had happened in the past few years:

The dominant forces of our country are not yet tolerant of the higher steps for colored youth; so that while our course of study was for the time being saved, *my head was lost in the fray* [sic], and I moved west. Here I am teaching Latin and Greek eight hours to the day, with police service, rhetorical and commencement dramatics thrown in now and then for 'duty work'. But if the industrializing wave that threatens reaches us here too, it is likely to be another case of 'Move along, Joe!' [. . .] As for me I stand on the double foundation stone of our Alma Mater – '*Labor and Learning*' – unrestricted and harmonious, without clash and without cliques – simply, for my people and all people a man's chance to earn a living not dissociated from man's first right and highest prerogative – to live.

Cooper would remain in the west until 1910, when she returned to the M Street school as a Latin teacher. After experiencing teaching and administration at the college level, Cooper decided to further her education by getting her doctorate. She first tried Columbia University, but in 1915 family obligations necessitated her adoption of her half-brother's five children, ranging in age from 6 months to 12 years. Her pursuit of her doctorate had to be put on hold as she acquired a new house to 'house [her children's] Southern exuberance'. Cooper eventually returned to what she affectionately dubbed her 'Home Work', this time at the University of Paris.

After much struggle and personal sacrifice, on March 23, 1925, Anna Julia Cooper defended her dissertation, *L'attitude de la France à l'égard de l'esclavage pendant la révolution* (France's attitude concerning slavery during the Revolution). With the verdict of one of her examiners that 'vous êtes Docteur' (you are a doctor), Cooper became the fourth ever African American woman to earn a PhD, joining Drs Georgiana Rose Simpson (University of Chicago, 1921), Eva Beatrice Dykes (Radcliffe, 1921) and Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (University of Pennsylvania, 1921).

Cooper continued to teach at M Street school until her retirement in 1930. After that she fulfilled her aim of supporting and educating a 'neglected' people by becoming the second president of Frelinghuysen University, which she operated, beginning in 1939, out of her home in La Droit Park in Washington, DC. She continued in this role until she retired from this position in 1949. Anna Julia Cooper died in her sleep on 27 February 1964, at the age of 105.

She summed up her life of educational service on several occasions, first in 1925:

In the language of our beloved Cicero: Nothing dumb can delight me. I ask no medal in bronze or gold. There is nothing in life really worth striving for but the esteem of just men that follows a sincere effort to serve to the best of one's powers in the advancement of one's generation.¹¹

Earlier in the same work, she remarked, 'I may say honestly and truthfully that my one aim is and always has been, so far as I may, to hold a torch for the children of a group too long exploited and too frequently disparaged in its struggling for the light.'¹² Finally, in a 1932 survey entitled 'Negro college graduates individual occupational history', Cooper, then aged 74, again reiterated her conviction that education must be broad and well rounded in her answer to question 38: 'I have always stood for that Education that aims at the making of *Men* rather than the construction of machines.'¹³

It is hard to fathom the incredible odds Anna Julia Cooper had to overcome to achieve the status of a member of the Black intellectual elite in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout her long life, her belief remained that education was the tool of liberation for others of her race and her gender. Works written and theories founded and espoused by Black women intellectuals are currently under virulent attack and subject to bans in order to maintain the status quo regarding the education of

BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Colour). This consists of the 'deficient mentality' standpoint; this, in turn, leads to stereotype threat and other obstacles to achieving higher education for young BIPOC.

The eight essays which make up *A Voice from the South* stand today as the precedent for many modern analyses and theories, including critical race feminist theory and critical pedagogy, with its emphasis on student-centred learning. In her introductory essay, 'Our raison d'être', Cooper explains her motivation for writing: '[N]ot many can more sensibly realize and more accurately tell the weight and the fret of the "long dull pain" than the open-eyed but hitherto voiceless Black Woman of America.'¹⁴ *A Voice from the South* is more than a reactive tract against the systemic and systematic oppression that Black women, in particular, suffered. Cooper's Black woman is not a victim but rather a warrior armed with the greatest weapon of all: education (which the cover image of this volume exemplifies, as Cooper's hands deftly flip through the book in her lap while she looks straight ahead). Cooper believed that with an education, Black women could unravel the stereotype of the sexually promiscuous, thieving, lying prostitute, a stereotype expressed in print by J. W. Jacks, president of the Missouri Press Association in 1895: 'The [Negro] women are prostitutes and all are natural liars and thieves.'¹⁵

Cooper demonstrated the real-time effects such sentiment had on Black women in terms of physical violence. Couching her revelations in the terms of the politics of respectability in 'Woman vs the Indian', Cooper shows the trajectory of the stereotype: Black women are prostitutes; prostitutes cannot be 'ladies', only 'women'; therefore, Black women do not have to be treated like (white) ladies and can be thrown off trains or beaten or raped with no consequences. In her mind such actions are indicative of barbarity, not civility. In this essay, she assumes an audience which is well versed in the classics, citing Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.493: 'Audetque viris concurrere virgo' (the young woman dares to fight with men). In 'The higher education of women', she cites *Aeneid* 1.27: 'spretae injuria formae' (the pain of scorned beauty).¹⁶ By weaponising the dominant educational paradigm of the time, Cooper undertakes a powerful act of resistance. She resists the prevalent notion of the time that people of African descent were intellectually inferior. She refracts the 'deficit mentality' posited by John C. Calhoun, who expounded, 'If there can be found a Negro who can conjugate a Greek verb, I will give up my notions of the inferiority of the Negro.'¹⁷

Furthermore, especially in the essays excerpted here, Cooper anticipated the theoretical framework of epistemic violence and epistemic injustice which undergirds the work of modern theorists Miranda Frick

and José Medina.¹⁸ Consider, for example, Frick's discussion of the link between knowledge and epistemic injustice:

To be wronged in one's capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value. When one is undermined or otherwise wronged in a capacity essential to human value, one suffers an intrinsic injustice. The form that this intrinsic injustice takes is [. . .] that the subject is wronged in her capacity as a giver of knowledge. The capacity to give knowledge to others is one side of that many-sided capacity so significant in human beings: namely the capacity for reason [. . .] No wonder, then, that being insulted, undermined, or other otherwise wronged in one's capacity as a giver of knowledge is something that can cut deep. No wonder too that in the contexts of oppression the powerful will be sure to undermine the powerless in just that capacity, for it provides a direct route to undermining them in their very humanity.¹⁹

Medina elaborates on this argument by stating, 'Members of groups that have been systematically disadvantaged and mistreated (e.g., women and racial minorities) are often unfairly depicted as intellectually inferior, mischaracterized as lacking cognitive capacities, or simply given less authority and credibility than members of other groups.'²⁰

Cooper also proved to be prescient in her use of data and statistics to delineate the connection between wealth, income and education (a classical education at the time) and between wealth and income. It is disconcerting to read modern reports on this issue and note that these gaps in education and wealth still exist.²¹

In sum, Anna Julia Cooper remains an important voice for epistemic justice and a defender of a place for classics in the quest for the end of systemic oppression based on white supremacy. For, as she so forcefully argues, '[our] great "problem" [i.e. racial inequality] after all is to be solved not by brooding over it, and orating about it, but by *living into it*.'²² Anna Julia Cooper's charge and legacy lives on in the work of modern Black women intellectuals, such as Michelle Alexander, Nikole Hannah-Jones and Saidiya Hartman, all of whom are attempting to end systemic oppression through the enlightenment of knowledge.²³ Indeed, Hartman's book title, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, recalls Cooper's description of the Oberlin College faculty's attitude to the education of women as a 'dangerous experiment'. Hartman's formulation retains an element of danger: any 'experiment' involving Black women has proven dangerous in American history. However, she adds an element of hope by replacing 'dangerous' with 'beautiful'.

Notes

- 1 Undated document held at Moorland – Springarn Research Center, Howard University. On ‘sou’: Cooper here is referring to an outdated coin in French currency that was of a low value. It disappeared from usage around the end of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it is still used as a synonym for money, especially a small amount.
- 2 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life, and Hints on Teaching*, 12.
- 3 Her classmates were Ida Gibbs (Hunt) and Mary Church (Terrell). For more on Terrell, see Chapter 21 in this volume.
- 4 Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 49–50.
- 5 Mary Church Terrell was the other; she earned a master’s in Classics the same year (1888).
- 6 Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 81.
- 7 Washington, ‘Introduction,’ xxxiii–iv.
- 8 Bonnick, ‘In the service of neglected people’, 179.
- 9 Hutchinson, *Anna J. Cooper*, 81.
- 10 Letter from Annette Eaton to Leona Gabel, 1977. Smith College Archives. Quoted in Washington, ‘Introduction,’ xxxiii. Dr Annette Hawkins Eaton attended the M Street School and went on to receive her PhD in Classics from Catholic University in 1943. She taught at Howard University and was acting chair and then chair of the Classics Department. She was also president of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States in 1968. Eaton’s observation is undermined by the fact that Cooper was not the first woman principal of M Street. That distinction belongs to Mary Jane Patterson (1840–94). Patterson served as principal twice: from 1871 to 1872 and 1873 to 1884. In 1872, she was demoted when the school hired Richard Theodore Greener, a graduate of Harvard and first Black member of the then-named American Philological Association (now the Society of Classical Studies). Greener left after only one year and Patterson was appointed principal again in 1873. She continued in this position until she resigned as principal in 1884; she continued to teach Latin at the school until her death in 1894.
- 11 Cooper, ‘Souvenir’, 341.
- 12 Cooper, ‘Souvenir’, 340.
- 13 Johnson, ‘Survey of Negro college graduates’ individual occupational history,’ question 38.
- 14 Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, ii.
- 15 J. W. Jacks published this as a rebuttal to the work of Florence Balarnie who, as secretary of the British Anti-Lynching Committee, had published a censure of lynching in several American newspapers. Jacks’s letter served as a catalyst for the campaign by several Black women’s clubs titled ‘In Defense of Ourselves’. The letter caused outrage among Black newspaper publishers and several reprinted it. This quote is from the Kansas City newspaper *American Citizen*, dated 12 July 1895.
- 16 *Aeneid* 1.493 appears in ‘The higher education of women’ and is an apt quote since it refers to Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, who fought alongside the Trojans during the tenth year of the Trojan war. *Aeneid* 1. 27 refers to Juno’s feelings of humiliation after the Judgement of Paris. Cooper employs it in ‘Woman versus the Indian’, following the description of the humiliating treatment of Black women on trains.
- 17 John C. Calhoun (1782–1850) was an adamant proponent of white supremacy and enslavement. Born in South Carolina, he served as a senator and as the seventh vice president of the United States (1825–32). I have not been able to track down the exact citation to this quote, but both Fannie Jackson Coppin and Anna Julia Cooper (*A Voice from the South*, 260) cite this quote as one of the goads used by white supremacists to make people of African descent prove their intellectual capability and equality.
- 18 Frick, *Epistemic Injustice*; Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*.
- 19 Frick, *Epistemic Injustice*, 44.
- 20 Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 27–8.
- 21 Hernández Kent and Ricketts, ‘Wealth gaps between white, Black and Hispanic families in 2019’.
- 22 Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 285.
- 23 Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*; in the latter, see especially pages 39–42.

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's *Works* (1894–1909)

The excerpts reproduced here are from volumes I, VIII and X of the *Collected Works* and date from between 1894 and 1909. Commentary by Phiroze Vasunia.

Deputation to the Natal Premier and Colonial Secretary, Sir John Robinson

Durban, 29 June 1894. Source: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. I (1884–1896), 2nd edition (Ahmedabad: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1969), pp. 133–4. Extract.

With greatest respect to Your Honour, we beg to point out that both the Anglo-Saxon and the Indian races belong to the same stock. We read Your Honour's eloquent speech at the time of the second reading of the Bill with rapt attention and took great pains to ascertain if any writer of authority gave countenance to the view expressed by Your Honour about the difference of the stocks from which both the races have sprung up. Max Muller, Morris, Greene and a host of other writers with one voice seem to show very clearly that both the races have sprung from the same Aryan stock, or rather the Indo-European as many call it. We have no wish whatever to thrust ourselves as members of a brother nation on a nation that would be unwilling to receive us as such, but we may be pardoned if we state the real facts, the alleged absence of which has been put forward as an argument to pronounce us as unfit for the exercise of the franchise.

Your Honour has, moreover, been reported to have said that it would be cruel to expect Indians to exercise the privilege of franchise. We humbly submit that our petition is a sufficient answer to this.

It has given us no small satisfaction to know that, however unjust Your Honour's speech may have appeared to us from our point of view, it breathed truest sentiments of justice, morality and, what is more, Christianity. So long as such a spirit is noticeable among the chosen of the land, we would never despair of right being done in every case.

Open letter to members of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly

Durban, before 19 December 1894. Source: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. I (1884–June 1896), 2nd edition (Ahmedabad: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1969), pp. 170, 176–7. Extract.

Were it possible to write to you anonymously, nothing would have been more pleasing to me. But the statements I shall have to make in this letter will be so grave and important that it would be considered a sheer act of cowardice not to disclose my name. I beg, however, to assure you that I write not from selfish motives, nor yet from those of self-aggrandisement or of seeking notoriety. The one and only object is to serve India, which is by accident of birth called my native country, and to bring about better understanding between the European section of the community and the Indian in this Colony.

[. . .]

In spite of the Premier's opinion to the contrary, as expressed in his speech at the second reading of the Franchise Bill, with the utmost deference to His Honour, I venture to point out that both the English and the Indians spring from a common stock, called the Indo-Aryan. I would not be able, in support of the above, to give extracts from many authors, as the books of reference at my disposal are unfortunately very few. I, however, quote as follows from Sir W. W. Hunter's *Indian Empire*:

This nobler race (meaning the early Aryans) belonged to the Aryan or Indo-Germanic stock, from which the Brahman, the Rajput, and the Englishman alike descend. Its earliest home visible to history

was in Central Asia. From that common camping ground certain branches of the race started for the East, others for the West. One of the Western offshoots founded the Persian Kingdom; another built Athens and Lacedaemon, and became the Hellenic nation; a third went on to Italy and reared the city on the seven hills, which grew into Imperial Rome. A distant colony of the same race excavated the silver ores of prehistoric Spain; and when we first catch a sight of ancient England, we see an Aryan settlement, fishing in wattle canoes and working the tin mines of Cornwall.

The forefathers of the Greek and the Roman, of the Englishman and the Hindoo, dwelt together in Asia, spoke the same tongue and worshipped the same gods.

The ancient religions of Europe and India had a similar origin.

Thus, it will be seen that the learned historian, who must be supposed to have consulted all the authorities, without a shadow of doubt makes the above unqualified assertion. If then I err, I err in good company. And the belief, whether mistaken or well-founded, serves as the basis of operations of those who are trying to unify the hearts of the two races, which are, legally and outwardly, bound together under a common flag.

A general belief seems to prevail in the Colony that the Indians are little better, if at all, than savages or the Natives of Africa. Even the children are taught to believe in that manner, with the result that the Indian is being dragged down to the position of a raw Kaffir.

Such a state of things, which the Christian legislators of the Colony would not, I firmly believe, wittingly allow to exist and remain, must be my excuse for the following copious extracts, which will show at once that the Indians were, and are, in no way inferior to their Anglo-Saxon brethren, if I may venture to use the word, in the various departments of life—industrial, intellectual, political, etc.

The Indian franchise

Beech Grove, Durban. 16 December 1895. Source: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. I (1884–June 1896), 2nd edition (Ahmedabad: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1969), pp. 288–9. Extract.

In conclusion, I shall be deeply indebted to those who would read this and be kind enough to express their opinion about its subject-matter. Many Europeans have privately expressed their sympathy for the Indians and have strongly disapproved of the sweeping resolutions passed at the various meetings held in the Colony in connection with the Indian franchise and the bitter tone of the speeches made. If these gentlemen will come forward and have the courage of their convictions, I submit, they will have a fourfold reward. They will earn the gratitude of the 40,000 Indians in the Colony, indeed of the whole of India, and will render true service to the Colony by disabusing the minds of the Europeans of the notion that the Indian is a curse to the Colony; they will serve humanity by rescuing or assisting to rescue a portion of an ancient race from unwarranted persecution which they know exists in the whole of South Africa, and last but not least, in common with the noblest Britons, be the forgers of the links that will unite England and India in love and peace. I humbly submit that such an achievement is worth a little ridicule that the pioneers will be subjected to. To separate the two communities is easy enough, to unite them by the 'silken cord' of love is equally difficult. But then, everything that is worth having is also worth a great deal of trouble and anxiety.

The Natal Indian Congress has been mentioned in connection with this matter and has been much misrepresented. In a separate pamphlet its objects and methods of working will be fully discussed.

While this was in course of preparation, Mr. Maydon made a speech at Bellair and a curious resolution was passed at the meeting. With the greatest deference to the honourable gentleman, I venture to take exception to his statement that the Indians have ever remained in a state of servitude and are, therefore, unfit for self-government. Although he invoked the aid of history in support of his statement, I venture to say that history fails to bear out the statement. In the first place Indian history does not date from the invasion of Alexander the Great. But I take the liberty to say that India of that date will compare very favourably with Europe of today. In support of that statement I beg to refer him to the Greek description of India at pp. 169–70 of Hunter's *Indian Empire*, partly quoted in my "Open Letter". What, however, of India of a period previous to that date? History says that the Aryans' home was not India but they came from Central Asia, and one family migrated to India and *colonized* it, the others to Europe. The government of that day was, so history

says, a civilized government in the truest sense of the term. The whole Aryan literature grew up then. The India of Alexander's time was India on the decline. When other nations were hardly formed, India was at its zenith, and the Indians of this age are descendants of that race. To say, therefore, that the Indians have been ever under servitude is hardly correct. India certainly has not proved unconquerable. If that be reason for disfranchisement, I have nothing to say except this, that every nation will, unfortunately, be found wanting in this respect. It is true England "wafts her sceptre" over India. The Indians are not ashamed of that fact. They are proud to be under the British Crown, because they think that England will prove India's deliverer. The wonder of all wonders seems to be that the Indians, like the favoured nation of the Bible, are irrepressible in spite of centuries of oppression and bondage. And many British writers think that India is under England with her consent.

'Story of a Soldier of Truth'

Published serially in Gujarati in the newspaper *Indian Opinion*, from 4 April to 9 May 1908. Source: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. VIII (January–August 1908) (Ahmedabad: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1962), pp. 172–4. The passage below is the preface to Gandhi's translation of Plato's *Apology* into Gujarati. Extract.

The heroic Socrates, an extraordinary person with a fine moral character, was born in 471 BC. A Greek, he lived a virtuous and benevolent life. Unable to bear his moral excellence and his virtue, some envious person made false accusations against him. Socrates lived in fear of God and cared little for the obloquy of men. He had no fear of death. A reformer, he strove to cleanse Athens, the capital of Greece [sic], of the evil which had entered its [political] life and thus came in contact with a large number of persons. He made a powerful impression on the minds of the young who followed him about in crowds. [Socrates' teaching] had the result of putting an end to the unconscionable gains made by persons [with predatory tendencies]. It came in the way of those who lived by exploiting others.

In Athens it was an offence to disregard the traditional religion of the *polis* or encourage others to do so. The offence, if proved,

was punishable with death. Socrates adhered to the traditional religion, but called upon the people to fight the corrupt elements [associated with its observance]. He himself would have nothing to do with them.

Under the law of Athens, such offences were tried before a popular assembly. Socrates was charged with violating the religion of the state and teaching others to do likewise and was tried before an assembly of elders. Many members of the assembly had suffered as a result of Socrates' teaching. Because of this, they bore him a grudge. They wrongfully declared him guilty and condemned him to die by taking poison. A prisoner sentenced might be put to death in any one of a number of ways. Socrates was condemned to death by poisoning.

This brave man took poison by his own hand and died. On the day of his death he discoursed to his friend and companion on the perishable nature of the human body and the immortality of the soul. It is said that up to the very last moment Socrates showed no fear, and that he took the poison smilingly. As he finished the last sentence of his discourse, he drank the poison from the cup as eagerly as we might drink sherbet from a glass.

Today the world cherishes Socrates' memory. His teaching has benefited millions. His accusers and his judges stand condemned by the world. Socrates has gained immortality and Greece stands in high esteem because of him and others like him.

Socrates' speech in his own defence was committed to writing by his companion, the celebrated Plato. It has been translated into many languages. The defence is excellent and imbued with moral fervour. We, therefore, wish to translate it, but rather than render it literally, we print only a summary of it.

We have much to struggle for, not only in South Africa but in India as well. Only when we succeed in these [tasks] can India be rid of its many afflictions. We must learn to live and die like Socrates. He was, moreover, a great Satyagrahi. He adopted Satyagraha against his own people. As a result the Greeks became a great people. If, through cowardice or fear of dishonour or death, we fail to realize or examine our shortcomings and fail to draw the people's attention to them, we shall do no good to India's cause, notwithstanding the number of external remedies we may adopt, notwithstanding the Congress sessions [we may hold], not even by becoming extremists.

India's good does not lie along that direction. When the disease is diagnosed and its true nature revealed in public, and when, through suitable remedies, the body [politic] of India is cured and cleansed both within and without, it will become immune to the germs of the disease, that is, to the oppression by the British and the others. If, however, the body itself is in a state of decay, then if we destroy one kind of germs, it will be attacked by another, and this will ruin the body [politic] India herself.

We argued thus and saw in the words of a great soul like Socrates the qualities of an elixir. We wanted our readers, therefore, to imbibe a deep draught of it, so that they might be able to fight—and to help others fight—the disease. It is with this objective in mind that we summarize Socrates's speech.

***Hind Swaraj* (Indian home rule)**

Source: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. X (November 1909–March 1911) (Ahmedabad: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1963), pp. 36–8. Extract.

Chapter 13: What is true civilization?

READER: You have denounced railways, lawyers and doctors. I can see that you will discard all machinery. What, then, is civilization?

EDITOR: The answer to that question is not difficult. I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the Pharaohs was broken; Japan has become westernized; of China nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece or Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, the Europeans imagine that they will avoid the mistakes of Greece and Rome. Such is their pitiable condition. In the midst of all this India remains immovable and that is her glory. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilized, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty: it is the sheet-anchor of our hope.

Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means “good conduct”.

If this definition be correct, then India, as so many writers have shown, has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be. We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages. They saw that kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the *Rishis* [sages] and the *Fakirs* [ascetics]. A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover, these *vakils* [lawyers] and *vaid*s [doctors] did not rob people; they were considered people’s dependants, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair.

The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil, too, was noticeable only in and around capitals. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule.

And where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before. The inhabitants of that part of India will very properly laugh at your new-fangled notions. The English do not rule over them, nor will you ever rule over them. Those in whose name we speak we do not know, nor do they know us. I would certainly advise you and those like you who love the motherland to go into the interior that has yet been not polluted by the railways and to live there for six months; you might then be patriotic and speak of Home Rule.

Now you see what I consider to be real civilization. Those who want to change conditions such as I have described are enemies of the country and are sinners.

READER: It would be all right if India were exactly as you have described it, but it is also India where there are hundreds of child widows, where two-year-old babies are married, where twelve-year-old girls are mothers and housewives, where women practise polyandry, where the practice of *Niyoga* [insemination by a person other than one's husband] obtains, where, in the name of religion, girls dedicate themselves to prostitution, and in the name of religion sheep and goats are killed. Do you consider these also symbols of the civilization that you have described?

EDITOR: You make a mistake. The defects that you have shown are defects. Nobody mistakes them for ancient civilization. They remain in spite of it. Attempts have always been made and will be made to remove them. We may utilize the new spirit that is born in us for purging ourselves of these evils. But what I have described to you as emblems of modern civilization are accepted as such by its votaries. The Indian civilization, as described by me, has been so described by its votaries. In no part of the world, and under no civilization, have all men attained perfection. The tendency of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God. So understanding and so believing, it behoves every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilization even as a child clings to the mother's breast.

Commentary by Phiroze Vasunia

Gandhi inspired Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr, but his own views on Africans and African cultures were condescending and drew on racial comparisons. This paradox, which is one of many that we might bring up in connexion with Gandhi, has been discussed and analysed at length. One explanation is that Gandhi's views on Africans and race came from his earlier years, from his time in South Africa, where he lived and worked for some two decades (1893–1914). Gandhi's views changed while he lived in South Africa and continued to evolve after his return to India. He travelled a great deal – in mind, body and spirit – from the days he agitated on behalf of the Indian community in South Africa to his last days in New Delhi. His later comments contradict some of his earlier remarks about Africans. These can be understood as the sincere reflections of a contemplative activist, or as retrospective attempts to gloss over ideas about which he was later embarrassed, or as both. To understand his words about Africans and Indians is a complex task.

Colonial attitudes and policies in Natal during the late nineteenth century favoured Europeans over and against indigenous peoples and the local Indian diaspora communities. The inequalities of the situation were brought home to Gandhi when a bill was proposed in the Natal Parliament to take away the franchise from Asians. He attempted, as a lawyer and representative of Indian interests, to make the best possible case he could to elevate Indians to the status of white Europeans. The strategy was to suggest to the colonial authorities and other Europeans that Indians were on a par, or almost on a par, with Europeans in terms of their civilisational achievements, and in practice this meant that he described Indians as being racially superior to Africans. As a lawyer and an advocate for the Indian cause, Gandhi attempted to sound logical and transactional, but he gave the impression of being a little too eager to win over the European authorities and of wanting to be accepted by the British Empire on its own terms. Such a stance will strike many readers as odd, but at this point Gandhi was not yet the fierce anti-colonial critic that he would become. He was seeking to maintain and enhance the rights of Indians within the terms of the legal system, and he evidently thought the best way for him to achieve that goal was to cast Africans as separate and inferior.

Gandhi's early arguments on behalf of the Indians in South Africa conform to a hierarchal scheme according to which Europeans appear

at the top of the civilisational ladder, followed by Indians, and with Africans at the very bottom. Gandhi rejected the suggestion that Indians and Africans should be placed at the same level and did not want to see the Indian 'being dragged down to the position of a raw Kaffir'. That word is indicative. According to the latest edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Since the mid 20th cent. *Kaffir* has been considered extremely offensive and is now widely avoided, esp. in South Africa, where its usage is categorized as *crimen injuria* [. . .] and is thus legally actionable.'¹ Already in Gandhi's own day the term had a pejorative connotation, and he regularly used it in a derogatory if not racial sense. Until about 1913, give or take a year or two, Gandhi continued to use the expression 'Kaffir' in his writings, but by most accounts he avoided the term after that year in spoken and written discourse.

Gandhi also drew on the Indo-European or Indo-Aryan theory to show that Indians and Europeans derived ultimately 'from the same Aryan stock' and therefore that Indians should continue to have the electoral franchise.² The Indo-European theory of language, which was formulated by William Jones in the late eighteenth century in Calcutta, was increasingly filled out, over the course of the nineteenth century, by Orientalists, especially in Britain and Germany. Gandhi is drawing on racialised nineteenth-century versions of the Indo-European theory, which were widely shared and accepted by many prominent intellectuals, in making the case for a shared ancient origin for Indians and Western Europeans. Africans were excluded from this family of peoples and hence had no place in the ties that linked Europeans and Indians. Incidentally, the appeal to a shared Indo-European ancestry was made also by other members of the Indian diaspora when they found themselves to be a discriminated minority in majority-white nations: in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923), Thind argued, unsuccessfully as it turned out, that he was eligible for naturalised citizenship in the USA on the grounds that the Indo-Aryan theory meant that he was a Caucasian and a member of the Aryan race.

To the Indo-European hypothesis, Gandhi brings attitudes that were consistent with what he would have found in nationalist histories of India written in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, Gandhi makes the additional claim, in both 'The Indian franchise' and *Hind Swaraj*, that ancient Indian civilisation was superior to Western civilisation. According to this reading the Aryans who settled in India created a culture and a polity that was highly developed, and the Indians of the present day were descended from this race. By the time Europe encountered India at the time of Alexander's invasion, the subcontinent

was past its highwatermark. *Hind Swaraj* contradicts 'The Indian franchise' slightly but the gist here, too, is that ancient India was a great civilisation and that contemporary Indians have retained many of the virtues of that ancient culture: '[T]he civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors.' This combination of nationalist and racialising views fueled Gandhi's arguments and, in his mind at least, helped him defend the rights and privileges of the minority Indian community in South Africa.

As Gandhi developed his idea of *satyagraha* (truth-struggle, struggle for truth) in South Africa, he continued to read widely, both in and out of jail, and arrived upon the figure of Socrates as 'a great Satyagrahi'. He thinks of Socrates as a brave martyr and is sufficiently enamoured of Plato's teacher that he translates the *Apology* into Gujarati, from an English rather than a Greek text, and serialises this translation in *Indian Opinion* in 1908. The Gujarati text was then subsequently rendered into English and both the Gujarati and English versions were disseminated in India. In 1910, the British authorities in Bombay banned Gandhi's version of the *Apology*, along with a few other texts, including *Hind Swaraj*. The government's move backfired when, in 1919, after Gandhi's return to India, the banned texts were deliberately circulated by Gandhi and his allies as part of the anticolonial movement. As Leela Gandhi observes, 'Accordingly, the rereading and translation of the *Apology* becomes one of the first acts of civil disobedience for the 1919 *satyagraha*.'³

In the preface to his translation of the *Apology*, Gandhi invokes Socrates as a figure who can inspire people in South Africa and India. Here the argument is slightly different, again, from what he will go on to write in *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi takes the line in the preface that India and Indians suffer from many failures and vices. India may once have been a great civilisation, but it has since fallen on hard times and sunk into a poor condition. In such circumstances, Gandhi surmises, it is not surprising that the British were able to conquer and rule India. He does not say that Indians brought this fate upon themselves, but he is prepared to rebuke his fellow Indians for not diagnosing their own condition and for not trying to lift themselves out of their plight.

Gandhi's emphasis in the preface on the body and bodily metaphors is extraordinary, though his language is not explicitly racial. Here we find Socrates himself holding forth on the transient nature of the human body and the soul's immortality. The courageous man is said to have taken 'poison by his own hand and died'. Gandhi describes his last words and actions as Socrates smiles and drinks the hemlock 'as eagerly as we might drink sherbet from a glass'. Even more interesting in the passage

is the notion that the Indian body politic is ailing and diseased and in dire need of a remedy. In this case, a lament for the weakened character of the Indian nation is expressed in terms of bodily health and infirmity. The sickness needs to be diagnosed accurately and its 'true nature' needs to be appreciated and understood and treated. If the right cure is applied to the body, the body will develop an immunity to the disease of British oppression, but if the body is not healed, one type of germ will replace another and ultimately destroy the body of India. Gandhi suggests that Socrates' example and his words offer a great elixir against the disease afflicting the Indian people. The hemlock may have killed the Athenian philosopher, but his words and deeds will act in a way that is opposite to the hemlock: they will treat the illness and strengthen India.

Gandhi's attention to the diseased body returns us to a moment, in 1906, that he recalls in his autobiography and that occupies a formative place in his political and spiritual awakening. *An autobiography, or the story of my experiments with truth* was published in serial form from 1925 onwards. Although the work was released a decade and more after Gandhi's departure from South Africa in 1914, it is indicative of how he strove to present events to his audiences during the important time of the freedom struggle in India. What is striking about this personal history is that it places Gandhi's compassion for the wounded Zulus in proximity to his understanding of *satyagraha* and the decision to observe *brahmacharya*, or celibacy. Gandhi and fellow volunteers in his ambulance corps helped the wounded Zulus, including those who fought for and against the British, since, as he recalls, 'white people were not willing nurses for the wounded Zulus and ... their wounds were festering.'⁷⁴ The work was draining, he writes, and then adds: 'But I swallowed the bitter draught, especially as the work of my Corps consisted only in nursing the wounded Zulus. I could see that but for us, the Zulus would have been uncared for.'⁷⁵ Now it is Gandhi who imbibes a 'bitter draught', but this tonic is of a different nature from the one that Socrates drank and takes the Indian lawyer to the brink of life-changing decisions. It is soon after this episode that Gandhi takes a vow of celibacy and develops the concept of *satyagraha*.

The centre of this remarkable confluence of events, which moves Gandhi decisively forward toward *satyagraha* and *brahmacharya*, turns on closeness to the bodies of indigenous Africans. No small part of Gandhi's service to the Zulus was driven by his need to show the Empire that Indians, too, could be of help in moments of crisis; yet this desire inevitably brought him into intimate contact with Zulus. He and his contingent tended to open wounds and festering sores as they

nursed black Africans back to health – while the white European soldiers recuperated in another area, separated by railings, through which they mocked the Zulus. In 1939, he remarked, ‘I shall never forget the lacerated backs of Zulus who had received stripes and were brought to us for nursing because no white nurse was prepared to look after them.’⁶ For the older Gandhi, his care for the wounded Zulu was evidently a turning point in his life. In 1939 again, he said, ‘I came through that experience with greater non-violence and with richer love for the great Zulu race. And I had an insight into what war by white men against coloured races meant.’⁷ Erik Erikson observes,

[I]t would seem that the experience of witnessing the outrages perpetrated on black bodies by white he-men aroused in Gandhi both a deeper identification with the maltreated, and a stronger aversion against all male sadism – including such sexual sadism as he had probably felt from childhood on to be part of all exploitation of women by men.⁸

That rings true, and Erikson’s observation is widely quoted. Even after one makes allowances for the fact that Gandhi was being selective in his recollection of the Bhambatha Rebellion, his time in South Africa was evidently a formative period and profoundly transformed his views on race as well as non-violence and sexual relations.

Gandhi held racist views about black Africans during his early years in South Africa, but he revised and reconsidered his position, and showed fewer and fewer signs of racism after 1913, his last full year there. Critics have levelled a variety of charges against him for his words in and about Africa, as they have for his attitudes to caste, his relations with young women and his seemingly excessive spiritualism. He was surely not the saintly figure on which millions of Indian schoolchildren were raised. We can say, on the subject of race and in his defence, that he was regularly and favourably invoked by the most successful antiracist campaigners of the twentieth century. The theories and methods he developed in South Africa proved to be valuable to Mandela and others in the African National Congress (ANC). Gandhi’s ‘idiosyncratic ideas – a philosophy of non-violent resistance, struggle as an ethical relationship between opponents, politics as experimentation with modes of self, a spiritual foundation of nationhood’ – inspired a generation of antiracist and anticolonial activists, leaders and thinkers in South Africa.⁹ As Jon Soske reminds us, many of Gandhi’s early views and political strategies were shared by members of the ANC, including

his support for the Empire. Mandela said that Gandhi was an 'integral part' of South Africa's history and referred to him more than once as a motivating force for the ANC.

In a related if different struggle, Martin Luther King Jr claimed Gandhi as a spiritual and political mentor and recalled that he was 'the guiding light of our technique of non-violent social change' during the Montgomery boycott.¹⁰ King visited India in 1959 and wrote a moving account of his journey to 'the land of Gandhi'. Of Gandhi himself, King wrote at the time, 'Posterity could not escape him even if it tried. By all standards of measurement, he is one of the half dozen greatest men in world history.'¹¹ King and Mandela, like others, came to learn from Gandhi when Gandhi's South African years were well behind him, and they may not have been aware of all the things he said or wrote during his first decade there. They found enough in the mature leader to see him as a powerful example and political ancestor.

Gandhi's reflections on race, civilisation and, indeed, Socrates ought to be seen in the light of ideas that he was working out in South Africa. His thoughts on these subjects were connected to each other and shaped by his location. He was writing as a member of a minority community and trying to work out how he might best defend the interests of his group within the framework of the law, but he was also in the midst of a profoundly personal exploration and laying down values by which he would try to abide for the rest of his life. His proximity to Zulus and the other inhabitants of South Africa made him reassess his feelings about race and civilisation. The change within him was gradual, but he also experienced flashpoints, such as the Bhambatha Rebellion, during which he saw, first-hand, violence inflicted on black bodies. Living in a place outside the subcontinent encouraged him to think anew about rights and privileges and about the kinds of alliances he needed to form in order to improve the lot of Indian migrants and their descendants in southern Africa. At the same time, he was thinking about Indians in other parts of the Empire, in India and elsewhere, and he sought to understand what the Indian nation meant to him and how it might aspire to modernity. After he left South Africa and returned to India, he remained passionately committed to nonviolence and *satyagraha* and drew worldwide attention to the Indian independence movement. His time among Zulus proved decisive for his political and intellectual awakening.

Notes

- 1 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Kaffir', accessed September 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1038868923>.
- 2 See also Chapter 10 on Michelet in this volume.
- 3 Gandhi, 'Concerning violence', 120.
- 4 Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, Part V, Ch. 24.
- 5 Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, Part V, Ch. 25.
- 6 Gandhi, *Collected Works* 68 (before October 15, 1938 – February 28, 1939), 273–4. A scanned version of the print edition can be found on several websites, including: <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/>
- 7 Gandhi, *Collected Works* 68 (before October 15, 1938 – February 28, 1939), 269.
- 8 Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, p. 194.
- 9 Soske, 'Myth and the archive', 112.
- 10 King, 'My trip to the land of Gandhi'.
- 11 King, 'My trip to the land of Gandhi'.

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Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self* (1902–3)

Extracts from chapters 2 and 4, published on 1 November 1902 in the *Colored American Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 35–46 and 110–21. All punctuation and spelling is consistent with the original publication. Commentary by Nicole A. Spigner.

Chapter 2

The passing of slavery from the land marked a new era in the life of the nation. The war, too, had passed like a dream of horrors, and over the resumption of normal conditions in business and living, the whole country, as one man, rejoiced and heaved a deep sigh of absolute content.

Under the spur of the excitement occasioned by the Proclamation of Freedom, and the great need of schools for the blacks, thousands of dollars were contributed at the North, and agents were sent to Great Britain, where generosity towards Negroes was boundless. Money came from all directions, pouring into the hands of philanthropists, who were anxious to prove that the country was able, not only to free the slave, but to pay the great debt it owed him, – protection as he embraced freedom, and a share in the great Government he had aided to found by sweat and toil and blood. It was soon discovered that the Negro possessed a phenomenal gift of music, and it was determined to utilize this gift in helping to support educational institutions of color in the Southland.

A band of students from Fisk University were touring the country, and those who had been fortunate enough to listen once to their matchless untrained voices singing their heartbreaking minor music with its grand and impossible intervals and sound combinations, were eager to listen again and yet again.

Wealthy and exclusive society women everywhere vied in showering benefits and patronage upon the new prodigies who had suddenly become the pets of the musical world. The Temple was a blaze of light, and crowded from pit to dome. It was the first appearance of the troupe in New England, therefore it was a gala night, and Boston culture was out in force.

The two friends easily found their seats in the first balcony, and from that position idly scanned the vast audience to beguile the tedious waiting. Reuel's thoughts were disturbed; he read over the program, but it carried no meaning to his pre-occupied mind; he was uneasy; the face he had seen outlined in the twilight haunted him. A great nervous dread of he knew not what possessed him, and he actually suffered as he sat there answering at random the running fire of comments made by Livingston on the audience, and replying none too cordially to the greetings of fellow-students, drawn to the affair, like himself, by curiosity.

"Great crowd for such a night," observed one. "The weather matches your face, Briggs; why didn't you leave it outside? Why do you look so down?"

Reuel shrugged his shoulders.

"They say there are some pretty girls in the troupe; one or two as white as we," continued the speaker unabashed by Reuel's surliness.

"They range at home from alabaster to ebony," replied Livingston. "The results of amalgamation are worthy the careful attention of all medical experts."

"Don't talk shop, Livingston," said Briggs peevishly.

"You are really more disagreeable than usual," replied Livingston, pleasantly. "Do try to be like the other fellows, for once, Reuel."

Silence ensued for a time, and then the irrepressible one of the party remarked: "The soprano soloist is great; heard her in New York." At this there was a general laugh among the men. Good natured Charlie Vance was generally "struck" once a month with the "loveliest girl, by jove, you know."

"That explains your presence here, Vance; what's her name?"

"Dianthe Lusk."

"Great name. I hope she comes up to it, – the flower of Jove."

"Flower of Jove, indeed! You'll say so when you see her," cried Charlie with his unusual enthusiasm.

“What! again, my son? ‘Like Dian’s kiss, unmasked, unsought, Love gives itself’” quoted Livingston, with a smile on his handsome face.

“Oh, stow it! Aubrey, even your cold blood will be stirred at sight of her exquisite face; of her voice I will not speak; I cannot do it justice.”

“If this is to be the result of emancipation, I for one vote that we ask Congress to annul the Proclamation,” said Reuel drily.

Now conversation cased; a famous local organist began a concert on the organ to occupy the moments of waiting. The music soothed Reuel’s restlessness. He noticed that the platform usually occupied by the speaker’s desk, now held a number of chairs and a piano. Certainly, the assiduous advertising had brought large patronage for the new venture, he thought as he idly calculated the financial result from the number in the audience.

Soon the hot air, the glare of lights, the mingling of choice perfumes emanating from the dainty forms of elegantly attired women, acted upon him as an intoxicant. He began to feel the pervading excitement – the flutter of expectation, and presently the haunting face left him.

The prelude drew to a close; the last chord fell from the fingers of the artist; a line of figures – men and women – dark in hue, and neatly dressed in quiet evening clothes, filed noiselessly from the ante-room and filled the chairs upon the platform. The silence in the house was painful. These were representatives of the people for whom God had sent the terrible scourge of blood upon the land to free from bondage. The old abolitionists in the vast audience felt the blood leave their faces beneath the stress of emotion.

The opening number was “The Lord’s Prayer.” Stealing, rising, swelling, gathering, as it thrilled the ear, all the delights of harmony in a grand minor cadence that told of deliverance from bondage and homage to God for his wonderful aid, sweeping the awed heart with an ecstasy that was almost pain; breathing, hovering, soaring, they held the vast multitude in speechless wonder.

Thunders of applause greeted the close of the hymn. Scarcely waiting for a silence, a female figure rose and came slowly to the edge of the platform and stood in the blaze of lights with hands modestly clasped before her. She was not in any way the preconceived idea of a Negro. Fair as the fairest woman in the hall, with wavy bands of chestnut hair, and great, melting eyes of brown, soft as those of

childhood; a willowy figure of exquisite mould, clad in a sombre gown of black. There fell a voice upon the listening ear, in celestial showers of silver that passed all conceptions, all comparisons, all dreams; a voice beyond belief – a great soprano of unimaginable beauty, soaring heavenward in mighty intervals.

“Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land. Tell ol’ Pharaoh, let my people go,” sang the woman in tones that awakened ringing harmonies in the heart of every listener.

“By Jove!” Reuel heard Livingston exclaim. From himself he was dazed, thrilled; never save among the great artists of the earth, was such a voice heard alive with the divine fire.

Some of the women in the audience wept; there was the distinct echo of a sob in the deathly quiet which gave tribute to the power of genius. Spell-bound they sat beneath the outpoured anguish of a suffering soul. All the horror, the degradation from which a race had been delivered were in the pleading strains of the singer’s voice. It strained the senses almost beyond endurance. It pictured to that self-possessed, highly cultured New England assemblage as nothing else ever had, the awfulness of the hell from which a people had been happily plucked.

Reuel was carried out of himself; he leaned forward in eager contemplation of the artist; he grew cold with terror and fear. Surely it could not be – he must be dreaming! It was incredible! Even as he whispered the words to himself the hall seemed to grow dim and shadowy; the sea of faces melted away; there before him in the blaze of light – like a lovely phantom – stood a woman wearing the face of his vision of the afternoon!

[. . .]

Chapter 4

Although not yet a practitioner, Reuel Briggs was a recognized power in the medical profession. In brain diseases he was an authority.

Early the next morning he was aroused from sleep by imperative knocking at his door. It was a messenger from the hospital. There had been a train accident on the Old Colony road, would he come immediately?

Scarcely giving himself time for a cup of coffee, he arrived at the hospital almost as soon as the messenger.

The usual silence of the hospital was broken; all was bustle and movement, without confusion. It was a great call up on the resources of the officials, but they were equal to it. The doctors passed from sufferer to sufferer, dressing their injuries; then they were borne to beds from which some would never rise again.

"Come with me to the women's ward, Doctor Briggs," said a nurse. "There is a woman there who was taken from the wreck. She shows no sign of injury, but the doctors cannot restore her to consciousness. Doctor Livingston pronounces her dead, but it doesn't seem possible. So young, so beautiful. Do something for her, Doctor."

The men about a cot made way for Reuel, as he entered the ward. "It's no use Briggs," said Livingston to him in reply to his question. "Your science won't save her. The poor girl is already cold and stiff."

He moved aside disclosing to Reuel's gaze the lovely face of Dianthe Lusk!

The most marvelous thing to watch is the death of a person. At that moment the opposite takes place to that which took place when life entered the first unit, after nature had prepared it for the inception of life. How the vigorous life watches the passage of the liberated life out of its earthly environment! What a change is this! How important the knowledge of whither life tends! Here is shown the setting free of a disciplined spirit giving up its mortality for immortality, – the condition necessary to know God. Death! There is no death. Life is everlasting, and from its reality can have no end. Life is real and never changes, but preserves its identity eternally as the angels, and the immortal spirit of man, which are the only realities and continuities in the universe, God being over all, Supreme Ruler and Divine Essence from whom comes all life. Somewhat in this train ran Reuel's thoughts as he stood beside the seemingly dead girl, the cynosure of all the medical faculty there assembled.

To the majority of those men, the case was an ordinary death, and that was all there was to it. What did this young upstart expect to make of it? Of his skill and wonderful theories they had heard strange tales, but they viewed him coldly as we are apt to view those who dare to leave the beaten track of conventionality.

Outwardly cool and stolid, showing no sign of recognition, he stood for some seconds gazing down on Dianthe; every nerve quivered, every pulse of his body throbbed. Her face held for him a wonderful charm, an extraordinary fascination. As he gazed he knew that once more he beheld what he had vaguely sought and yearned for all his forlorn life. His whole heart went out to her; destiny, no chance, had brought him to her. He saw, too, that no one knew her, none had a clue to her identity; he determined to remain silent for the present, and immediately he sought to impress Livingston to do likewise.

His keen glance swept the faces of the surrounding physicians. "No, not one," he told himself, "holds the key to unlock this seeming sleep of death." He alone could do it. Advancing far afield in the mysterious regions of science, he had stumbled upon the solution of one of life's problems: *the reanimation of the body after seeming death*.

He had hesitated to tell of his discovery to any one; not even to Livingston had he hinted of the daring possibility, fearing ridicule in case of a miscarriage in his calculations. But for the sake of this girl he would make what he felt to be a premature disclosure of the results of his experiments. Meantime, Livingston, from his place at the foot of the cot, watched his friend with fascinated eyes. He, too, had resolved, contrary to his first intention, not to speak of his knowledge of the beautiful patient's identity. Curiosity was on tiptoe; expectancy was in the air. All felt that something unusual was about to happen.

Now Reuel, with gentle fingers, touched rapidly the clammy brown, the icy, livid hands, the region of the pulseless heart. No breath came from between the parted lips; the life-giving organ was motionless. As he concluded his examination, he turned to the assembled doctors:

"As I diagnose this case, it is one of suspended animation. This woman has been long and persistently subjected to mesmeric influences, and the nervous shock induced by the excitement of the accident has thrown her into a cataleptic sleep."

"But man!" broke from the head physician in tones of exasperation, "rigor mortis in unmistakable form is here. The woman is dead!"

At these words there was a perceptible smile on the faces of some of the students – associates who resented his genius as a personal affront, and who considered these words as good as a reprimand for the daring student, and a settler of his pretensions. Malice and envy, from Adam's time until today, have loved a shining mark.

But the reproof was unheeded. Reuel was not listening. Absorbed in thoughts of the combat before him, he was oblivious to all else as he bent over the lifeless figure on the cot. He was full of an earnest purpose. He was strung up to a high tension of force and energy. As he looked down upon the unconscious girl whom none but he could save from the awful fate of a death by post-mortem, and who by some mysterious mesmeric affinity existing between them, had drawn him to her rescue, he felt no fear that he should fail.

Suddenly he bent down and took both cold hands into his left and passed his right hand firmly over her arms from shoulder to wrist. He repeated the movements several times; there was no response to the passes. He straightened up, and again stood silently gazing upon the patient. Then, like a man just aroused from sleep, he looked across the bed at Livingston and said abruptly:

“Dr. Livingston, will you go over to my room and bring me the case of vials in my medicine cabinet? I cannot leave the patient at this point.”

Livingston started in surprise as he replied: “Certainly, Briggs, if it will help you any.”

“The patient does not respond to any of the ordinary methods of awakening. She would probably lie in this sleep for months, and death ensue from exhaustion, if stronger remedies are not used to restore the vital force to a normal condition.”

Livingston left the hospital; he could not return under an hour; Reuel took up his station by the bed whereon was stretched an apparently lifeless body, and the other doctors went the rounds of the wards attending to their regular routine of duty. The nurses gazed at him curiously; the head doctor, upon whom the young student’s earnestness and sincerity had evidently made an impression, came a number of times to the bare little room to gaze upon its silent occupants, but there was nothing new. When Livingston returned, the group again gathered about the iron cot where lay the patient.

“Gentlemen,” said Reuel, with quiet dignity, when they were once more assembled, “will you individually examine the patient once more and give your verdicts?”

Once more doctors and students carefully examined the inanimate figure in which the characteristics of death were still more pronounced. On the outskirts of the group hovered the house-surgeon’s assistants ready to transport the body to the operating

room for the post-mortem. Again the head physician spoke, this time impatiently.

"We are wasting our time, Dr. Briggs; I pronounce the woman dead. She was past medical aid when brought here."

"There is no physical damage, apparent or hidden, that you can see, Doctor?" questioned Reuel, respectfully.

"No; it is a perfectly healthful organism, although delicate. I agree entirely with your assertion that death was induced by the shock."

"Not *death*, Doctor," protested Briggs.

"Well, well, call it what you like – call it what you like, it amounts to the same in the end," replied the doctor testily.

"Do you all concur in Doctor Hamilton's diagnosis?" Briggs included all the physicians in his sweeping glance. There was a general assent.

"I am prepared to show you that in some cases of seeming death – or even death in reality – consciousness may be restored or the dead brought back to life. I have numberless times in the past six months restored consciousness to dogs and cats after rigor mortis had set in," he declared calmly.

"Bosh!" broke from a leading surgeon. In this manner the astounding statement, made in all seriousness, was received by the group of scientists mingled with an astonishment that resembled stupidity. But in spite of their scoffs, the young student's confident manner made a decided impression upon his listeners, unwilling as they were to be convinced.

Reuel went on rapidly; his eyes kindled; his whole person took on the majesty of conscious power, and pride in the knowledge he possessed. "I have found by research that life is not dependent upon organic function as a principle. It may be infused into organized bodies even after the organs have ceased to perform their legitimate offices. Where death has been due to causes which have not impaired or injured or destroyed tissue formation or torn down the structure of vital organs, life may be recalled when it has become entirely extinct, which is not so in the present case. This I have discovered by my experiments in animal magnetism."

The medical staff was fairly bewildered. Again Dr. Hamilton spoke:

"You make the assertion that the dead can be brought to life, if I understand your drift, Dr. Briggs, and you expect us to believe such utter nonsense." He added significantly, "My colleagues and I are here to be convinced."

"If you will be patient for a short time longer, Doctor, I will support my assertion by action. The secret of life lies in what we call volatile magnetism – it exists in the free atmosphere. You, Dr. Livingston, understand my meaning; do you see the possibility in my words?" he questioned, appealing to Aubrey for the first time.

"I have a faint conception of your meaning, certainly," replied his friend.

"The subtile magnetic agent is constantly drawn into the body through the lungs, absorbed and held in bounds until chemical combination has occurred through the medium of mineral agents always present in normal animal tissue. When respiration ceases this magnetism cannot be drawn into the lungs. It must be artificially supplied. This, gentlemen, is my discovery. I supply this magnetism. I have it here in the case Dr. Livingston has kindly brought me." He held up to their gaze a small phial wherein reposed a powder. Physicians and students, now eager listeners, gazed spell-bound upon him, straining their ears to catch every tone of the low voice and every change of the luminous eyes; they pressed forward to examine the contents of the bottle. It passed from eager hand to eager hand, then back to the owner.

"This compound, gentleman, is an exact reproduction of the conditions existing in the human body. It has common salt for its basis. This salt is saturated with oleo resin and then exposed for several hours in an atmosphere of free ammonia. The product becomes a powder, and *that* brings back the seeming dead to life."

"Establish your theory by practical demonstration, Dr. Briggs, and the dreams of many eminent practitioners will be realized," said Dr. Hamilton, greatly agitated by his words.

"Your theory smacks of the supernatural, Dr. Briggs, charlatanism, or dreams of lunacy," said the surgeon. "We leave such assertions to quacks, generally, for the time of miracles is past."

"The supernatural presides over man's formation always," returned Reuel, quietly. "Life is that evidence of supernatural endowment which originally entered nature during the formation of the units for the evolution of man. Perhaps the superstitious masses came nearer to solving the mysteries of creation than the favored elect will ever come. Be that as it may, I will not contend. I will proceed with the demonstration."

There radiated from the speaker the potent presence of a truthful mind, a pure, unselfish nature, and that inborn dignity which repels the shafts of lower minds as ocean's waves absorb the drops of rain. Something like respect mingled with awe hushed the sneers, changing them into admiration as he calmly proceeded to administer the so-called life-giving powder. Each man's watch was in his hand; one minute passed – another – and still another. The body remained inanimate.

A cold smile of triumph began to dawn on the faces of the older members of the profession, but it vanished in its incipency, for a tremor plainly passed over the rigid form before them. Another second – another convulsive movement of the chest!

"She moves!" cried Aubrey at last carried out of himself by the strain on his nerves. "Look, gentlemen, she breathes! *She is alive*; Briggs is right! Wonderful! Wonderful!"

"We said there could not be another miracle, and here it is!" exclaimed Dr. Hamilton with strong emotion.

Five minutes more and the startled doctors fell back from the bedside at a motion of Reuel's hand. A wondering nurse, with dilated eyes, unfolded a screen, placed it in position and came and stood beside the bed opposite Reuel. Holding Dianthe's hands, he said in a low voice: "Are you awake?" Her eyes unclosed in a cold, indifferent stare which gradually changed to one of recognition. She looked at him – she smiled, and said in a weak voice, "Oh, it is you; I dreamed of you while I slept."

* * *

Commentary by Nicole A. Spigner

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins – novelist, playwright and performer, journalist, political activist and race woman – was born to free people of colour in Portland, Maine, in 1859. As a young woman, Hopkins moved to Boston, Massachusetts, and lived out the rest of her life there, passing away from injuries due to a house fire in 1930. During her lifetime, she wrote and performed at least one play, published four novels and several short stories, helped found and then edit the first Black literary journal in the United States, *The Colored American* magazine, and wrote many articles and op-eds that concentrated on life and politics in the Black

diaspora. She was trained as a stenographer, a job that she returned to later in life after her illustrious and racially radical writing and editing career was sabotaged by the famous integrationist Booker T. Washington.¹

By the end of the nineteenth century, Hopkins seemed to have left the stage and begun dedicating her time to writing essays and fiction that engaged themes of enslavement, Black migration and gender politics, and experimented with form and genre. Her 1900 short story 'Talma Gordon' is the first detective fiction published by a Black person in the US. That same year, she published her first full-length and only single-volume novel, *Contending Forces*, which examines racial and gender politics in the US South after the Civil War. The main character, Sappho, marks Hopkins' first Black Classicist literary moment and the start of her proto-Black feminism, as pointed out by many critics, including Hazel V. Carby, Ann duCille, Lois Brown and Charlotte J. Rich.² Hopkins wrote and published her four novels between 1900 and 1903, including *Hagar's Daughter: A story of Southern caste prejudice* (1901) and *Winona: A tale of negro life in the South and Southwest* (1902), which also consider the aftermaths of enslavement and Black migration in the US. These issues are also central to *Of One Blood* (1902–3), the first speculative Black Classicist novel and the most intricate turn-of-the-century work of fiction authored by a Black person in the US.

The complicated story of *Of One Blood*

The last of Hopkins' novels, *Of One Blood, or the Hidden Self*, was serialised in *The Colored American* from 1902 to 1903. It tells the story of a trinity of siblings who are separated through mysterious circumstances and reunite in a fantastic, multi-genre story that includes resurrection, an incestuous love triangle, sexual violence, the occult, and an adventure into an ancient African civilisation. To call *Of One Blood* complicated is an understatement, as even the conception of the main character and his siblings provides layers to unfold as one understands Hopkins' various critiques of race and slavery in the US. The novel follows the young, mixed-race Reuel Briggs as he struggles with his racial identity in the US and then recovers his lost royal and Black heritage through an adventure in Ethiopia.

Key to Reuel's path towards self-discovery is his interaction with two other main characters to whom Reuel does not initially know he is related: Aubrey Livingston and Dianthe Lusk. Unbeknownst to all three characters, they are siblings born during slavery, as a result of the rape of their enslaved mother by her slave-owning, white half-brother. Their

lack of self-knowledge – their identities and how they are related – dangerously positions them to engage in a violent and incestuous love triangle when they finally meet in young adulthood. Although the novel begins after the abolition of slavery, the plot extends the violence and incest that the siblings' mother and grandmother faced during slavery, as their grandmother was subjected to sexual violence by the man who claimed ownership of her. The grandmother, Aunt Hannah, bore 10 children due to this typical yet horrifying violence, but was only allowed to keep one child: Mira, the mother of the three siblings central to the novel. Through the siblings' violent origins, Hopkins makes clear the inextricability of violence and white privilege and power as enabled through Atlantic slavery. Furthermore, each sibling lives a different racial identity because of their nearly white phenotypes.

At the beginning of the novel, Reuel deliberately passes as a white man and attends medical school at Harvard University, where he meets Aubrey. Aubrey, often called 'Livingston' in the novel, deduces Reuel's Blackness and claims that his own life as a white man from a Southern slave-owning culture has trained him to see Reuel's true race, despite Reuel's attempt to hide his Black roots. Aubrey's racial vision, however, does not extend to himself, and he does not know that he is also a result of violence and miscegenation. Aubrey was born at the same time as his father's legitimate, white son. The legitimate son died soon after birth, and Aubrey's maternal grandmother, Aunt Hannah, switched the babies. Aubrey never learns that he has Black blood, let alone that he is the biological son of an enslaved person. While Reuel demonstrates the deliberately passing Black body, Aubrey serves as an example of Blackness that remains undetectable, even to the subject himself.

Meanwhile, the novel introduces Dianthe as a member of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and offers the reading audience a third possible racial performance for those born to Black mothers who look white. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were a historical choir formed at Fisk University, an HBCU (historically Black college or university) in Nashville, Tennessee. During the nineteenth century, the Singers travelled throughout the US and Europe to raise funds for the university. Reuel and Aubrey attend a Fisk Jubilee concert in Boston, where Dianthe sings 'Go Down Moses', a Negro Spiritual that foreshadows Reuel's journey to Africa and the recovery of his royal Black inheritance.

The siblings' connection remains a mystery to the reading audience for most of the novel. Some time after the Jubilee concert, Reuel and Aubrey bring their sister back to life after a train accident. After being reanimated, Dianthe suffers amnesia. The boys conspire with one another

and tell her that she is a white woman named Felice Adams, so that Reuel may marry her. The novel unfolds the romance plot between Dianthe, now Felice, and Reuel, interrupted by a trip that Reuel takes to Africa in search of treasure. While in Africa, Reuel finds out that he is the ruler of a lost civilisation of Telessar and must take his throne in the capital city of Meroe. Aubrey emerges as the story's villain and successfully steals Felice/Dianthe from Reuel. The story ends after Dianthe recovers her memory and with a series of fantastic revelations and violence, including Aunt Hannah telling the story of the siblings' familial connection.

Considering the twists and turns of this novel's plot, one might miss the fact that this text not only refers to several outside texts but rewrites two different classical texts. Hopkins begins by rewriting Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, on which this essay will concentrate, and then shifts into a rewriting of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* when introducing Reuel's African adventure. In this shift, the novel considers not only the various sufferings that Hopkins' characters experience as a result of the chattel system into which they were born, but also the longer aftermath of slavery that emerges as proto-Afrocentrism and the Back-to-Africa movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Hopkins' use of Heliodorus' text offers a version of Africa in which her reading audience can ground an emerging Black nationalist pride and one somewhat different than, but still akin to, the colonial fantasies of Marcus Garvey and those involved in the American Colonization Society's Liberian project. It is, however, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that Hopkins spends the most time rewriting.

Of One Blood does not exactly map onto Ovid's text; however, Hopkins provides her readers with clues and verbal echoes alluding to the novel as a re-envisioned *Metamorphoses*. The novel contains a host of Ovid's characters and conventions: Myrrha (Mira), Adonis (Charlie Vance), two Venuses (Dianthe and the Candace), Erebus (Reuel), the flower of Jove (Dianthe) and incest. Additionally, and most important for this essay, *Of One Blood* uses animation of the inanimate, deanimation and a double death to recast the history of slavery in the US and issues of racial identity due to that history. Ovid's Book 10 provides a unique set of stories of kinship and loss that reshape the way that we understand neoclassical writing at the turn of the twentieth century. In turn, *Of One Blood* sheds new light on Ovid's work.

In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins utilises the classical mimetic form – the formal practice of narrative retelling – to explore the complex relationship that emerges through the intersections of classicism, the classics and American national narratives. Specifically, Hopkins recasts Ovid's Book 10 of *Metamorphoses* as a story of slavery in the US and its social

aftermath. By rewriting Book 10 as a story highlighting the persisting threat of white supremacy at the turn of the twentieth century, Hopkins probes Ovid's story of the founding of the Roman Republic – which critics, perhaps most notably Caroline Winterer in *The Culture of Classicism*, now see as a classical narrative that helped buttress US nation-building efforts and the formal chattel slave system. Simultaneously, and as if one novel could do any more work, Hopkins criticises American literary projects that claim a classical literary genealogy. By choosing Ovid's work over Virgil's or Homer's, the authors most revered by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American literary communities, Hopkins challenges her peers and readers to consider the motivations inspiring American national narratives through an alternative, non-canonical literary foundation. Through *Of One Blood*, Hopkins argues that the classical lends itself to stories that undermine identity categories and trouble the racial boundaries established during slavery.

Orpheus, revisited

Like all things with *Of One Blood*, Hopkins writes multiple layers of meaning into the central characters. During the Fisk Jubilee concert, Dianthe's performance of the song 'Go Down Moses' revises Orpheus' poetic lament for his lost wife. Dianthe sings with power and sorrow for those who suffered during slavery. However, unbeknownst to her, Dianthe herself lives in this legacy, as her mother and grandmother suffered sexual violence during their enslavement – because Mira, Dianthe's mother, was used to entertain her enslaver and his friends. Dianthe extends her mother's and grandmother's legacies in two ways: as entertainment for white audiences and through the intersection of racial desire, violence and incest.

Dianthe's introduction mirrors the dedication to Orpheus' song in Ovid. Orpheus begins his lament to his lost wife with an invocation to Jove.³ In *Of One Blood*, Dianthe's singing inspires Aubrey to spontaneously call out Jove's name. Reuel hears Aubrey calling out to the Roman father god, collapsing the familial space between the three siblings and the Boston audience attending the Jubilee concert: "By Jove," Reuel heard [Aubrey] exclaim. For [. . .] never [. . .] was such a voice heard alive with the divine fire.' Aubrey's confirmation that Dianthe's talent is God-given mirrors a conversation that just preceded her performance. Before Reuel and Aubrey first see Dianthe at the Fisk Jubilee concert, their friend Charlie Vance readies them for a Black performance where singing is only part of the entertainment. Charlie predicts that his friends will be

shocked that some of the ‘pretty’ Negro women in the singing troupe are, in Charlie’s words, ‘as white as we’. Charlie assures them that one singer in particular, Dianthe, is not only beautiful but talented and calls her ‘the flower of Jove’, which Aubrey confirms through his exclamation.

In *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus sings a variety of love songs, tales that make up Book 10, as he mourns the double loss of his wife to Pluto. Eurydice first dies on her wedding day and then again when Orpheus attempts but fails to rescue her from Hades.⁴ Orpheus defies Pluto’s explicit directions to ascend out of Hades without looking back at Eurydice. He cannot help but look, and Eurydice is lost to him forever, with her voice never fully emerging as she vanishes from Orpheus’ sight.⁵ In his misery, he sequesters himself to mourn Eurydice in private.⁶ He takes to an open field, where he begins to sing. Some trees, including Cypress, who was once a person, gather around Orpheus to hear his songs.⁷ Surrounded by these now animate trees, he dedicates his songs: ‘From Jove, O Muse, my mother – for the entire kingdom yields to the power of Jove – inspire my song! I have often sung of Jove’s power, before.’⁸ Orpheus follows this dedication with a variety of love songs: stories of love between men, of ‘maidens inflamed by desire’, a desire that moves women to powerful action, and the story and lineage of Pygmalion and his ivory statue, which is animated by Venus as a reward to Pygmalion for his dedication.⁹

Orpheus calls out to Jove and his mother, Calliope, the muse of epic poetry. Therefore, by evoking the name of Jove, Pauline Hopkins links Dianthe’s performance to Orpheus’ and to the mother connecting the three siblings, Aubrey, Reuel and Dianthe. Mira in *Of One Blood*, then, is both Myrrha, the great-granddaughter of Pygmalion, and Orpheus’ mother, Calliope, aptly making Aunt Hannah Calliope’s mother, Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory and the mother of all the muses. Aunt Hannah bears witness to the violence upon her lineage and functions as the family’s collective memory. When singing at the concert, Dianthe’s voice expresses the ‘horror’ and ‘degradation’ that enabled the enslavement and sexual violation of her mother and grandmother.¹⁰ The ‘fire’ that inspires lust and punishment of the women populating Orpheus’ songs infuses Dianthe’s voice with life and the ‘divinity’ of old gods and a distant past.

Dianthe’s song links an ancient past and highlights the inevitability of loss, suffering and longing under any oppressive system. The philosopher Maurice Blanchot accuses Orpheus of sacrificing Eurydice, of desiring her only in her death and absence.¹¹ The Jubilee concert venue replicates the distance and desire between Orpheus and Eurydice, with Reuel and Aubrey sitting far away from the stage and in the public sphere,

above Dianthe and the other singers. Moreover, Reuel and Aubrey will later figuratively kill Dianthe when they assign her a new identity, as Felice Adams. The combination of Dianthe's talent and the painful legacy of slavery about which she sings inspires pleasure and desire that Reuel, Aubrey and the entire Boston audience feel while watching Dianthe, causing them all to be 'spell-bound' and 'strain[ing their] senses almost beyond endurance'.¹² Like Orpheus', Dianthe's art requires sacrifice.

At the intersection of racial performance and entertainment, Dianthe's song provokes in the brothers and the rest of the audience what Saidiya Hartman famously calls:

the terror of pleasure – the violence that undergirded the comic moment in minstrelsy – and the pleasure of terror – the force of evil that propelled the plot of melodrama and fascinated the spectator – filiated the coffel, the auction block, the popular stage, and plantation recreations in a scandalous equality. At each of these sites of performance, suffering was transformed into wholesome pleasures.¹³

Dianthe sings of the death and mourning of women who came before her, a sublime 'wholesome pleasure' for the audience, as no member of the white Boston audience will suffer as a result of slavery's legacy, while the three siblings will all endure tragedy before the novel's end. Unlike Orpheus, who animates the trees with his songs, Dianthe freezes her audience. She inspires rapture, reversing animation. Her art, her pain, provoke the very desire that brought her into being by giving the white audience the pleasure of the US slave past. At least, it appears to be past. In truth, Dianthe's performance foreshadows how, as a Black woman in the wake of slavery, she will also suffer.

Spell-bound and reanimated

Reuel's desire for Dianthe, sparked during the performance and by the mark of Dianthe's suffering (and his own), increases when, only two chapters later, Reuel assigns Dianthe a new identity – in essence, when Dianthe dies, and Felice lives in her place. Like the double death of Eurydice, Dianthe will physically and literally die in the train accident and then symbolically die when Reuel and Aubrey rename her Felice. Summoned to the hospital when a train derails, Reuel, a promising Harvard medical student, finds his faculty and colleagues surrounding the seemingly dead body of Dianthe. Struck by the pathos of her beauty

and the memory of her performance, and with the assistance of Aubrey, Reuel extends his animal-based reanimation experiments and attempts to revive Dianthe. Mirroring the white patriarchal history of slavery that haunts the novel, Reuel's propriety over Dianthe's body begins with his decision to revive her. By successfully reanimating Dianthe, Reuel secures his place in the Harvard medical community, where he passes as a white man and finally receives acclaim and respect from his colleagues. Because no one in the medical community recognises Dianthe as the Jubilee singer, Reuel and Aubrey reinscribe her identity. Reuel's colleagues suffer collective blindness to Dianthe's identity, highlighting their inability to identify Reuel's and Aubrey's Blackness.

As the white male Livingstons owned Aunt Hannah and Mira, Reuel claims Dianthe for his own and solicits the help of his brother, Aubrey, in this claim. Aubrey believes himself to be white and representative of white Southern masculinity, particularly as constructed by antebellum white men who surveilled and controlled the movement of Black Southern bodies. Reuel reverses this racial power dynamic at the beginning of the reanimation scene when he positions Aubrey as his assistant and nurse and orders Aubrey to fetch the necessary medicines and equipment from his room. Standing over Dianthe's body, which he has diagnosed as being in a state of 'suspended animation', Reuel surprises Aubrey when he says 'abruptly': 'Dr. Livingston, will you go over to my room and bring me the case of vials in my medicine cabinet? I cannot leave the patient at this point.'

Thus, before beginning the procedure on Dianthe, Reuel begins performing his soon-to-be legitimated identity as white (and therefore able to command Aubrey to do his bidding). Like Dianthe's audience, Reuel's colleagues freeze, enraptured by Reuel as he brings Dianthe back to life. As Reuel performs the procedure on Dianthe, 'Physicians and students, now eager listeners, gazed spell-bound upon him, straining their ears to catch every tone of the low voice and every change of the luminous eyes; they pressed forward'. While reanimating Dianthe, she who rendered her Boston audience 'spell-bound', Reuel deanimates his medical audience. Here, the power of deanimation ironically connects Reuel to his hidden Black identity – as those who watch him may not know that he is Black. Still, his unique melding of occult knowledge (the black magic in the text, if you will) and Western medicine enable him to reanimate Dianthe. Simultaneously, this mixed racial-medical performance transforms Reuel from a largely unnoticed medical student to a superstar. To the Harvard medical community, Reuel's value

immediately increases; fellow medical students begin vying for Reuel's time. Reuel's sense of ostracisation evaporates.

Hopkinsian reanimation troubles identity in much the same way as Ovidian reanimation: failure inevitably pairs with rebirth and reorders the identities of one or more of those involved in the attempt. When Reuel brings Dianthe back to life, she can no longer access her memory and, therefore, her identity. The gap in Dianthe's memory allows Reuel to exact his control over her life – an extension of the act of reanimating – by reassigning Dianthe's race as white and renaming her Felice Adams. Reuel rewrites Dianthe's history as an augmentation of his misappropriated white identity. Dianthe becomes an essential factor in Reuel's quest for whiteness. Her amnesia and particularly the loss of her singing voice are the keys to wiping out her true racial identity – an identity that is always already troubled because she looks like a white woman.

Having visited death, Dianthe cannot immediately bring her previous experiences into her new existence, in the same way that Eurydice remains in Hades despite Orpheus' efforts to free her. Just as Eurydice's final words to Orpheus disappear, along with her visage, before Orpheus' eyes and as the direct result of Orpheus' inability to follow Pluto's instructions, Dianthe's identity slips away from her, along with her singing voice, at the hands of Reuel. Dianthe's memory later returns with the recovery of her voice, in a performance where her mother's voice rides her own, and where identities, histories and subjectivities intertwine. The narrative makes Dianthe's singing – and particularly her singing of 'Go Down Moses' – inextricable from her Black feminine identity. Her voice and identity remain linked; her art, therefore, is her identity. And, what's more, her art can arrest those who would otherwise rewrite this identity.

Conclusion

There is a failure in attempting to bring back the past and change it – that which has happened cannot be undone. However, within the present lies pure potential for not only the recovery of a lost past but also the ability to change the future through this knowledge. Hopkins drew on Ovid to reveal a story that her voice may not have otherwise accessed. Through, firstly, Orpheus' failure to restore Eurydice to the earth and, then, his pain and poetry, Orpheus brings back to the trees a lost animation. So, while he may not fully rescue Eurydice from Hades, that failure – his grief turned to song – manifests as movement in those previously rooted and rendered static, suffering from their traumas. The restorative, reanimating potential, then, lies within creative production.

As a writer, for Hopkins, and as a singer, for Dianthe, the artist's work as a critic, therefore, may not be to rescue that which has been lost. The artist's work relies upon failure, for Orpheus would have sung no songs in the field had he not failed to rescue Eurydice. However, the work of the artist as critic is not as much to remedy or reverse these failures as it is to aptly and effectively *communicate* that failure – perhaps, and ideally, challenging the potential repetition of this trauma to step out of the cycle of failure, as we witness Reuel doing at the end of the novel. One cannot rescue oneself from an already experienced traumatic history. However, one can give voice to that trauma, to its legacy, and serve as a warning for others who are close to repeating that trauma. Hopkins offers her reading audience the chance to consider how they, too, relive their traumas – and, more broadly, how American society puts itself in a position to repeat its history. Dianthe's critical power emerges when she reverses the audience-artist relationship and reflects to the audience the pain and anguish of enslavement. Dianthe momentarily becomes the anti-Orpheus, and perhaps a Jove, in whose presence all yield, as she holds fast her audience as she sings. Dianthe's song communicates the 'sorrow' of slavery – the inevitable and unshakeable consequences of America's organised violent past that followed all American citizens into the twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 With the help of the British newspaper man John C. Freund, Booker T. Washington attempted to convince Hopkins to publish less radical content in *The Colored American*. Failing to convince Hopkins to change her political ways, in 1904 Washington purchased the magazine, moved it to New York from Boston and ousted Hopkins as editor. Hopkins wrote a complete account of this experience in a letter to Harper S. Fortune, one of the co-founders of *The Colored American*. This letter is held in the Fisk University Special Collections. At the time of her death, Hopkins was working as a stenographer at MIT. For additional information see Knight, 'Furnace blasts for the Tuskegee wizard'; Knight, *Pauline Hopkins and the American Dream*; Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*; Wallinger, *Pauline E. Hopkins*.
- 2 See Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, DuCille, *The Coupling Convention*, Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, and Rich, *Transcending the New Woman*.
- 3 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 143–50.
- 4 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 11, 52–60.
- 5 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 58–60.
- 6 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 72–83.
- 7 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 86–109.
- 8 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 147–9. For the purposes of this chapter, I have used the English translation by Frank Justus Miller, because of its accessibility and its popularity.
- 9 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 269–97.
- 10 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, 15.
- 11 Blanchot and Adams Sitney, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, 173.
- 12 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, 15.
- 13 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 32.

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Part IV

Colonial and postcolonial meditations

Fanny Jackson Coppin's *Reminiscences of School Life, and Hints on Teaching* (1913)

Extracts from 'Autobiographical sketch', 'Hints on teaching', 'How to teach reading and spelling', in *Reminiscences of School Life, and Hints on Teaching*. African-American Women Writers: 1910–1940 (series), edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1995 [1913].) Commentary by Shelley Haley.

Autobiographical sketch

Pages 10–12

When my aunt had finally saved up the hundred and twenty-five dollars, she bought me and sent me to New Bedford, Mass., where another aunt lived, who promised to get me a place to work for my board, and get a little education if I could. She put me out to work, at a place where I was allowed to go to school when I was not at work. But I could not go on wash day, nor ironing day, nor cleaning day, and this interfered with my progress. There were no Hamptons, and no night schools then.

Finally, I found a chance to go to Newport with Mrs. Elizabeth Orr, an aunt by marriage, who offered me a home with her and a better chance at school. I went with her, but I was not satisfied to be a burden on her small resources. I was now fourteen years old, and felt that I ought to take care of myself. So, I found a permanent place in the family of Mr. George H. Calvert, a great grandson of Lord Baltimore, who settled Maryland. His wife was Elizabeth Stuart, a descendant of Mary, Queen of Scots. Here I had one hour every other

afternoon in the week to take some private lessons, which I did of Mrs. Little. After that, I attended for a few months the public colored school which was taught by Mrs. Gavitt. I thus prepared myself to enter the examination for the Rhode Island State Normal School, under Dana P. Colburn; the school was then located at Bristol, R. I. Here, my eyes were first opened on the subject of teaching. I said to myself, is it possible that teaching can be made so interesting as this! But, having finished the course of study there, I felt that I had just begun to learn; and, hearing of Oberlin College, I made up my mind to try and get there. I had learned a little music while at Newport, and had mastered the elementary studies of the piano and guitar. My aunt in Washington still helped me, and I was able to pay my way to Oberlin, the course of study there being the same as that at Harvard College. Oberlin was then the only College in the United States where colored students were permitted to study.

The faculty did not forbid a woman to take the gentleman's course, but they did not advise it. There was plenty of Latin and Greek in it, and as much mathematics as one could shoulder. Now, I took a long breath and prepared for a delightful contest. All went smoothly until I was in the junior year in College. Then, one day, the Faculty sent for me—ominous request—and I was not slow in obeying it. It was a custom in Oberlin that forty students from the junior and senior classes were employed to teach the preparatory classes. As it was now time for the juniors to begin their work, the Faculty informed me that it was their purpose to give me a class, but I was to distinctly understand that if the pupils rebelled against my teaching, they did not intend to force it. Fortunately for my training at the normal school, and my own dear love of teaching, tho there was a little surprise on the faces of some when they came into the class, and saw the teacher, there were no signs of rebellion. The class went on increasing in numbers until it had to be divided, and I was given both divisions.

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I had been so long in Oberlin that I had forgotten about my color, but I was sharply reminded of it when, in a storm of rain, a Philadelphia streetcar conductor forbid my entering a car that did not have on it 'for colored people', so I had to wait in the storm until one came in which colored people could ride. This was my first unpleasant experience in Philadelphia. Visiting Oberlin not long after my work

[as a teacher] began in Philadelphia, President Finney asked me how I was growing in grace; I told him that I was growing as fast as the American people would let me. When told of some of the conditions which were meeting me, he seemed to think it unspeakable.

At one time, at Mrs. Peck's, when we girls were sitting on the floor getting out our Greek, Miss Sutherland, from Maine, suddenly stopped, and, looking at me, said: 'Fanny Jackson, were you ever a slave?' I said yes; and she burst into tears. Not another word was spoken by us. But those tears seemed to wipe out a little of what was wrong.

I never rose to recite in my classes at Oberlin but I felt that I had the honor of the whole African race upon my shoulders. I felt that, should I fail, it would be ascribed to the fact that I was colored. At one time, when I had quite a signal triumph in Greek, the Professor of Greek concluded to visit the class in mathematics and see how we were getting along. I was particularly anxious to show him that I was as safe in mathematics as in Greek.

I, indeed, was more anxious, for I had always heard that my race was good in the languages, but stumbled when they came to mathematics. Now, I was always fond of a demonstration, and happened to get in the examination the very proposition that I was well acquainted with; and so went that day out of the class with flying colors.

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My life there [with the Calvert family with whom I lodged] was most happy, and I never would have left [Mrs. Calvert], but it was in me to get an education and to teach my people. This idea was deep in my soul. Where it came from I cannot tell, for I had never had any exhortations, nor any lectures which influenced me to take this course. It must have been born in me. [. . .] When I was about to leave her to go to the Normal School, she said to me: 'Fanny, will money keep you?' But that deep-seated purpose to get an education and become a teacher to my people yielded to no inducement of comfort or temporary gain. During the time that I attended the Normal School in Rhode Island, I got a chance to take some private lessons in French, and eagerly availed myself of the opportunity. [. . .] Freedmen now began to pour into Ohio from the South, and some of them settled in the township of Oberlin. During my last year at the college, I formed an evening class for them, where they might

be taught to read and write. It was deeply touching to me to see old men painfully following the simple words of spelling; so intensely eager to learn. I felt that for such people to have been kept in the darkness of ignorance was an unpardonable sin, and I rejoiced that even then I could enter measurably upon the course in life which I had long ago chosen. Mr. John M. Langston, who afterwards became Minister to Hayti, was then practicing law at Oberlin. His comfortable home was always open with a warm welcome to colored students, or to any who cared to share his hospitality.

I went to Oberlin in 1860, and was graduated in August, 1865, after having spent five and a half years.

[. . .]

Of the thousands then coming to Oberlin for an education, a very few were colored. I knew that, with the exception of one here or there, all my pupils would be white; and so they were. It took a little moral courage on the part of the faculty to put me in my place against the old custom of giving classes only to white students. But, as I have said elsewhere, the matter was soon settled and became an overwhelming success. How well do I remember the delighted look on the face of Principal Fairchild when he came into the room to divide my class, which then numbered over eighty. How easily a colored teacher might be put into some of the public schools. It would only take a little bravery, and might cause a little surprise, but wouldn't be even a nine days' wonder.

And now came the time for me to leave Oberlin, and start in upon my work at Philadelphia.

In the year 1837, the Friends of Philadelphia had established a school for the education of colored youth in higher learning. To make a test whether or not the Negro was capable of acquiring any considerable degree of education. For it was one of the strongest arguments in the defense of slavery, that the Negro was an inferior creation; formed by the Almighty for just the work he was doing. It is said that John C. Calhoun made the remark, that if there could be found a Negro that could conjugate a Greek verb, he would give up all his preconceived ideas of the inferiority of the Negro. Well, let's try him, and see, said the fair-minded Quaker people. And for years this institution, known as the Institute for Colored Youth, was visited by interested persons from different parts of the United States and Europe. Here I was given the delightful task

of teaching my own people, and how delighted I was to see them mastering Caesar, Virgil, Cicero, Horace and Xenophon's *Anabasis*. We also taught New Testament Greek. It was customary to have public examinations once a year, and when the teachers were thru examining their classes, any interested person in the audience was requested to take it up, and ask questions. At one of such examinations, when I asked a titled Englishman to take the class and examine it, he said: 'They are more capable of examining me, their proficiency is simply wonderful'.

One visiting friend was so pleased with the work of the students in the difficult metres in Horace that he afterwards sent me, as a present, the Horace which he used in college. A learned Friend from Germantown, coming into a class in Greek, the first aorist, passive and middle, being so neatly and correctly written at one board, while I, at the same time, was hearing a class recite, exclaimed: 'Fanny, I find thee driving a coach and six'. As it is much more difficult to drive a coach and six, than a coach and one, I took it as a compliment. But I was especially glad to know that the students were doing their work so well as to justify Quakers in their fair-minded opinion of them. General O. C. Howard, who was brought in at one time by one of the managers to hear an examination in Virgil, remarked that Negroes in trigonometry and the classics might well share in the triumphs of their brothers on the battlefield.

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About this time we were visited by a delegation of school commissioners, seeking teachers for schools in Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey. These teachers were not required to know and teach the classics, but they were expected to come into an examination upon the English branches, and to have at their tongue's end the solution of any abstruse problem in the three R's which their examiners might be inclined to ask them. And now, it seemed best to give up the time spent in teaching Greek and devote it to the English studies.

As our young people were now about to find a ready field in teaching, it was thought well to introduce some textbooks on school management, and methods of teaching, and thoroughly prepare our students for normal work. At this time our faculty was increased by the addition of Richard T. Greener, a graduate of Harvard College, who took charge of the English Department, and Edward Bouchet, a

graduate of Yale College, and also of the Sheffield Scientific School, who took charge of the scientific department. Both of these young men were admirably fitted for their work. And, with Octavius V. Catto in charge of the boys' department, and myself in charge of the girls—in connection with the principalship of the school—we had a strong working force.

I now instituted a course in normal training, which at first consisted only of a review of English studies, with the theory of teaching, school management and methods. But the inadequacy of this course was so apparent that when it became necessary to reorganize the Preparatory Departments, it was decided to put this work into the hands of the normal students, who would thus have ample practice in teaching and governing under daily direction and correction. These students became so efficient in their work that they were sought for and engaged to teach long before they finished their course of study.

[. . .]

In Philadelphia, the only place at the time where a colored boy could learn a trade, was in the House of Refuge, or the Penitentiary! And now began an eager and intensely earnest crusade to supply this deficiency in the work of the Institute for Colored Youth.

[. . .]

The Academic Department of the Institute had been so splendidly successful in proving that the Negro youth was equally capable as others in mastering a higher education, that no argument was necessary to establish its need, but the broad ground of education by which the masses must become self-supporting was, to me, a matter of painful anxiety. Frederick Douglass once said, it was easier to get a colored boy into a lawyer's office than into a blacksmith shop; and on account of the inflexibility of the Trades Unions, this condition of affairs still continues, making it necessary for us to have our own 'blacksmith shop'.

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At a meeting of some of the public school directors and heads of some of the educational institutions, I was asked to tell what was being done in Philadelphia for the industrial education of the colored youth. It may well be understood I had a tale to tell. And I told them the only places in the city where a colored boy could learn a trade

was in the House of Refuge or the Penitentiary, and the sooner he became incorrigible and got into the Refuge, or committed a crime and got into the Penitentiary, the more promising it would be for his industrial training. It was to me a serious occasion. I so expressed myself. As I saw building after building going up in this city, and not a single colored hand employed in the constructions, it made the occasion a very serious one to me.

[. . .]

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‘Ah’, said some, ‘this is the way the school should have begun, the good Quaker people began at the wrong end’. Not so, for when they began this school, the whole South was a great industrial plant where the fathers taught the sons and the mothers taught the daughters, but the mind was left in darkness. That is the reason that John C. Calhoun is said to have remarked: ‘If you will show me a Negro who can conjugate a Greek verb, I will give up all my preconceived ideas of him’. So that the managers had builded wiser than many persons knew.

[. . .]

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[It] is a matter of serious concern to us to see our youth, with just as decided diversity of talent as any other people, all herded together into three or four occupations. It is cruel to make a teacher or a preacher of a man who ought to be a printer or a blacksmith, and that is exactly what we are now obliged to do. The most advance that has been made since the war has been done by political parties, and it is precisely into political positions that we think it least desirable that our youth should enter.

Hints on teaching

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My deep interest centers in elementary education for several reasons; first, because it is at this period of the child’s life that habits are formed and tastes cultivated which may guide him in the pursuit of knowledge and happiness in after life, and which by the alchemy of experience are to change the elements of what he has

learned into wisdom for his highest happiness. All higher learning is but a combination of a few simple elements, and when these are well taught, it clears away the difficulty of future acquisitions, and nature can spread her beauty before eyes that can see and teach the marvelous precision of her laws, to ears that can hear. I call this opening the doors upward and outward, whereas a different way of instruction is like going out of a room backward.

Again, we want to lift education out of the slough of the passive voice. Little Mary goes to school to be educated, and her brother John goes to the high school for the same purpose. It is too often the case that the passive voice has the right of way, whereas in the very beginning we should call into active service all the faculties of mind and body. Unfortunately book learning is so respectable, and there is so much of it all about us, that it is apt to crowd out the prosy process of thinking, comparing, reasoning, to which our wisest efforts should be directed.

Never let the word 'dumb' be used in your class, or anything said disrespectful of parents or guardians who may have helped the child. If the teacher has the questions or the review well selected, they can be quickly given out and no one division has to wait for the other. When the teacher has given all the time possible to certain work, the divisions can be stopped, arranged in order and the pupils will profit by the criticisms of one another, the teacher making no corrections that can possibly be made by the class; thus inviting and stimulating the critical knowledge or judgment of all; whether in punctuation, spelling, subject matter, or the appearance of the work; the advanced lesson already having been heard by the teacher.

[. . .]

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Calling names, the words 'stupid', or 'dunce', or 'dumb', serves only to make the pupil angry or to discourage him. Here, again, the teacher ought to think of himself when he was taking his first lessons. Whenever a pupil has spoken disrespectfully to a teacher and the teacher can say with truth, 'Do I not always speak kindly and politely to you?' the case is won without any more argument. I have never known this to fail. I have often seen a tear steal down the face of a child, and then I neither asked for an apology nor forced one, but of the child's own volition it came at once.

[. . .]

Let us understand that the object of punishment is not to make up for wrongdoing, for that cannot be done; but, to prevent the repetition of the wrong. It should always be administered in a kind spirit, and should be so reasonable, that a child's sense of justice would agree with it. He should see that if he repeated the wrong act it would not be good for him nor for the teacher nor his parents nor the school.

Of course no cruel punishment should ever be allowed, and if whipping is to be done it is far better for the parent to do it, for his hand is restrained by love.

I once heard this story. Two little boys were out selling matches; one having sold out met a comrade who had not sold any. Said the one who had been successful to his comrade, 'I will take your matches and give you my money. If I am not sold out when I get home I shall get a whipping like yourself. Your master would whip you, but my father would whip me, but he wouldn't whip so hard nor so long as your master'. A page of philosophy could not give us a better understanding of the case, than is given by the incident of these two little match boys.

How to teach reading and spelling

Children learn poetry far more quickly than they do prose, and so we select what we teach them largely from poets. There is a world of happy thoughts all about us, and if we make wise selections in teaching, they are quite sure to be remembered. And the grain of truth which they contain is as encouraging in bringing forth fruit, as is the grain of mustard seed. What we sow we reap, and there is no field more fertile than that of a child's mind. If we plant tomatoes, we get tomatoes; we certainly should not expect to find potatoes. And so, if we plant beautiful thoughts and beautiful words in the child's mind, we shall certainly get the same.

* * *

Commentary by Shelley Haley

In the mid-nineteenth century, well before the legislated end of enslavement, Black women in the United States rose to challenge their ineducability, which had been espoused in historical and political tracts from the eighteenth century onwards. Mary Jane Patterson (1840–94) graduated from Oberlin College in 1862 and is considered the first Black woman to receive a BA degree in the US.¹ She was followed by Frances (Fanny) Jackson Coppin (1837–1913) in 1865.²

Born into enslavement in 1837 in Washington, DC, Coppin's earliest memory is of her grandmother's one-room cabin, and all her life she retained the scars she received from accidental burns as a baby. Her first intellectual puzzle came at the age of three, when she was intrigued by the word 'offspring', used by her grandmother in her nightly prayers:

Mammy used to make a long prayer every night before going to bed; but not one word of all she said do I remember except the word 'offspring'. She would ask God to bless her offspring. This word remained with me, for, I wondered what offspring meant.³

This reminiscence reveals a harbinger of Coppin's lifelong devotion to language, which included her study of Ancient Greek, Latin and Sanskrit.

Coppin's grandmother had six children: three girls and three boys. Coppin mentions that her grandfather, Henry Orr, self-emancipated and then became a prominent head waiter and caterer. He worked to emancipate his three sons – John, William Henry and Moses, aged 9, 7 and 5 respectively when they were freed – while leaving his daughters Sarah, Lucy (Fanny's mother) and Rebecca enslaved. It might appear that this was a financial exigency: Orr simply did not have the money to purchase all six children. Upon closer inspection, however, it seems that Orr did not want to assume financial responsibility for the girls.⁴ Orr had internalised white, middle-class social norms and regarded the financial needs of his daughters as the responsibility of their husbands. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that he did emancipate Sarah in 1840, when she was 30 years old and about to be married. When Orr died in 1845, he stipulated that Rebecca was to be emancipated. That left Lucy, little Fanny's mother, and her grandmother still enslaved. Coppin mentions her mother only once in *Reminiscences* (and never her father), and that mention comes in connection with her recounting of her own emancipation:

Sarah [Coppin's maternal aunt] went to work at six dollars a month, saved one hundred and twenty-five dollars and bought little Frances, having taken a great liking to her, for *on account of my birth*, my grandfather refused to buy my mother; and so I was left a slave in the District of Columbia where I was born.⁵

Coppin never mentions her male kin again and it is likely, given that she dedicates *Reminiscences* to her aunt Sarah Orr Clark, that this gender inequity was the seed that blossomed into Coppin's Black feminist pedagogy and activism.

In her quest for an education, Coppin encountered several obstacles. Once legally free, she was determined to be financially independent as well. She was motivated to get an education to achieve that goal, but also to satisfy the intellectual curiosity she had demonstrated at an early age. After obtaining her freedom, Coppin moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where her Aunt Rebecca arranged a position for her and where she could begin her education. In a description reminiscent of Cinderella, and not without ironic wit, Coppin tells of her first job as a free young Black woman: '[Aunt Rebecca] put me out to work, at a place where I was allowed to go to school when I was not at work. But I could not go on wash day, nor ironing day, nor cleaning day, and this interfered with my progress'.⁶

Eventually, Coppin found another position, this time with the family of George H. Calvert. Coppin enthusiastically relates the genealogy of Calvert, 'a great grandson of Lord Baltimore', and his wife Elizabeth Stuart Calvert, 'descendant of Mary, Queen of Scots'.⁷ Coppin does not raise this point as an elitist move, but rather because she associated the Calverts with educated and therefore enlightened people. To her mind, education was the tool that removed the ignorance at the root of racism and bigotry. She felt it was impossible to be both educated and unenlightened about racism. Moreover, the Calverts represented Coppin's first real opportunity to educate herself. The family had many visitors who were literary persons, Coppin was allowed to hire a tutor from her earnings, and she attended the Black schools of Newport, Rhode Island. She then prepared to enter the Rhode Island Normal School and, in what reads like a religious conversion, she finds her true calling: 'Here, my eyes were first opened on the subject of teaching. I said to myself, is it possible that teaching can be made so interesting as this!'⁸ Later, she relates that, although happy with the Calverts, 'it was in me to get an education and teach my people. This idea was deep in my soul. Where it came from I cannot tell, for I never had any exhortations, nor any lectures which influenced me to take this course. It must have been born in me'.⁹

It was important to Coppin to be educated, not only for the benefit of racial uplift but also for her personal wellbeing. As a teacher, she would be financially and intellectually independent. Coppin had heard of Oberlin College, the land-grant institution of higher education established in 1833 to educate women and men of all races, perhaps at Rhode Island State Normal, and she set enrollment there as her major goal. In 1860 she enrolled in the 'Ladies Department' to prepare for entrance to the 'Collegiate Department'. At this point, no Black women had graduated from that department. Since, as Coppin observes, 'the course of study there [at Oberlin] [was] the same as that at Harvard' – that is, fundamentally a classical curriculum – Coppin had to increase her knowledge of Greek and Latin. The College Catalogue for 1860–61 reveals the formidable task Coppin was up against. A first-year student in the Collegiate Department had to be examined in numerous texts, including Andrews' *Latin Grammar and Reader*, (Cornelius) Nepos, Cicero's *Select Orations*, Virgil, and Latin prose composition; Crosby's *Greek Grammar and Lessons*, three books of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and the Gospels of the New Testament or an equivalent; algebra to equations of the second degree and Weber's *General History*.¹⁰ After one year in the 'Ladies Department', Coppin passed her entrance exam and entered the 'Collegiate Department' in the fall of 1861.

By 1861, when Coppin embarked upon her undergraduate career, the classical curriculum was firmly established throughout the US and so was pivotal in creating a racial, gender and class norm among the educated elite. Coppin's decision to pursue the classical course, the only one that led to the BA degree, required talent, certainly, but also courage and a great deal of self-confidence and self-esteem. But, most of all, it required an intellect which rebelled against the epistemic injustice of stereotypes without internalising those stereotypes. Coppin herself relates an incident that demonstrates how she anticipated the theoretical framing of epistemic injustice:

I never rose to recite in my classes at Oberlin but I felt that I had the honor of the whole African race upon my shoulders. I felt that, should I fail, it would be ascribed to the fact that I was colored. At one time, when I had quite a signal triumph in Greek, the Professor of Greek condescended to visit the class in mathematics and see how we were getting along. I was particularly anxious to show him that I was as safe in mathematics as in Greek.

I, indeed, was more anxious, for I had always heard that my race was good in the languages, but stumbled when they came to mathematics.¹¹

There are similarities between Coppin's experiences and my own, as I was often the only student of colour in my ancient languages courses at Syracuse University and regularly felt the same challenge of not having the privilege to be able to fail in any of my classes. Sadly, when I mentored many of my own students of colour, some revealed their own burdens of having to represent their race, gender and class.

Coppin was equally aware of the gender bias inherent in the systems of higher education, even at institutions such as Oberlin College. Once again she anticipated a modern theoretical framework, this time that of racialised gender. Coppin observed,

The faculty did not forbid a woman to take the gentleman's course, but they did not advise it.¹² There was plenty of Latin and Greek in it, and as much mathematics as one could shoulder. Now, I took a long breath and prepared for a delightful contest. All went smoothly until I was in the junior year in College. Then, one day, the Faculty sent for me – ominous request – and I was not slow in obeying it. It was a custom in Oberlin that forty students from the junior and senior classes were employed to teach the preparatory classes. As it was now time for the juniors to begin their work, the Faculty informed me that it was their purpose to give me a class, *but I was to distinctly understand that if the pupils rebelled against my teaching, they did not intend to force it.*¹³

Coppin was successful and attributed that success to 'my training at the normal school, and my own dear love of teaching'.¹⁴ During her senior year at Oberlin, Coppin was recruited for a position at the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY); according to her remembrance, 'When I was within a year of graduation, application came from a Friends' school in Philadelphia for a colored woman who could teach Greek, Latin and higher mathematics. The answer returned was: "We have the woman, but you must wait a year for her".'¹⁵ Coppin graduated from Oberlin with a BA in 1865, becoming only the second Black woman to do so. She joined the faculty of ICY in 1865, became principal there in 1869 and remained in that position until her retirement in 1902. Coppin describes how ICY came into existence:

In the year 1837, the Friends of Philadelphia had established a school for the education of colored youth in higher learning. To make a test whether or not the Negro was capable of acquiring any considerable degree of education. For it was one of the strongest arguments in defense of slavery, that the Negro was an inferior creation; formed by the Almighty for just the work he was doing. It is said that John C. Calhoun made the remark, that if there could be found a Negro that could conjugate a Greek verb, he would give up all his preconceived ideas of the inferiority of the Negro. Well, let's try him, and see, said the fair-minded Quaker people.¹⁶

Coppin is absolutely giddy with pride and excitement over the success of her students and confesses 'how delighted I was to see them mastering Caesar, Virgil, Cicero, Horace and Xenophon's *Anabasis*. We also taught New Testament Greek'.¹⁷ At the same time that Coppin exulted in seeing her students master the intricacies of classical languages and mathematics, she also realised the value of choice in education curricula. She advocated, campaigned for and established industrial and vocational curricula a full 30 years before Booker T. Washington did. However, Coppin never wanted or intended for the classical curriculum to be supplanted by an industrial one. She firmly believed that it must be a matter of choice based on talent, not the race of the student. She did not believe, as Carter G. Woodson arguably did, that classics rendered Black students miseducated, if that was the track they chose. Jarvis Givens has argued that 'Woodson's critique was less about access in general and more about exposure to hegemonic curricula and indoctrination into white ruling-class ideology'.¹⁸ However as I see it, Coppin's main pedagogical principles were kindness and respect; she would have considered the approaches of Carter G. Woodson, Booker T. Washington and other male educators restricting, exclusive and rigidly gendered.

In an ironic twist, Coppin's industrial programme was so successful that some people questioned the wisdom of the Quakers in establishing ICY with a classical curriculum in the first place. As the fervor for industrial education swept the country, Coppin never abandoned the classical curriculum, but she was also never blind to practical necessity. In a disheartening reminder that little has changed regarding the prison pipeline, Coppin stresses the need for industrial education with this observation: 'In Philadelphia, the only place at the time [in 1876] where a colored boy could learn a trade, was in the House of Refuge, or the Penitentiary!'¹⁹ And later, during a speech to public school administrators, she repeated this assertion:

And I told them the only places in the city where a colored boy could learn a trade was in the House of Refuge or the Penitentiary, and the sooner he became incorrigible and got into the Refuge, or committed a crime and got into the Penitentiary, the more promising it would be for his industrial training.²⁰

Much could be said about how Coppin anticipates critical race pedagogy, but that is beyond the scope of this essay.²¹ Suffice it to say, the altruism that was the core of Coppin's Black feminism was also the focus of her educational philosophy. Driven by the best interests of her students, Coppin centred her administrative style and pedagogical philosophy on their needs. When the Board of Managers of ICY instituted tuition fees in 1866, Coppin, without doubt recalling her struggle to find funds for her education, immediately foresaw the potential for financial hardship for some families and the potential for exclusion of the very pupils who would most benefit from ICY's academic programmes. As principal, Coppin refused to dismiss students who were delinquent in their tuition payments, and she eventually pressured the managers into ending the practice of charging tuition fees.

Fanny Jackson Coppin believed in the intuitive moral goodness and intellectual curiosity of Black people and always emphasised this in relation to Black women. Her comments presented to the World's Congress of Representative Women in 1893 encapsulate this:

Our idea of getting an education did not come out of wanting to imitate any one whatever. It grew out of the uneasiness and the restlessness of the desires we felt within us; the desire to know, not just a little, but a great deal. We wanted to know how to calculate an eclipse, to know what Hesiod and Livy thought; we wished to know the best thoughts of the best minds that lived with us; not merely to gain an honest livelihood, but from a God-given love of all that is beautiful and best, and because we thought we could do it.²²

Notes

- 1 This distinction may belong to Grace A. Mapps (1835–97), who was an educator and poet. Grace attended New York Central College in McGrawville, NY, in 1852; however, despite undertaking a four-year course of study there, there is no record of the type of degree she received. Consequently, Mary Jane Patterson is the first recorded Black woman to receive a BA in the US.
- 2 Much of what follows about Fanny Jackson Coppin is taken from my previous publication: Haley, 'Introduction'.
- 3 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 9.

- 4 Perkins, *Fanny Jackson Coppin and the Institute for Colored Youth*, 14.
- 5 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 9–10. Emphasis is my own.
- 6 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 11.
- 7 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 11.
- 8 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 11.
- 9 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 17.
- 10 Catalogue of Oberlin College, 1860–61, 40. Cited in Perkins, *Fanny Jackson Coppin and the Institute for Colored Youth*, 24.
- 11 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 15. Later Black alumnae also recounted incidents of epistemic injustice, such as Mary Church Terrell (see Chapter 21 in this volume).
- 12 The classical course was dubbed the ‘gentleman’s course’ because it was a four-year regimen which culminated in the awarding of a BA. The literary course was dubbed the ‘ladies’ course’ and consisted of a two-year regimen after which successful candidates earned a certificate. The ‘ladies’ course’ did not require Greek, Latin or mathematics.
- 13 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 12. Emphasis is my own.
- 14 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 12.
- 15 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 13.
- 16 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 19.
- 17 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 20.
- 18 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 96. While Givens discusses Anna Julia Cooper briefly, he does not cite any other Black women educators contemporary with Woodson.
- 19 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 23.
- 20 Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, 28.
- 21 For a discussion of the application of critical race pedagogy to the teaching of world languages, see Anya, ‘Critical race pedagogy for more effective and inclusive world language teaching’.
- 22 Sewall, *The World’s Congress of Representative Women*, 716.

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Tenney Frank's 'Race mixture in the Roman Empire' (1916)

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There is one surprise that the historian usually experiences upon his first visit to Rome. It may be at the Galleria Lapidaria of the Vatican or at the Lateran Museum, but, if not elsewhere, it can hardly escape him upon his first walk up the Appian Way. As he stops to decipher the names upon the old tombs that line the road, hoping to chance upon one familiar to him from his Cicero or Livy, he finds praenomen and nomen promising enough, but the cognomina all seem awry. L. Lucretius *Pamphilus*, A. Aemilius *Alexa*, M. Clodius *Philostorgus* do not smack of freshman Latin. And he will not readily find in the Roman writers now extant an answer to the questions that these inscriptions invariably raise. Do these names imply that the Roman stock was completely changed after Cicero's day, and was the satirist recording a fact when he wailed that the Tiber had captured the waters of the Syrian Orontes? If so, are these foreigners ordinary immigrants, or did Rome become a nation of ex-slaves and their offspring? Or does the abundance of Greek cognomina mean that, to a certain extent, a foreign nomenclature has gained respect, so that a Roman dignitary might, so to speak, sign a name like C. Julius Abascantus on the hotel register without any misgivings about the accommodations?

Unfortunately, most of the sociological and political data of the empire are provided by satirists. When Tacitus informs us that in Nero's day a great many of Rome's senators and knights were

descendants of slaves and that the native stock had dwindled to surprisingly small proportions, we are not sure whether we are not to take it as an exaggerated thrust by an indignant Roman of the old stock. At any rate, this, like similar remarks equally indirect, receives totally different evaluation in the discussion of those who have treated of Rome's society, like Friedländer, Dill, Mommsen, Wallon, and Marquardt. To discover some new light upon these fundamental questions of Roman history, I have tried to gather such fragmentary data as the corpus of inscriptions might afford. This evidence is never decisive in its purport, and it is always, by the very nature of the material, partial in its scope, but at any rate it may help us to interpret our literary sources to some extent. It has at least convinced me that Juvenal and Tacitus were not exaggerating. It is probable that when these men wrote a very small percentage of the free plebeians on the streets of Rome could prove unmixed Italian descent. By far the larger part—perhaps ninety per cent—had Oriental blood in their veins.

My first quest was for information about the stock of the ordinary citizen of Rome during the empire. In the *Corpus of Latin Inscriptions*¹ the editors, after publishing the honorary and sepulchral inscriptions of the nobles and military classes, followed by those of the slaves and humble classes which occur in the *columbaria*, gave the rest of the city's sepulchral inscriptions (19,260) in alphabetical order.² Of these I read the 13,900 contained in volume VI, parts 2 and 3, which, despite the occurrence of some slaves as well as of some persons of wealth, represent on the whole the ordinary type of urban plebeians.

[. . .]

The conclusion of our pros and cons must be that nearly ninety per cent of the Roman-born folk represented in the above-mentioned sepulchral inscriptions of *CIL*, volume VI, parts 2 and 3, are of foreign extraction.

Who are these Romans of the new type and whence do they come? How many are immigrants, and how many are of servile extraction? Of what race are they? Seneca happens to make a remark which is often quoted as proof of extensive immigration to Rome. He writes to his mother in derision of Rome:

Of this crowd the greater part have no country; from their own free towns and colonies, in a word, from the whole globe, they are congregated. Some are brought by ambition, some by the call of public duty, or by reason of some mission, others by luxury which seeks a harbor rich and commodious for vices, others by the eager pursuit of liberal studies, others by shows, etc.³

Seneca apparently refers in large part to visitors, but also to immigrants. In so far as he has transients in mind we are not concerned with the passage, for such people did little to affect the permanent racial complexion of Rome's civil population. A passage in Juvenal's third satire is perhaps more to the point, for he seems to imply that the Oriental has come to stay.

While every land ...

daily pours

Its starving myriads forth. Hither they come

To batten on the genial soil of Rome,

Minions, then lords of every princely dome,

Grammarian, painter, augur, rhetorician,

Rope-dancer, conjurer, fiddler, and physician.

This passage clearly suggests that foreigners of their own free will have drifted to Rome in great numbers to make it their place of livelihood and their permanent abode. I cannot here treat the whole problem, but, while agreeing that the implication of this passage is true to a certain degree, I would question whether the generalities in it are not too sweeping.

[...]

It is evident then that the sweeping statements of men like Juvenal and Seneca should not be made the basis for assuming a considerable free-born immigration that permanently altered the citizen-body of Rome. These writers apparently did not attempt to discriminate between the various classes that were speaking foreign jargons on the streets of Rome. As a matter of fact, this foreign-speaking population had, for the most part, it seems, learned the languages they used within the city itself from slaves and freedman parents of foreign birth.

If now this great crowd of the city was not of immigrant stock, but rather of servile extraction, the family life of the slaves must have been far more conducive to the propagation of that stock than is usually assumed, and, furthermore, manumission must have been practised so liberally that the slave-stock could readily merge into the citizen-body.

[. . .]

However, as far as the inscriptions furnish definite evidence, they tell the same tale as the writers of Rome, namely, that slaves were at all times emancipated in great numbers.

When we consider whence these slaves came and of what stock they actually were, we may derive some aid from an essay by Bang, *Die Herkunft der Römischen Sklaven*. Bang has collected all the inscriptions like *Damas, natione Syrus*, and *C. Ducenius C. lib. natus in Syria*, which reveal the provenance of slaves. Of course, the number of inscriptions giving such information is relatively small, a few hundred in all. It should also be noticed that when a slave gives his nationality he shows a certain pride in it, which, in some cases at least, implies that he is not a normal slave of the mart, born in servitude, but rather a man of free birth who may have come into the trade by capture, abduction, or some other special way. However, with this word of caution we may use Bang's statistics for what they are worth.

[. . .]

Therefore, when the urban inscriptions show that seventy per cent of the city slaves and freedmen bear Greek names and that a large proportion of the children who have Latin names have parents of Greek names, this at once implies that the East was the source of most of them, and with that inference Bang's conclusions entirely agree. In his list of slaves that specify their origin as being outside of Italy (during the empire), by far the larger portion came from the Orient, especially from Syria and the provinces of Asia Minor, with some from Egypt and Africa (which for racial classification may be taken with the Orient). Some are from Spain and Gaul, but a considerable proportion of these came originally from the East. Very few slaves are recorded from the Alpine and Danube provinces, while Germans rarely appear, except among the imperial bodyguard. Bang remarks that Europeans were of greater service to the empire as soldiers than as servants. This is largely true, but,

as Strack has commented,⁴ the more robust European war-captives were apt to be chosen for the gruelling work in the mines and in industry, and consequently they have largely vanished from the records. Such slaves were probably also the least productive of the class; and this, in turn, helps to explain the strikingly Oriental aspect of the new population.

Up to this point we have dealt mainly with the inscriptions of the city. But they, of course, do not represent the state of affairs in the empire at large. Unfortunately, it is difficult to secure large enough groups of sepulchral inscriptions for other cities and districts to yield reliable average on the points just discussed. However, since the urban inscriptions have presented a general point of view regarding the prolificness of slaves and the significance of the Greek cognomen, it will suffice to record the proportion of servile and Oriental names found in some typical district outside of the city.

[. . .]

When the indexes of *CIL* are nearer completion such details will be more readily available and the tedious work of getting full statistics may be undertaken with the hope of reaching some degree of finality. However, the trend is evident in what we have given, and the figures are, I think, fairly representative of the whole. In these towns, as at Rome, the proportion of non-Latin folk is strikingly large. Slaves, freedmen, and citizens of Greek name make up more than half the population, despite the fact that in the nature of the case these are presumably the people least likely to be adequately represented in inscriptions.

[. . .]

How strikingly un-Latin these places must have appeared to those who saw the great crowd of humble slaves, who were buried without ceremony or record in nameless trenches! Yet here are the Marsi, proverbially the hardest native stock of the Italian mountains; Beneventum, one of Rome's old frontier colonies; Milan and Padua, that drew Latins and Romanized Celts from the richest agricultural districts of the Po valley; the old colony of Narbo, the home of Caesar's famous Tenth Legion—the city that Cicero called *specula populi Romani*; and four cities at the western end of the empire. If we may, as I think fair, infer for these towns what we found to be true at Rome, namely, that slaves were quite as prolific as the civil population, that they merged into the latter, and that Greek names

betokened Oriental stock, it is evident that the whole empire was a melting-pot and that the Oriental was always and everywhere a very large part of the ore.

There are other questions that enter into the problem of change of race at Rome, for the solution of which it is even more difficult to obtain statistics. For instance, one asks, without hope of a sufficient answer, why the native stock did not better hold its own. Yet there are at hand not a few reasons. We know for instance that when Italy had been devastated by Hannibal and a large part of its population put to the sword, immense bodies of slaves were bought up in the East to fill the void; and that during the second century, when the plantation system with its slave service was coming into vogue, the natives were pushed out of the small farms and many disappeared to the provinces of the ever-expanding empire. Thus, during the thirty years before Tiberius Gracchus, the census statistics show no increase. During the first century BC, the importation of captives and slaves continued, while the free-born citizens were being wasted in the social, Sullan, and civil wars. Augustus affirms that he had had half a million citizens under arms, one-eighth of Rome's citizens, and that the most vigorous part. During the early empire, twenty to thirty legions, drawn of course from the best free stock, spent their twenty years of vigor in garrison duty, while the slaves, exempt from such services, lived at home and increased in number. In other words, the native stock was supported by less than a normal birth-rate, whereas the stock of foreign extraction had not only a fairly normal birth-rate but a liberal quota of manumissions to its advantage.

[. . .]

But the existence of other forms of "race suicide", so freely gossipped about by writers of the empire, also enters into this question, and here the inscriptions quite fail us. The importance of this consideration must, nevertheless, be kept in mind. Doubtless, as Fustel de Coulanges (*La Cité Antique*) has remarked, it could have been of little importance in the society of the republic so long as the old orthodox faith in ancestral spirits survived, for the happiness of the *manes* depended upon the survival of the family, and this religious incentive probably played the same rôle in the propagation of the race as the Mosaic injunctions among the Hebrews, which so impressed Tacitus in a more degenerate day of Rome. But religious considerations and customs—which in this matter emanate from

the fundamental instincts that continue the race—were questioned as all else was questioned before Augustus's day. Then the process of diminution began. The significance of this whole question lies in the fact that "race suicide" then, as now, curtailed the stock of the more sophisticated, that is, of the aristocracy and the rich, who were, to a large extent, the native stock. Juvenal, satirist though he is, may be giving a fact of some social importance when he writes that the poor bore all the burdens of family life, while the rich remained childless:

jacet aurato vix ulla puerpera lecto;
Tantum artes hujus, tantum medicamina possunt,
Quae steriles facit.⁵

There may lie here—rare phenomenon—an historic parallel of some meaning. The race of the human animal survives by means of instincts that shaped themselves for that purpose long before rational control came into play. Before our day it has only been at Greece and Rome that these impulses have had to face the obstacle of sophistication. There at least the instinct was beaten, and the race went under. The legislation of Augustus and his successors, while aimed at preserving the native stock, was of the myopic kind so usual in social law-making, and, failing to reckon with the real nature of the problem involved, it utterly missed the mark. By combining epigraphical and literary references, a fairly full history of the noble families can be procured, and this reveals a startling inability of such families to perpetuate themselves. We know, for instance, in Caesar's day of forty-five patricians, only one of whom is represented by posterity when Hadrian came to power.⁶ The Aemilii, Fabii, Claudii, Manlii, Valerii, and all the rest, with the exception of the Cornelii, have disappeared. Augustus and Claudius raised twenty-five families to the patriciate, and all but six of them disappear before Nerva's reign. Of the families of nearly four hundred senators recorded in 65 AD under Nero, all trace of a half is lost by Nerva's day, a generation later. And the records are so full that these statistics may be assumed to represent with a fair degree of accuracy the disappearance of the male stock of the families in question. Of course members of the aristocracy were the chief sufferers from the tyranny of the first century, but this havoc was not all wrought by *delatores* and assassins. The voluntary choice

of childlessness accounts largely for the unparalleled condition. This is as far as the records help upon this problem, which, despite the silence, is probably the most important phase of the whole question of the change of race. Be the causes what they may, the rapid decrease of the old aristocracy and the native stock was clearly concomitant with a twofold increase from below: by a more normal birth-rate of the poor, and the constant manumission of slaves.

This Orientalizing of Rome's populace has a more important bearing than is usually accorded it upon the larger question of why the spirit and acts of imperial Rome are totally different from those of the republic, if indeed racial characteristics are not wholly a myth. There is to-day a healthy activity in the study of the economic factors—unscientific finance, fiscal agriculture, inadequate support of industry and commerce, etc.—that contributed to Rome's decline. But what lay behind and constantly reacted upon all such causes of Rome's disintegration was, after all, to a considerable extent, the fact that the people who built Rome had given way to a different race. The lack of energy and enterprise, the failure of foresight and common sense, the weakening of moral and political stamina, all were concomitant with the gradual diminution of the stock which, during the earlier days, had displayed these qualities. It would be wholly unfair to pass judgment upon the native qualities of the Orientals without a further study, or to accept the self-complacent slurs of the Romans, who, ignoring certain imaginative and artistic qualities, chose only to see in them unprincipled and servile egoists. We may even admit that had the new races had time to amalgamate and attain a political consciousness, a more brilliant and versatile civilization might have come to birth. That, however, is not the question. It is apparent that at least the political and moral qualities which counted most in the building of the Italian federation, the army organization, the provincial administrative system of the republic, were the qualities most needed in holding the empire together. And however brilliant the endowment of the new citizens, these qualities they lacked. The Trimalchios of the empire were often shrewd and daring business men, but their first and obvious task apparently was to climb by the ladder of quick profits to a social position in which their children with Romanized names could comfortably proceed to forget their forebears. The possession of wealth did not, as in the republic, suggest certain duties toward the commonwealth. Narcissus and Pallas might be

sagacious politicians, but they were not expected to be statesmen concerned with the continuity of the *mos majorum*. And when, on reading Tacitus, we are amazed at the new servility of Scipios and Messalas, we must recall that these scattered inheritors of the old aristocratic ideals had at their back only an alien rabble of ex-slaves, to whom they would have appealed in vain for a return to ancestral ideas of law and order. They had little choice between servility and suicide, and not a few chose the latter.

It would be illuminating by way of illustration of this change to study the spread of the mystery religions. Cumont seems to think that these cults won many converts among all classes in the West. Toutain, skeptical on this point, assigns not a little of the new religious activity to the rather formal influence of the court at Rome. Dobschütz, a more orthodox churchman, seems to see in the spread of these cults the pervasion of a new and deeper religious spirit, which, in some mystical way, was preparing the old world for Christianity. But is not the success of the cults in great measure an expression of the religious feelings of the new people themselves? And if it is, may it not be that Occidentals who are actually of Oriental extraction, men of more emotional nature, are simply finding in these cults the satisfaction that, after long deprivation, their temperaments naturally required? When a senator, dignified by the name of M. Aurelius Victor, is found among the votaries of Mithras in the later empire, it may well be that he is the great-grandson of some child kidnapped in Parthia and sold on the block at Rome. Toutain has proved, I think, that in the northern and western provinces the only Oriental cult that took root at all among the real natives was that of Magna Mater, and this goddess, whose cult was directed by the urban priestly board, had had the advantage of centuries of a rather accidental recognition by the Roman state. In the western provinces, the Syrian and Egyptian gods were worshipped chiefly by people who seem not to be native to the soil. The Mithraic worshippers in these provinces were, for the most part, soldiers recruited or formerly stationed in the East, and Orientals who, by way of commerce or the slave-market, had come to live in the West. From the centres where such people lived the cult spread but very slowly.

[...]

In short, the mystery cults permeated the city, Italy, and the western provinces only to such an extent as the city and Italy and

the provinces were permeated by the stock that had created those religions.

At Rome, Magna Mater was introduced for political reasons during the Punic War, when the city was still Italian. The rites proved to be shocking to the unemotional westerner, who worshipped the staid patrician called Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and were locked in behind a wall. As the urban populace began to change, however, new rites clamored for admittance, for, as a senator in Nero's days says,⁷ "Nationes in familiis habemus, quibus diversi ritus, externa sacra." And as the populace enforced their demands upon the emperor for *panem et circenses*, so they also secured recognition for their *externa sacra*. One after another of the emperors gained popularity with the rabble by erecting a shrine to some foreign Baal, or a statue to Isis in his chapel, in much the same way that our cities are lining their park drives with tributes to Garibaldi, Pulaski, and who knows what -vitch. Finally, in the third and fourth centuries, when even the aristocracy at Rome was almost completely foreign, these Eastern cults, rather than those of old Rome, became the centres of "patrician" opposition to Christianity. In other words, the western invasion of the mystery cults is hardly a miraculous conversion of the even-tempered, practical-minded Indo-European to an orgiastic emotionalism, foreign to his nature. These religions came with their peoples, and in so far as they gained new converts, they attracted for the most part people of Oriental extraction who had temporarily fallen away from native ways in the western world. Christianity, which contained enough Oriental mysticism to appeal to the vast herd of Easterners in the West, and enough Hellenic sanity to captivate the rationalistic Westerner, found, even if one reckons only with social forces, the most congenial soil for growth in the conglomeration of Europeans, Asiatics, and Africans that filled the western Roman Empire in the second century.

This is but one illustration. But it is offered in the hope that a more thorough study of the race question may be made in conjunction with economic and political questions before any attempt is made finally to estimate the factors at work in the change of temper of imperial Rome.

* * *

Commentary by Denise Eileen McCoskey

Tenney Frank (1876–1939) was born near Clay Center, Kansas, on 19 May 1876. Although his family would later lose the farm he grew up on, Frank considered his rural background crucial to his work as a Roman historian, believing that it gave him invaluable insight into the role of agriculture in ancient Italy's social and economic life. Frank graduated from the University of Kansas in 1898 with a degree in classics, alongside special study of geology. He completed his PhD at the University of Chicago in 1903 and held teaching positions first at Bryn Mawr College from 1904 to 1919 and then at Johns Hopkins University (a department that had only a few years before lost Basil Gildersleeve to retirement), where he remained until his death in 1939.

During his time at Bryn Mawr, Frank's interests shifted from a narrow focus on philology to the pursuit of larger topics in Roman history, a change that was marked by publication of *Roman Imperialism* in 1914. In this work, Frank argued that the early Romans had engaged only in 'defensive imperialism'. This stance, taken by many historians at the time, claimed that prior to the first century BCE Roman expansion had taken place as a response to external pressures rather than in accordance with any concerted plan or innate aggression. Frank's strong emphasis on the language of the fetial oath as evidence of Rome's 'good faith',⁸ however, has been read by many scholars, both then and now, as naïve. Placing Frank's work against the backdrop of the First World War, which was ongoing at the time, George Willis Botsford noted:

[the fact] that [Frank's] argument, so far as expressed in these general terms, has no real value is proved by all that we know of the inter-relations of states throughout history, and particularly by the present European war, in which every belligerent claims to have engaged in the conflict purely and simply for defence.⁹

Following the publication of *Roman Imperialism*, Frank would become a dominant figure in American classics, serving as both president of the American Philological Association in 1929 and editor of the *American Journal of Philology* from 1936 to 1939. He was widely published throughout his career, including books on ancient literature and Roman building construction, as well as a college-level textbook entitled *A History of Rome* in 1923. One of his major achievements was *An Economic History of Rome to the End of the Republic* (1920), but his plans for a second volume were stymied by the publication of M. Rostovtzeff's *The*

Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (1926). In his review of Rostovtzeff's work, Frank chided his contemporary for relying too much on Hellenistic Asia and Egypt, proclaiming:

Egypt in fact, the most un-Roman of all lands, looms too large, as it generally has in Rostovtzeff's studies on Rome, and general inferences are too frequently drawn from Ptolemaic institutions and from the wails of the pitiful fellahin. Here and there the result suggests the conclusions that some future historian might draw if he were to reconstruct present-day American conditions from the letters of the negro laborers in Porto Rico.¹⁰

Such a statement attests to the racial prejudice underlying Frank's work, not to mention his views of what should be taken (or not) as representative of both Roman and American life. From 1932 on, Frank was occupied with the multi-volume *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, a collaborative project he spearheaded on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation. The fifth and final volume (one of two he had authored himself) had to be completed after his death, which occurred unexpectedly in Oxford, England, where Frank had been appointed to the prestigious Eastman Professorship.

Having studied in Göttingen and Berlin in 1910–11 while on sabbatical, Frank found approaches to ancient history on the continent unsatisfying, and often set his work openly against the European scholarship of his day. Urging in *Roman Imperialism* that his reader 'imagine a people far removed from the economic pressure as well as the political traditions of modern Europe', Frank's early Romans correlated strongly with his idealised version of America, where regular members of a republic held power in accordance with the 'voting booth' and 'recruiting station', but were nonetheless kept in check by the authority given to office-holding members of the upper class.¹¹ Frank's use of America as a lens for reading the Roman world was widely recognised; when reviewing *An Economic History of Rome*, W. S. Ferguson remarked that 'a distinctively American *motiv* runs through this book from beginning to end'.¹²

Frank served as a professor at the American School of Classical Studies in Rome from 1916 to 1918 and was then appointed Professor in Charge of Classical Studies for 1922–3. It was during his first period of residence in Rome that Frank was inspired to write 'Race mixture in the Roman Empire' as a response to the ongoing debates about Rome's alleged 'decline and fall' that were taking place in earnest throughout the early twentieth century, a topic that had taken on additional significance

in the shadow of the First World War. As Frank himself observed in 'Race mixture in the Roman Empire', '[t]here is to-day a healthy activity in the study of the economic factors – unscientific finance, fiscal agriculture, inadequate support of industry and commerce, etc. – that contributed to Rome's decline', but he sought to provide an explanation based instead on race and racial composition, concluding that 'what lay behind and constantly reacted upon all such causes of Rome's disintegration was, after all, to a considerable extent, the fact that the people who built Rome had given way to a different race'. This assertion was reiterated in many of his major works and would exert considerable influence in Roman studies in the decades following, including studies of Roman slavery more specifically. However, Frank's thesis was not universally accepted, even at the time. Some criticised his methods – in particular, his system for calculating the proportion of Rome's population that had allegedly been descended from 'foreigners' – and Rostovtzeff directly refuted some of the racist assumptions in Frank's argument. Professing in *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* that he was 'not competent to sit in judgement on the problem of degeneration from the biological and physiological point of view', Rostovtzeff nonetheless avowed that '(a)gainst Frank I may suggest that I see no criterion for distinguishing between inferior and superior races. Why are the Greek and Latin races considered the only superior races in the Roman Empire?'¹³

Frank began 'Race mixture in the Roman Empire' by musing on the names that he ostensibly observed on Roman tombstones when walking along the Appian Way, pointing to what he considered a dramatic shift to more foreign-sounding ones. 'Do these names,' Frank asked, 'imply that the Roman stock was completely changed after Cicero's day' and '(i)f so, are these foreigners ordinary immigrants, or did Rome become a nation of ex-slaves and their offspring?' Noting that most of the evidence for the composition of Rome's population came from literary evidence, especially satire, Frank attempted to test such depictions against statistical study of the names found on Roman inscriptions, concluding that around 90 per cent of Rome's population in the imperial period could be shown to be descended from foreign 'stock' and that such descent, contrary to the testimony in Roman literature, derived from 'servile extraction' rather than 'free-born immigration'. Frank's emphasis on 'ex-slaves and their offspring' was crucial to his argument. He further insisted both that the vast proportion of enslaved persons had come from the east – that is, from places like Syria and Asia Minor – and that similar results could be found in other towns throughout the Empire, meaning that 'the whole empire was a melting-pot and that

the Oriental was always and everywhere a very large part of the ore'. Ruminating that '[t]here are other questions that enter into the problem of change of race at Rome, for the solution of which it is even more difficult to obtain statistics', Frank highlighted in particular the question of why 'the native stock did not better hold its own', positing that 'the native stock was supported by less than a normal birth-rate, whereas the stock of foreign extraction had not only a fairly normal birth-rate but a liberal quota of manumissions to its advantage'.

While Frank conceded that 'had the new races had time to amalgamate and attain a political consciousness, a more brilliant and versatile civilization might have come to birth', he believed that, at least in the short term, 'the spirit and acts of imperial Rome' had changed from the days of the Republic and, in particular, that this 'new' population lacked the 'political and moral qualities' to sustain their Empire. Frank provided one additional illustration of the alleged impact of such a shift, insisting that the spread of 'mystery religions' throughout the Empire could be explained by population change rather than any 'miraculous conversion of the even-tempered, practical-minded Indo-European to an orgiastic emotionalism, foreign to his nature'. Frank's reference to an 'Indo-European' temperament hints at his views, expressed more openly elsewhere, that Roman racial origins had derived from the early invasion of Italy by Indo-Europeans, a group he also referred to – in the language of the time – as 'Aryans'.¹⁴ By basing Roman racial identity in alleged invasions beginning in the third millennium BCE, Frank was notably forced to acknowledge that the Romans were themselves 'a mixed race whose chief elements were immigrant Aryans and non-conquered non-Aryans', immediately adding that '[h]owever this may be, certainly the predominant element was Aryan'.¹⁵

American ideas about race during this period were shaped in large part by contemporary scientific racism, including Joseph Arthur de Gobineau's hugely influential *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–5), which argued that races were biologically distinct and that any 'mixing' of groups would invariably lead to decline. However, Frank's approach can also be linked to the ways such ideas had been both adopted and adapted by the American eugenics movement, which had taken hold in the United States in the early twentieth century and would peak in the 1920s. Frank's research was itself cited in the fourth edition of *The Passing of the Great Race* (1921), a work authored by Madison Grant, an American lawyer heavily involved in the eugenics movement. Pioneered by the English explorer and statistician Francis Galton, eugenics proposed that human reproduction could be 'managed' in ways that would allow the

overall ‘improvement’ of the general population, a principle that relied heavily on identifying which groups made the ‘best’ contribution to human society and should therefore be ‘encouraged’ to propagate themselves. Frank’s general interest in demography and related confidence that data (rather than, say, ‘unscientific finance’) could be used to track Rome’s decline reflect the prominent role occupied generally by statistics in the practice of eugenics. Indeed, in 1910, Harvard Professor Charles Davenport, who was central to introducing Galton’s ideas to the United States, had founded the Eugenics Record Office, which collected and stored copious data on the physical and social traits of thousands of American families until its closure in 1939. Even more, Frank employed a loaded term from American eugenics in his analysis of ancient Rome: ‘race suicide’, which sought to label and cast blame, especially on women, for the perceived decline in birth rates among the most ‘desirable’ groups. Believing that ‘race suicide’ had been discussed by Roman writers, Frank connected that alleged ancient phenomenon to his own era, asserting in ‘Race mixture in the Roman Empire’ that “‘race suicide’ then, as now, curtailed the stock of the more sophisticated, that is, of the aristocracy and the rich, who were, to a large extent, the native stock’. As this statement suggests, notions of class intersected strongly with race in the ways ‘superior’ groups were defined by adherents to both scientific racism and eugenics.

In the United States, eugenics would play a prominent role in debates in the early twentieth century over immigration policy, often serving as a foundation for arguing that immigration from certain territories, especially eastern and southern – as opposed to northern – Europe, should be restricted. So it is significant that, even as he showed a certain paranoia about peoples from the east, Frank argued against ‘ordinary immigrants’ as the source of Rome’s declining ‘stock’ (it should be noted that his own father had immigrated from Sweden). The specific targeting of ‘ex-slaves and their offspring’, on the other hand, suggests deep antipathy towards Black Americans and their role in American society of the early twentieth century. Moreover, Frank’s perception that Roman decline was due to the Romans having had a ‘liberal’ (that is, too liberal) practice of manumission might also suggest his own negative attitude towards America’s universal emancipation, which had been issued only 13 years before he was born. At least one reviewer of his *Economic History* remarked on the connection, writing that ‘[t]he supplanting of the Roman and Italic stock by the issue of slaves is, then, another constructive idea on which Professor Frank forms his book’, adding that it ‘needless to say, may envisage an American situation’.¹⁶

The specific weight Frank placed on enslaved persons in his analysis is especially striking when juxtaposed with the contemporary arguments of the Swedish classicist Martin P. Nilsson, who placed more emphasis than Frank on the ‘mixing’ of races as a biological process. Nilsson also pointed to the impact of Rome’s ‘provincial’ population more broadly, asserting that ‘the shelter of Roman peace and Roman administration’ had led, via institutions like trade and the army, to the increased contact of races across the space of the Empire and so to ‘unlimited bastardizing’.¹⁷ Nilsson further explained that ‘bastardizing to this extent results in the mingling of better and worse races into a motley and indefinite mass without firm mental or moral characteristics’, a dynamic he deemed ‘sufficient explanation’ for Rome’s fall.¹⁸ Notably, Nilsson acknowledged that both the Greeks and Romans were themselves the ‘product of a blending of races’, a phenomenon he believed had received its impetus in both cases from ‘invading Aryan tribes’. For Nilsson the key difference was that, following the mingling of local populations and invaders in those early times, a sufficient period of ‘isolation and inbreeding’ had occurred, which allowed the stabilisation of a new race and, in the case of Athens, the establishment of ‘the foundations of our own culture’. For Nilsson, then, the modern lesson in Rome’s demise pertained not to the integration of free descendants of enslaved persons into American society, but rather to the example of modern European nations, whose borders, Nilsson believed, formed ‘to some degree an effective barrier’ against the type of race mixing that had destroyed the Roman Empire.¹⁹

While the concept of race mixing – and the American eugenics movement itself – was largely discredited following the Second World War and widespread dissemination of Nazi atrocities, Frank’s essay has continued to find a following, especially among anti-immigration and white nationalist groups. Indeed, both Frank’s and Nilsson’s essays were included in a 2013 volume issued by the independent publishing house Ostara Publications, which was founded to distribute Arthur Kemp’s 1999 *March of the Titans: The complete history of the white race* and currently operates ‘as a resource for Eurocentric history, politics, and study’.²⁰ But it would be a mistake to presume that Frank’s influence was restricted merely to such fringe outlets and thus ignore the longstanding tolerance, and even endorsement, of such ideas within the field of classics itself. For one, ‘Race mixture in the Roman Empire’ was still being reprinted as late as 1970, in a collection entitled *The Fall of Rome: Can it be explained?*, edited by Mortimer Chambers, a member of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) History Department. Yet Frank’s ideas have been

contested over time by some within the field of classical studies, including Frank M. Snowden Jr and Lloyd Thompson, both prominent Black classicists.

Perhaps the most substantial challenge to the racist frameworks applied to the ancient world by Frank and like-minded scholars, however, came from the publication of Martin Bernal's multivolume *Black Athena* project, beginning in the 1980s. In this work, Bernal sought to discredit what he called the 'Aryan model' of Greek origin, which he believed had attended the rise of classical studies as a professional practice. The basic premise of this model, namely that 'Aryan' invaders had provided the racial energy necessary for the development of ancient civilisation, can be seen reflected in the work of both Frank and Nilsson. Bernal, in turn, offered his own model of Greek origin, a 'revised ancient model' which argued instead for substantial Egyptian and Phoenician influence on the formation of Greek culture. The specifics of Bernal's own model, and especially its emphasis on conquest and colonisation as the primary vehicle for cultural transformation, have been subject to considerable critique; however, overall his work provides a major rebuke to Frank and other classical scholars. Although Bernal sought to query the alleged origins of ancient Greece (rather than Rome's fall) and markedly utilised the language of cultural contact and cultural formation rather than race, *Black Athena* nonetheless defied the fundamental assumptions underlying notions of race mixing and the development of ancient society that had long infused classical scholarship. Most notably, rather than conceptualising 'mixing' between groups as an inherent source of weakness and deterioration, Bernal argued that such contact was the precise reason for the ancient world's success, explaining that '[m]y enemy is not Europe, it's purity – the idea that purity ever exists, or that if it does exist, that it is somehow more culturally creative than mixture. I believe that the civilization of Greece is so attractive precisely because of those mixtures.'²¹

Notes

- 1 CIL., vol. VI., parts 2, 3, 4. (Notes in the extracts appear in the original and have not been edited.)
- 2 VI., part 4², published in 1902, contains 2572 additional inscriptions of this class.
- 3 *Ad Helviam*, 6.
- 4 *Historische Zeitschrift*, CXII. 9.
- 5 VI. 594–596.
- 6 Stech, in *Klio*, Beiheft X.
- 7 Tacitus, *Annales*, XIV. 44.
- 8 Frank, *Roman Imperialism*, 9.
- 9 Botsford, Review of *Roman Imperialism*, 157.
- 10 Frank, Review of *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 292.
- 11 Frank, *Roman Imperialism*, viii.
- 12 Ferguson, Review of *An Economic History of Rome*, 801.
- 13 Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 485.
- 14 Frank, *Roman Imperialism*, 2.
- 15 Frank, *Roman Imperialism*, 2.
- 16 Ferguson, Review of *An Economic History of Rome*, 804.
- 17 Nilsson, 'The race problem of the Roman Empire', 385.
- 18 Nilsson, 'The race problem of the Roman Empire', 387.
- 19 Nilsson, 'The race problem of the Roman Empire', 388.
- 20 <https://ostarapublications.com/about/>
- 21 Vitello, 'Martin Bernal.'

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Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929)

Chapter 10 of *Home to Harlem* (London: Vintage Classics, 2022, 77–8) and Chapter 4 of *Banjo* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2008, 40–6). Please note that these texts contain potentially triggering language. Commentary by Justine M^cConnell.

Home to Harlem (1928)

Chapter 10: 'The Railroad'

Over the heart of the vast gray Pennsylvania country the huge black animal snorted and roared, with sounding rods and couplings, pulling a long chain of dull-brown boxes packed with people and things, trailing on the blue-cold air its white masses of breath.

Hell was playing in the hot square hole of a pantry and the coffin-shaped kitchen of the dining-car. The short, stout, hard-and-horny chef was terrible as a rhinoceros. Against the second, third, and fourth cooks he bellied his way up to the little serving door and glared at the waiters. His tough, aproned front was a challenge to them. In his oily, shining face his big white eyes danced with meanness. All the waiters had squeezed into the pantry at once, excitedly snatching, dropping and breaking things.

'Hey, you there! You mule!' The chef shouted at the fourth waiter. 'Who told you to snitch that theah lamb chops outa the hole?'

'I done think they was the one I ordered—'

'Done think some hell, you down-home black fool. Ain't no thinking to be done on here—'

'Chef, ain't them chops ready yet?' a waiter asked.

'Don't rush me, nigger,' the chef bellowed back. 'Wha' yu'all trying to do? Run me up a tree? Kain't run this here chef up no tree. Jump off ef you kain't ride him.' His eyes gleamed with grim humor. 'Jump off or lay down. This heah white man's train service ain't no nigger picnic.'

The second cook passed up a platter of chops. The chef rushed it through the hole and licked his fingers.

'There you is, yaller. Take it away. Why ain't you gone yet? Show me some service, yaller, show me some service.' He rocked his thick, tough body sideways in a sort of dance, licked the sweat from his brow with his forefinger and grunted with aggressive self-satisfaction. Then he bellied his way back to the range and sent the third cook up to the serving window.

'Tha's the stuff to hand them niggers,' he told the third cook. 'Keep 'em up a tree all the time, but don't let 'em get you up there.'

Jake, for he was the third cook, took his place by the window and handed out the orders. It was his first job on the railroad, but from the first day he managed his part perfectly. He rubbed smoothly along with the waiters by remaining himself and not trying to imitate the chef nor taking his malicious advice.

Jake had taken the job on the railroad just to break the hold that Harlem had upon him. When he quitted Rose he felt that he ought to get right out of the atmosphere of Harlem. If I don't git away from it for a while, it'll sure git me, he mused. But not ship-and-port-town life again. I done had enough a that here and ovah there. . . . So he had picked the railroad. One or two nights a week in Harlem. And all the days on the road. He would go on like that until he grew tired of that rhythm. . . .

The rush was over. Everything was quiet. The corridors of the dining-car were emptied of their jam of hungry, impatient guests. The 'mule' had scrubbed the slats of the pantry and set them up to dry. The other waiters had put away silver and glasses and soiled linen. The steward at his end of the car was going over the checks. Even the kitchen work was finished and the four cooks had left their coffin for the good air of the dining-room. They sat apart from the dining-room boys. The two grades, cooks and waiters, never chummed together, except for gambling. Some of the waiters were very haughty. There were certain light-skinned ones who went walking with pals of their complexion only in the stop-over cities.

Others, among the older men, were always dignified. They were fathers of families, their wives moved in some sphere of Harlem society, and their movements were sometimes chronicled in the local Negro newspapers.

Sitting at one of the large tables, four of the waiters were playing poker. Jake wanted to join them, but he had no money. One waiter sat alone at a small table. He was reading. He was of average size, slim, a smooth pure ebony with straight features and a suggestion of whiskers. Jake shuffled up to him and asked him for the loan of two dollars. He got it and went to play. . . .

Jake finished playing with five dollars. He repaid the waiter and said: 'Youse a good sport. I'll always look out for you in that theah hole.'

The waiter smiled. He was very friendly. Jake half-sprawled over the table. 'Wha's this here stuff you reading? Looks lak Greek to me.' He spelled the title, 'S-A-P-H-O, Sapho.'

'What's it all about?' Jake demanded, flattening down the book on the table with his friendly paw. The waiter was reading the scene between Fanny and Jean when the lover discovers the letters of his mistress's former woman friend and exclaims: 'Ah *Oui . . . Sapho . . . toute la lyre. . .*'

'It's a story,' he told Jake, 'by a French writer named Alphonse Daudet. It's about a sporting woman who was beautiful like a rose and had the soul of a wandering cat. Her lovers called her Sapho. I like the story, but I hate the use of Sapho for its title.'

'Why does you?' Jake asked.

'Because Sappho was a real person. A wonderful woman, a great Greek poet—'

'So theah is some Greek in the book!' said Jake.

The waiter smiled. 'In a sense, yes.'

And he told Jake the story of Sappho, of her poetry, of her loves and her passion for the beautiful boy, Phaon. And of her leaping into the sea from the Leucadian cliff because of her love for him.

'Her story gave two lovely words to modern language,' said the waiter.

'Which one them?' asked Jake.

'Sapphic and Lesbian. . . beautiful words.'

'What is that there Leshbian?'

' . . . Lovely word, eh?'

'Tha's what we calls bulldyker in Harlem,' drawled Jake. 'Them's all ugly womens.'

'Not *all*. And that's a damned ugly name,' the waiter said. 'Harlem is too savage about some things. *Bulldyker*,' the waiter stressed with a sneer.

Jake grinned. 'But tha's what they is, ain't it?'

He began humming:

'And there is two things in Harlem I don't understan' It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man. . . .'

Charmingly, like a child that does not know its letters, Jake turned the pages of the novel. . . .

'Bumbole! This heah language is most different from how they talk it.'

'Bumbole' was now a popular expletive for Jake, replacing such expressions as 'Bull,' 'bawls,' 'walnuts,' and 'blimey.' Ever since the night at the Congo when he heard the fighting West Indian girl cry, 'I'll slap you bumbole,' he had always used the word. When his friends asked him what it meant, he grinned and said, 'Ask the monks.'

'You know French?' the waiter asked.

'*Parlee-vous? Mademoiselle, un baiser, s'il vous plait. Voilà!* I larned that much offn the froggies.'

'So you were over there?'

'*Au oui, camarade*,' Jake beamed. 'I was way, way ovah there after Democracy and them boches, and when I couldn't find one or the other, I jest turned mah black moon from the A. E. F . . . But you! How come you jest plowing through this here stuff lak that? I could nevah see no light at all in them print, chappie. *Eh bien. Mais vous compris beaucoup*.'

'*C'est ma langue maternelle*.'

'Hm!' Jake made a face and scratched his head. '*Comprendre pas*, chappie. Tell me in straight United States.'

'French is my native language. I—'

‘Don’t crap me,’ Jake interrupted. ‘Ain’tchu—ain’tchu one of us, too?’

‘Of course I’m Negro,’ the waiter said, ‘but I was born in Hayti and the language down there is French.’

‘Hayti . . . Hayti,’ repeated Jake. ‘Tha’s where now? Tha’s—’

‘An island in the Caribbean—near the Panama Canal.’

Jake sat like a big eager boy and learned many facts about Hayti before the train reached Pittsburgh. He learned that the universal spirit of the French Revolution had reached and lifted up the slaves far away in that remote island; that Black Hayti’s independence was more dramatic and picturesque than the United States’ independence and that it was a strange, almost unimaginable eruption of the beautiful ideas of the ‘Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité’ of Mankind, that shook the foundations of that romantic era.

For the first time he heard the name Toussaint L’Ouverture, the black slave and leader of the Haytian slaves. Heard how he fought and conquered the slave-owners and then protected them; decreed laws for Hayti that held more of human wisdom and nobility than the Code Napoleon; defended his baby revolution against the Spanish and the English vultures; defeated Napoleon’s punitive expedition; and how tragically he was captured by a civilized trick, taken to France, and sent by Napoleon to die broken-hearted in a cold dungeon.

‘A black man! A black man! Oh, I wish I’d been a soldier under sich a man!’ Jake said, simply.

He plied his instructor with questions. Heard of Dessalines, who carried on the fight begun by Toussaint L’Ouverture and kept Hayti independent. But it was incredible to Jake that a little island of freed slaves had withstood the three leading European powers. The waiter told him that Europe was in a complex state of transition then, and that that wonderful age had been electrified with universal ideas—ideas so big that they had lifted up ignorant people, even black, to the stature of gods.

‘The world doesn’t know,’ he continued, ‘how great Toussaint L’Ouverture really was. He was not merely great. He was lofty. He was good. The history of Hayti today might have been different if he had been allowed to finish his work. He was honored by a great enigmatic poet of that period. And I honor both Toussaint and the poet by keeping in my memory the wonderful, passionate lines.’

He quoted Wordsworth's sonnet.

'Toussaint, the most unhappy Man of Men!
Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now
Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den; —
Oh miserable Chieftain! Where and when
Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
Though fallen Thyself never to rise again,
Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee, air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and Man's unconquerable Mind.'

Jake felt like one passing through a dream, vivid in rich, varied colors. It was revelation beautiful in his mind. That brief account of an island of savage black people, who fought for collective liberty and was struggling to create a culture of their own. A romance of his race, just down there by Panama. How strange!

Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askew at foreign niggers. Africa was jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey-chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world.

The waiter told him that Africa was not jungle as he dreamed of it, nor slavery the peculiar rôle of black folk. The Jews were the slaves of the Egyptians, the Greeks made slaves of their conquered, the Gauls and Saxons were slaves of the Romans. He told Jake of the old destroyed cultures of West Africa and of their vestiges, of black kings who struggled stoutly for the independence of their kingdoms: Prempreh of Ashanti, Tofa of Dahomey, Gbehanzin of Benin, Cetawayo of Zulu-Land, Menelik of Abyssinia. . . .

Had Jake ever heard of the little Republic of Liberia, founded by American Negroes? And Abyssinia, deep-set in the shoulder of Africa, besieged by the hungry wolves of Europe? The only nation that has existed free and independent from the earliest records of

history until today! Abyssinia, oldest unconquered nation, ancient-strange as Egypt, persistent as Palestine, legendary as Greece, magical as Persia.

There was the lovely legend of her queen who visited the court of the Royal Rake of Jerusalem, and how he fell in love with her. And her beautiful black body made the Sage so lyrical, he immortalized her in those wonderful pagan verses that are sacred to the hearts of all lovers—even the heart of the Church. . . . The catty ladies of the court of Jerusalem were jealous of her. And Sheba reminded them that she was black but beautiful. . . . And after a happy period she left Jerusalem and returned to her country with the son that came of the royal affair. And that son subsequently became King of Abyssinia. And to this day the rulers of Abyssinia carry the title, Lion of Judah, and trace their descent direct from the liaison of the Queen of Sheba with King Solomon.

First of Christian nations also is the claim of this little kingdom! Christian since the time when Philip, the disciple of Jesus, met and baptized the minister of the Queen of Abyssinia and he returned to his country and converted the court and people to Christianity.

Jake listened, rapt, without a word of interruption.

‘All the ancient countries have been yielding up the buried secrets of their civilizations,’ the waiter said. ‘I wonder what Abyssinia will yield in her time? Next to the romance of Hayti, because it is my native country, I should love to write the romance of Abyssinia . . . Ethiopia.’

‘Is that theah country the same Ethiopia that we done l’arned about in the Bible?’ asked Jake.

‘The same. The Latin peoples still call it Ethiopia.’

‘Is you a professor?’

‘No, I’m a student.’

‘Whereat? Where did you l’arn English?’

‘Well, I learned English home in Port-au-Prince. And I was at Howard. You know the Negro university at Washington. Haven’t even finished there yet.’

‘Then what in the name of mah holy rabbit foot youse doing on this heah white man’s chuh-chuh? It ain’t no place foh no student. It seems to me you’ place down there sounds a whole lot better.’

‘Uncle Sam put me here.’

‘Whadye mean Uncle Sam?’ cried Jake. ‘Don’t hand me that bull.’

‘Let me tell you about it,’ the waiter said. ‘Maybe you don’t know that during the World War Uncle Sam grabbed Hayti. My father was an official down there. He didn’t want Uncle Sam in Hayti and he said so and said it loud. They told him to shut up and he wouldn’t, so they shut him up in jail. My brother also made a noise and American marines killed him in the street. I had nobody to pay for me at the university, so I had to get out and work. *Voilà!*’

‘And you ain’t gwine to study no moh?’

‘Never going to stop. I study now all the same when I get a little time. Every free day I have in New York I spend at the library downtown. I read there and I write.’

Jake shook his head. ‘This heah work is all right for me, but for a chappie like you . . . Do you like waiting on them ofays? ’Sall right working longshore or in a kitchen as I does it, but to be rubbing up against them and bowing so nice and all a that. . . ’

‘It isn’t so bad,’ the waiter said. ‘Most of them are pretty nice. Last trip I waited on a big Southern Senator. He was perfectly gentlemanly and tipped me half a dollar. When I have the blues I read Dr. Frank Crane.’

Jake didn’t understand, but he spat and said a stinking word. The chef called him to do something in the kitchen.

‘Leave that theah professor and his nonsense,’ the chef said. . . .

The great black animal whistled sharply and puff-puffed slowly into the station of Pittsburgh.

Banjo (1929)

Chapter 4: ‘Hard Feeding’

The boys had a canny ear for the sounds of ‘good’ ships. They knew them by the note of the horns.

They might be binging out a barrel of wine, or picking up peanuts, or lying on the breakwater when one of the good ships (ships whose crews were friendly and gave the beach boys food) signaled its coming in. One would shout, tossing his cap into the air, ‘Oh, boy! That theah’s a regular broad coming in!’ And it would surely be one of their ships.

Sometimes it would be a ship that one of them saw last in Pernambuco, or the ship that another had allowed to leave him in Casablanca. Three months, six months, a year, two years since any of the crew had met this beach boy. Indescribably happy surprise reunions, and stories reminiscent of how they got messed up with wine, girls, and police and missed their ships.

Ginger's little story was brought out by one of these meetings. And for a while it made him 'Lights-out' Ginger and the butt of the boys until another incident superseded it. Ginger had often mentioned that he had lost quite a bit of money in Marseilles in one night, but nobody knew just how. Then he met the pal who had been with him on the boat he had left and it all came out. In a bistro by the breakwater, over a table loaded with red wine, the story was told of Ginger's going into one of the little houses of amusement in the Ditch. He was boozy and very happy, singing and swaying. He sang, 'Money is no object. I'll pay for anything in the place.' And he paid. He did it with great gusto, was really amusing, and all the girls and touts and the other customers were delighted.

There was a little mangy-faced white there who could make himself intelligible in English. And he said to Ginger, 'The whole house is yours.'

'I know it,' Ginger grinned back, 'and I'll show it. I'll give this here money to the boss ef she puts the lights out for five minutes.' And he waved a thousand-franc note. The *patrone's* eyes popped fire.

'Why, you big stiff,' said the boy who told the story and who had been with Ginger, 'that's a whole lot a money and tha's all youse got.'

'Don't I know what Ise doing?' cried Ginger. 'Ise one commanding nigger who'll always pay for a show.'

'You can have you' show, but Ise sure gwine away from here, leaving you.' And he left.

Ginger paid for his five-minute show and got all of it. Nor did he rejoin his pal, but remained on the beach to become a bum and a philosopher. Bantered as a scholar by the boys, Ginger always had a special opinion, a little ponderous, to give on topics arising among them. And whenever they were up against any trouble, he always advised taking the line of least resistance.

Ginger laughed with the rest when his story was told, and said: 'There ain't a jack man of us that ain't got a history to him as good as any that evah was printed. And Ise one that ain't got no case against life.'

Ginger's former pal was now again in Marseilles, for the third time since Ginger had fallen for the beach. And the beach boys were invited to his ship to lunch. The galley of that ship was Negro and it was one of the best of 'good' ships.

Banjo went along with Malty and company. He was not a regular panhandler like the other boys. He could not make a happy business of it like them. Because sometimes they were savagely turned down and insulted and he was not the type to stand that. He would have gone to work on the docks, as he had intended at first when he went broke, if his personality and his banjo had not fixed him in a situation more favorable than that of his mates. There was always a pillow for his head at Latnah's, and when he played in any of the bistros of the quarter and she was there, she always took up a collection. Indeed, she collected every time Banjo finished a set of tunes. That was the way the white itinerants did it, she said. *They* never played for fun as Banjo was prone to do. They played in a hard, unsmiling, funereal way and only for sous. Which was doubtless why their playing in general was so execrable. When Banjo turned himself loose and wild playing, he never remembered sous. Perhaps he could afford to forget, however, with Latnah looking out for him and always ready with a ten-franc note whenever his palm was itching for small change.

The ship of Ginger's pal had such a beach-known reputation for handing out the eats that, besides Malty and company, other men of the beach, white and colored, had assembled down by it to feed. Some dozen of them.

When the officers and men had finished eating, Ginger's old friend brought out what was left to the hungry group waiting on the deck. Good food and plenty of it in two pans. Thick, long slices of boiled beef, immense whole boiled potatoes, pork and beans, and lettuce.

All the men rushed the food like swine, each roughly elbowing and snapping at the other to get his hand in first. While they were stuffing themselves, smacking, grunting, and blowing with the disgusting noises of brutes, the food all over their faces, a mess boy brought out a large broad pan half filled with sweet porridge and set it down on the deck. Immediately the porridge was stormed. A huge blond Nordic, who looked like a polar bear that had been rolling in mud, was tripped up by an Armenian and fell sprawling, his lousy white head flopping in the pan of porridge. The blond picked himself up and, burying his greasy-black hand in the porridge, he brought up

a palmful and dashed it in the face of the Armenian. That started a free fight in which the pan of porridge was kicked over, whole boiled potatoes went flying across the deck, and Bugsy seized the moment to slap in the face with a slice of beef a boy from Benin whom he hated.

‘Goodoh Bugsy!’ cried Malty. ‘Tha’s sho some moh feeding his face.’

Banjo was standing a little way off, watching the *mêlée* in anger and contempt. A lanky, prematurely wrinkle-faced officer passed by with a sneering glance at the beach fellows and went to the galley. The cook, a well-fleshed broad-chested brown Negro, came out on the deck.

‘You fellahs am sure a bum lot,’ he said. ‘The victuals I done give you is too good foh you-all. The garbage even is too good. You ain’t no good foh nothing at all.’

But the boys were again eating, picking up potatoes and scraps of meat from the deck and scooping up what was left of the porridge.

Banjo had started for the gangway, and Bugsy called to him, ‘Hi, nigger, ain’t you gwine put away some a this heah stuff under you’ shirt?’

‘The mess you jest fight and trample ovah?’ retorted Banjo. ‘You c’n stuff you’ guts tell youse all winded, but my belly kain’t accommodate none a that theah stuff, for that is too hard feeding for mine.’

Having finished eating, the men came off the deck, all friendly vagabonds again. Squabbling and scuffling came natural to them, like eating and drinking, dancing and bawdying, and did not have any bad effect upon the general spirit of their comradeship.

Malty’s group picked up Banjo on the dock and separated from the others. Their next objective was to find some conveniently situated barrel of wine that they could bung out and guzzle without trouble.

‘It’s all the same in the life of the beach,’ Malty said to Banjo. ‘Once you get used to it, you kain’t feel you’self too good for anything!’

‘Theah’s some things that this heah boy won’t evah get used to,’ said Banjo. ‘I heah that officer call you all ‘a damned lot a disgusting niggers,’ and I don’t want no gitting used to that. You fellahs know what the white man think about niggers and you-all ought to do better than you done when he’low you on his ship to eat that dawggone grub. I take life easy like you-all, but I ain’t nevah gwine to lay mahself wide open to any insulting cracker of a white man. For I’ll let a white man mobilize mah black moon for a whupping, ef he can, foh calling me a nigger.’

'Nix on the insults when a man is on the beach,' said Malty. 'Gimme a bellyful a good grub and some wine to wash it down is all I ask for.'

'You ain't got no self-respecting in you, then,' said Banjo. 'Youse just a bum and no moh. I ain't a bigheaded nigger, but a white man has got to respect me, for when I address myself to him the vibration of brain magic that I turn loose on him is like an electric shock on the spring of his cranium.'

'Attaboy!' applauded Ginger, who loved big words with a philosophical flavor. 'You done deliver a declaration of principle, but a declaration of principle is a dependant usynimous with the decision of the destiny of the individual in the general.'

"Gawd is the first principle," I done heard that said,' declared Malty. Bugsy grinned, saying, 'And Gawd is in Boody Lane.'

'Youse a nut!' said Malty. 'Don't be calling up Gawd's name as if he was a nigger.'

'I seen him there, I tell you', laughed Bugsy, 'the day of the big church *fête*. I seen that there blond broad burning her candle before his image.'

'It was nothing,' said Ginger, 'but the eternal visible of imagination.'

No barrel was found in a position favorable for a raid, and so the boys filled their pockets with peanuts and walked across the suspension bridge toward the breakwater. Banjo was in a discontented mood and did not join in the jests. At the end of the breakwater a small boat was letting off passengers. Banjo went up to it and said, '*Bonjour*' to the *patron*, who greeted him with a smile.

Banjo stepped into the boat and, waving his hand airily at his pals, said: 'Good by!' The *patron* started the motor and the boat went sheering off against the breakwater toward the direction of the Vieux Port.

The boys gazed after him pop-eyed and gaping. What a fellow Banjo was to put himself over! None of them knew that when Banjo's pockets were bulging with real money that very boat had taken him and his girl on two excursions, one to the Chateau d'If and another to the Canal du Rove at l'Estaque. The boat was just then returning from a trip to the canal, and had stopped to let off passengers who wanted to see the breakwater. Banjo had merely struck, accidentally, a pretty thing again, but it seemed very wonderful to his pals, as if a special pilot had appeared for him and he had walked away from them into a boat that was conveying him to some perfect paradise.

Commentary by Justine McConnell

Claude McKay (1890–1948) was a Jamaican writer who became a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance and the radical black internationalism movement. Born in Nairne Castle in Clarendon Parish in the rural centre of Jamaica, Festus Claudius McKay was known by an abbreviation of the second of his two Roman names, both drawn from their appearance in the New Testament. As a boy, he was sent to live with his older brother, U'Theo, a teacher whose own education included Latin and French and who encouraged Claude to read widely and voraciously. At the age of 17, McKay met an English expatriate Walter Jekyll (whose name was borrowed by his friend, Robert Louis Stevenson, for his 1886 novella, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*). Jekyll had recently, in 1907, collected and published *Jamaican Song and Story: Annancy stories, digging sings, ring tunes, and dancing tunes* and encouraged McKay's writing, urging him to focus on his poetry written in Jamaican Creole. This was an unusual approach at a time when creole languages were denigrated as informal and ill educated, and the publication of McKay's first two collections of poetry, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* (both in 1912), both written primarily in Patwah, was a formally radical innovation.

That same year, McKay left Jamaica never to return. After a brief spell at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, he transferred to Kansas State College. Here he first learnt of W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which he recalled 'shook [him] like an earthquake',¹ and he studied ancient history among other subjects.² Two years later, McKay left Kansas, remarking in his autobiography that he was driven 'by the lust to wander and wonder. The spirit of the vagabond, the demon of some poets, had got hold of me';³ both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* can be seen as celebrations of this kind of wanderlust. McKay went first to New York; then, in autumn 1919, in the wake of the racial violence known as the 'Red Summer', he left for London. During the 'Red Summer' McKay had penned one of his most famous poems, 'If we must die', exhorting his fellow Black men to confront racial violence and inequities with courageous resistance. After London, and over the next 12 years, he lived in Moscow, Berlin, Paris, Marseilles, Barcelona, Casablanca and Tangier, only returning to the United States in 1934. It is during his time in Europe and Morocco that four of McKay's five novels were written. After his return to New York, he wrote a fifth, *Amiable*

with *big teeth*, that remained unpublished until 2017. He converted to Catholicism in the mid-1940s and moved to Chicago, where he died in 1948.

Home to Harlem and *Banjo* were written once McKay had returned to Paris from Russia, where his books *The Negroes of America* (1923) and *Trial by Lynching* (1925) were first published, both in Russian translation. Despite enjoying commercial success, *Home to Harlem* was castigated by W. E. B. Du Bois, who memorably declared that it, 'nauseates me, and after the dirtier parts of its filth I feel distinctly like taking a bath'.⁴ Du Bois's criticism sprang from his sense that the novel catered to the 'prurient demand on the part of white folk' for licentious depictions of African American life, and, to a lesser extent, that it lacked structure, with neither 'a well-conceived plot [n]or with any artistic unity'.⁵ McKay went on to embrace the latter criticism in his next novel, *Banjo*, which he subtitled 'A story without a plot'. Yet *Banjo*'s narrative style reflects more than just artistic concerns: its plotlessness is an act of resistance against the strictly policed movement of people, emphasised in the novel's concern with the passports and papers of its characters,⁶ and of nationalism, with the characters' steadfastly transitory and transnational experiences refusing to be contained. As Brent Hayes Edwards has argued of the novel's episodic nature, 'the episodes *are* the philosophy, and it is not the internationalism of coordinated social movement, but an internationalism of debate, miscommunication, and light-hearted and hot-headed accusation'.⁷

Neither novel, nor the other works in McKay's oeuvre, can be said to develop a thoroughgoing engagement with the literatures and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. Yet McKay had a good knowledge of Graeco-Roman antiquity and his fleeting and sometimes oblique allusions to it are significant nonetheless, as we shall see. In his autobiography too, *A Long Way From Home* (1937), he equated the United States with the Roman Empire, remarking:

I never could believe that art and literature could not flourish in America. That idea was altogether contrary to my historical outlook. I believed that there would be an American art and culture mainly derived from Europe and augmented by the arts and cultures of other countries precisely as there had been a distinct Roman art and culture mainly derived from Greece, but augmented by the arts and cultures that Rome had conquered.⁸

McKay's own approach incorporates this dynamic within a broader framework of internationalism. His dialogues with ancient Greece are momentary, denying the kind of primacy to Greece that he identifies in ancient Roman culture, and thereby rejecting discourses of nationalism and imperialism while still engaging with aspects of classical antiquity that he finds enriching.

The extracts reproduced in this chapter are drawn from McKay's first two novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, both of which are self-consciously driven as much by debates and dialogues between characters as they are by plot, recounting the adventures, encounters and conversations of groups of Black friends in the 1920s in Harlem and Marseilles respectively.

The first extract, Chapter 10 from *Home to Harlem*, includes an explicit but fleeting reference to Greek antiquity. The episode is a pivotal moment within the novel, not only as the first encounter between the protagonist, Jake, and another key figure, Ray (who will feature in *Banjo* too), but crucially, as the catalyst that prompts Jake's introduction to Black internationalism, revolution and slavery beyond the context of the United States. The mention of Sappho comes from Ray's reading of Alphonse Daudet's 1884 novel *Sapho*, but Ray quickly educates Jake about the ancient Greek Sappho; in doing so, he counters Jake's homophobia. At the same time, Ray introduces Jake to black internationalism as he not only explains that French is his mother tongue but also teaches Jake about the history of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution. McKay thus forges a surprising link between Sappho and what C. L. R. James labelled 'the only successful slave revolt in history'.⁹ Thus McKay connects an early example of queer poetics with a ground-breaking moment in history, both of which have been occluded by dominant narratives of history.

Sappho, then, serves a significant purpose in *Home to Harlem* as the figure who leads the way to a broader vision of the world for Jake – one less prejudiced towards both homosexuality and people from outside the United States. In learning of Haiti, Jake learns of US colonialism and begins to relinquish his prejudices and nationalism ('Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners'), paving the way for his own transnationalism. In the connection that McKay constructs between Sappho's queerness and political revolution, there is an echo too of the situation he found during his stay in Russia in 1922–3, with the rise of sexual freedom (including the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the legalisation of abortion and increased women's rights) temporarily ushered in by the Bolshevik Revolution and associated especially with Leon Trotsky, whom McKay knew.

The second extract, Chapter 4 of *Banjo*, includes no overt reference to ancient Greece but develops an oblique re-envisioning of the Circe episode from Homer's *Odyssey*. Despite *Banjo*'s subtitle – 'a story without a plot' – there is a narrative, but like those stories told in the chapter entitled 'Story-telling', it is episodic and sometimes disjointed. The narrative reflects – as Ray himself ponders within the novel, after watching a comic opera – life itself:

[Comic opera] gave him such a perfect illusion of a crazy, disjointed relationship of all the arts of life. Singing and acting and orchestra and all the garish hues. Fascinating *mélange* of disorder. No one part ever equal to the other. Like life . . . like love. All the world on a stage just wrong enough to be right.¹⁰

Eschewing the traditional plot device of seriality ('and then . . . and then . . .'), McKay gestures towards what might be regarded one of the most archetypal plots, only to resist it. So it is that, in a novel that is in some senses about creating a new home and leaving behind the one assigned by categorisations of nationality, 'race' and language, McKay alludes to one of the most canonical narratives of the 'journey home', Homer's *Odyssey*. McKay 'Signifies' upon Homer (to use Henry Louis Gates' theory of 'repetition with signal difference'¹¹) in the chapter entitled 'Hard Feeding', with his evocations of the Circe episode of the *Odyssey* (Book 10), to rewrite both what it means to find home and to be a heroic figure.

Even the connection between *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, established by the figures of the first novel recurring in the second, looks – once the Circe motif is recognised – like a subtle allusion to the way in which the *Iliad*'s relatively minor character of Odysseus becomes the protagonist of the later epic. Ray, likewise, plays a major role in *Banjo* while Jake reappears there only briefly, inverting the attention paid to each in *Home to Harlem*. This subterranean Homeric intertext aligns McKay's novels with a broader tradition of works by African diaspora writers that likewise engage with the Homeric epics in a variety of ways, from Aimé Césaire to Derek Walcott, Ralph Ellison to Toni Morrison.¹²

McKay's chapter opens with a glancing evocation of Elpenor, the hapless young member of Odysseus' crew who, drunk, falls asleep on the roof the night before they are due to leave Circe's island and on waking, forgets where he is and falls to his death.¹³ His death, when Odysseus discovers it in the Underworld, elicits an emotional response from the Greek hero and serves as a prelude to him learning of the death of his mother. In *Banjo*, the men who live as vagabonds around the port of

Marseilles turn Elpenor's story of missing Odysseus' departing ship from one of tragedy into one of daily life, with all its highs and lows, as we hear of their reunions with the crews of passing ships as 'Indescribably happy surprise reunions, and stories reminiscent of how they got messed up with wine, girls, and police and missed their ships'. Unlike the tragic reunion between Odysseus and Elpenor that can only take place in the Underworld, McKay's characters (at least at this point in the novel) persist and survive to be reunited with their former comrades.

Likewise, although Banjo is the novel's protagonist, McKay partially resists such centralisation, espousing in narrative form the communist principles of the people. Banjo's formal first names, Lincoln Agrippa, are laden with history, while his surname, 'Daily', suggests something more quotidian; however, he rejects both these imposed characteristics and adopts the nickname 'Banjo' instead, in homage to the instrument he plays and in a rejection of dominant discourses of history. As Ginger says after his own tale is told, 'There ain't a jack man of us that ain't got a history to him as good as any that evah was printed.' Critics objected to the novel's episodic form,¹⁴ failing to perceive McKay's radical manoeuvre. Yet, seven years earlier, James Joyce had published *Ulysses* (1922) with his quotidian 'hero', Leopold Bloom; McKay, who admired Joyce's work and considered *Ulysses* 'a textbook for modern writers',¹⁵ goes a step further and makes the hero of his story a collective of men rather than an individual – men living on the margins of society, in the eyes of many, but celebrated by McKay.

Nonetheless, McKay's depiction of these characters does not idealise them, as Du Bois's criticism of *Home to Harlem* made clear. In the extract, this is seen in the way the men behave like pigs: 'All the men rushed the food like swine, each roughly elbowing and snapping at the other to get his hand in first. [...] they were stuffing themselves, smacking, grunting, and blowing with the disgusting noises of brutes' and the blond Nordic man is compared to 'a polar bear that had been rolling in mud'. The food fight that ensues brings to mind the behaviour of the suitors on Ithaca and the moment when Antinous throws a footstool at the disguised Odysseus begging for food.¹⁶ However, crucially, McKay again rewrites the scenario. Where the Homeric suitors are killed for their behaviour, in *Banjo* peace is restored as swiftly and as easily as the fight broke out. Once again, McKay insists on survival and persistence where Homer offers mortality and death; in doing so, McKay depicts not only a future without catastrophic conflict, but also a rejection of the *Odyssey's* restoring of the status quo of rule by the aristocratic elite.

Despite McKay's focus on community, Banjo sits apart from the others in this episode, highlighting the echoes of the Circe episode where Odysseus is the only one not turned into an animal. Banjo 'watch[es] the *melée* in anger and contempt' and berates his friends afterwards for fulfilling the negative expectations of a white officer on the ship: 'I take life easy like you-all, but I ain't nevah gwine to lay mahself wide open to any insulting cracker of a white man'. Cementing this separateness, the chapter ends with a kind of prefiguration of the novel's close, in which Banjo, together with Ray, will set off on new adventures. This onward movement of the novel's ending, a centrifugal trajectory rather than the *Odyssey's* centripetal one, was also prefigured by the reappearance of *Home to Harlem's* Jake in *Banjo's* Marseilles, revealing the earlier novel's title to have been something of a misnomer, and reshaping the very concept of 'home'.

As *Banjo's* subtitle indicates, McKay's novel rejects the idea of a teleological narrative and, in doing so, celebrates the creation of new diasporic communities of the kind he depicts in Marseilles. It is diaspora ever in process that McKay advocates, a vagabond lifestyle that had appealed to him since the moment he left Kansas State College and that he portrays in *Banjo* – a black internationalism that is neither static nor homogenous. As Stuart Hall argues, diaspora should be understood not as being about a 'return' (which he regards as 'the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of "ethnicity"'); rather, diaspora identities are 'those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference'.¹⁷ Seen in this light, McKay's 'plotless' novel acquires another dimension: its episodic nature, in which even encounters are repeated with difference, becomes an exemplification of diaspora's constant transformation that embraces difference, while its Signifying on Homer, 'repeating with difference' the ancient narrative, contributes to its exploration and lauding of diaspora identity.

Like the term 'black internationalism' (*internationalisme noir*), coined by the Martiniquan intellectual Jane Nardal in the same year that *Home to Harlem* was published,¹⁸ McKay's *Banjo* had a significant influence on the thinkers of the *négritude* movement, particularly its trio of 'founding fathers': Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas and Léopold Sédar Senghor.¹⁹ Ten years later, Aimé Césaire would write his own Odyssean narrative in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, further evidencing the imbrication of black internationalism, *négritude* and the discipline of classics, not least as a result of the latter's adoption by imperialists and the former's anticolonial impetus. Yet despite being a profound meditation on transnationalism, *Banjo* simultaneously critiques the radical black internationalist movement,²⁰ as is emphasised by its characters' refusal

to participate in the racist, capitalist structures of wage labour and their dispersal at the end, with the novel rejecting a narrative of permanent community and seamless collectivity, and instead offering what Edwards labels ‘vagabond internationalism’.²¹ So the novel ends, as does Homer’s *Odyssey*, with another journey on the horizon. But if McKay had an Odysseus figure in mind at that moment, it is one more akin to the eponymous hero of Tennyson’s Victorian poem, an ever-wandering Ulysses rather than Homer’s homeward-bound Odysseus.

Notwithstanding the difference in tone, Bernardine Evaristo’s 2001 verse-novel, *The Emperor’s Babe*, can be read as a kind of counterpart to McKay’s *Banjo*, depicting a diasporic community who – as in *Banjo* – live, love and write poetry and music together. But where *Banjo* is almost exclusively interested in its male characters, Evaristo centres women; where *Banjo* is set in McKay’s contemporary moment, *The Emperor’s Babe* is set in London at the turn of the third century CE, when Britain was ruled by Septimius Severus. And where McKay’s characters actively step outside capitalist structures, Evaristo’s teenage protagonist, Zuleika, whose parents migrated to Londinium from Sudan, is only too willing to take part in them given the opportunity:

we were partners in crime, banditos, renegades
she said there was more to life

than playing with friggin’ dolls, like causing
trouble and discovering what grown-ups

did in private without getting caught.
We were gonna steal from the rich,

give to the poor, keep seventy-five per cent
for ourselves and live in one of them mansions

with a thousand slaves feeding us cakes,
all time every day, but until such time . . .²²

The Emperor’s Babe reminds us that the roots of black internationalism can be traced back into antiquity, as can the existence of Black British people.²³ By drawing from the history of Roman Britain, the transhistorical and

transnational nature of Evaristo's work celebrates a dimension of British society that had been occluded by racist discourses. Like McKay, Evaristo riffs on Graeco-Roman antiquity to draw attention to its implication within colonialist systems as well as its potential to be interwoven with antiracist discourses.

Notes

- 1 McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 90.
- 2 Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 70.
- 3 McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 9.
- 4 Du Bois, 'Two novels'.
- 5 Du Bois, 'Two novels'.
- 6 Chalk, "'Sensible of being étrangers'".
- 7 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 210.
- 8 McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 188.
- 9 James, *The Black Jacobins*, xviii.
- 10 McKay, *Banjo*, 180.
- 11 Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*. Gates explains, 'Writers Signify upon each other's texts by rewriting the received textual tradition. This can be accomplished by the revision of tropes. This sort of Signifyin(g) revision serves, if successful, to create a space for the revising text. It also alters fundamentally the way we read the tradition, by defining the relation of the text at hand to the tradition.' (135)
- 12 See Rankine, *Ulysses in Black*; Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*; and McConnell, *Black Odysseys*.
- 13 *Odyssey* 11.51–83.
- 14 See, for example, the review by Anon. in the *Times Literary Supplement* (27 June 1929).
- 15 McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 190.
- 16 *Odyssey* 17.409–76.
- 17 Hall, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', 235.
- 18 Nardal, 'Internationalisme noir'.
- 19 Jones, 'With *Banjo* by my bed'; Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*.
- 20 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 210.
- 21 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 187–240.
- 22 Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 9–10.
- 23 Fryer, *Staying Power* has been cited by Evaristo as an influence.

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Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's *Sourires et larmes d'une jeunesse* (*Smiles and tears of youth*, 1937)

'Uprooting?' and 'Images of Life', essays from *Sourires et larmes d'une jeunesse* (Hanoi: Éditions de la Revue indochinoise, 1937). Translated from the French by Kelly Nguyen. Commentary by Kelly Nguyen.

'Uprooting?'

Nowhere is there a spectacle as curiously paradoxical as the one in Vietnam. Everywhere else, leaders of the people and public opinion agree in praising the virtues of youth. Youth is seen with the greatest regard. It is exalted for its instincts for honour and sacrifice, its disinterestedness, its generosity. It is entrusted with the hopes of the race and the future of the nation. Never, in fact, has youth been more tested than in these disastrous times. It bears on its shoulders the heavy burden of the crisis. Having worked well, suffered well, it believes it can reach the end of its ordeals and occupy the place to which it is entitled and where it is sure to render useful services. But now contrite faces announce that there is no work for it. Thrown into unemployment, into forced idleness dangerous to a peace of mind, it no longer knows what to do with its vigour, its intelligence, its knowledge, its will. The present hours are hopeless, the future hours are hardly less so. Sick with anxiety, painfully penetrated by the precariousness of present existence, suffering in body and mind, youth spins on the spot, stomps, silently gnaws at the bit. It could become a public hazard. The most intelligent nations have understood that it is necessary to spare it. In the absence of real food with which to satisfy its legitimate appetites, hollow bones are thrown

at it, high-sounding words: honour, devotion, sacrifice. To remedy the disorder of the hearts and the inactivity of the muscles, old ideals have been brought out. National ideologies galvanise the fascist and Hitlerian youths, while on the borders of Europe, the Marxist mystique loves the Soviet youth. This policy is smart and clever.

The same cannot be said of the one used towards Vietnamese youth. Vietnamese youth is incriminated for insolence and pretension, vanity, the tendency for unintelligent mimicry, contempt for customs and traditions, the pride of a semi-intellectual, the fiery exaltation which does not intend to be reasoned with, and even the appetite for learning and discussion. That such reproaches are deserved, we will not deny. But are these not the faults not of a youth, but of youth itself? On the other hand, is this policy of systematic denigration really appropriate? At the very moment when we ask this starving youth, deprived of subsistence, for the most painful sacrifices, should we also attack it so harshly with useless harassment, adding to the tortures of hunger which it endures?

But we are not content with just criticising. We also aim to justify our critiques. We have constructed a theory that tends to become, if we do not stop its ascent, one of those common premises that we serve at all official banquets and to travellers who land in Indochina.

The doctrine that we are attacking is placed under the honorary patronage of Maurice Barrès: an admirable title to enjoy the audience of the learned. If we are to believe the skillful doctors who defend it, the whole moral crisis from which Vietnamese youth suffers comes from an 'uprooting'. This youth was once nourished by the fine essence of Confucian culture, which for many centuries permeated the oriental soul. It learnt from a refined social education, respect for age, politeness of manners, gentleness of manners, a philosophy of serenity.

Traditional morality imposed the dogma of filial piety: youth was prescribed to draw inspiration from it in the slightest advances of intellectual, sentimental and active life. Now, behold, France has overthrown the learned and ingenious edifice of this civilisation. The old Confucian framework of society has crumbled under the thrust of the new principles. Among these ruins and in the midst of this mess, young minds would feel helpless and lonely. Having its ties broken, its roots cut off from the original environment, and consequently no longer receiving the spiritual nourishment it needed, it would try to live by makeshift means. It would stammer

in a History that is not its own the famous words: 'Our ancestors, the Gauls ...' Who will laugh the most at this? It seems to be a big mistake to dispense to Vietnamese brains a teaching designed for use by French brains. Drunk on a new science whose depth it is far from probing and whose vastness it is far from traversing, whose scope and meaning it ignores, Vietnamese youth would become insolent and pretentious. All the evil came from 'uprooting'. The mistake – to continue the comparison between men and trees – was to transplant Vietnamese minds from the Confucian terrain to the Western terrain.

Such is the thesis put forward to explain the moral crisis of Vietnamese youth. It is likely to capture the imagination of the public. Superficial minds subscribe to it without reservation. Barresian prestige takes effect. The formula for uprooting, seductive and convenient, is experiencing incredible success. It's time to put a stop to it. What credence can and should we give to a theory that rests on a metaphor? We are talking about uprooting. But has it first been proven that man is a plant? The whole question is there.

However, we rise up against such assimilation. Man has no roots: he has feet. It is unfair to think that even in the time of Barrès, we blindly accepted 'truths' without discussion. There is between the vegetal and the man all the difference which separates the immobile from the mobile, the unconscious from the conscious. Man cannot uproot himself because he is not rooted. He moves by himself. If by roots we mean the moral ties that connect him to a land, to a horizon, the matter could be acceptable. It is no longer so when it is claimed that these attachments are as necessary to his existence as roots are to a tree. Indeed, the roots only maintain the physiological life of the tree, the only life attributed to it. On the contrary, the ties of man relate only to his spiritual life. Severed, his physical life will nevertheless continue as before. Nor will his spiritual life be seriously affected, since man carries with him, within him, his entire spiritual universe. It is not necessary that he always have under his feet the ground that carried him, before his eyes the horizon that saw him born, to hear the voices of the dead, the lesson of the past, and to draw inspiration from its traditions. In such conditions, is it permissible to speak of the uprooting of man?

But let us grant the defenders of the theory that man can uproot himself. Let us make this supreme concession to them. Well, they will still have to demonstrate that uprooting is harmful, contrary

to human psychology, to the modern metaphysics of life, to the teachings of history. However, such a demonstration is, strictly speaking, impossible.

How can we deny that the need to change is at the bottom of human nature, that man cannot stand immobility, this detestable expression of monotony and of boredom? This eternal psychology of man is in accordance with the modern metaphysics of life. Life is movement, perpetual flow, perpetual becoming. It is not only mobility, but also flexibility, originality, novelty, adaptation. Integrated into the current of life, man does not remain a dead weight that allows himself to be carried away. He reacts, he tries to understand, to take control. To claim that uprooting is contrary to human nature is to forget that life flows onward and that man adapts. But uprooting not only appears in this way as a human need and a necessity of life, it is also a condition of progress. History is there to prove to us that all human civilisation is more or less 'uprooted'. The Greek miracle did not exist: Greece borrowed from Egypt and the East. The whole evolution of humanity is but a series of borrowing and lending, an uninterrupted exchange, a continual uprooting. The relationship between man and land is not compulsory. This is so true that the inhabitants of deprived regions marched to conquer better soils. The migrations of peoples cannot be explained otherwise.

How in such conditions, and to return to the precise problem which concerns us, can one accuse uprooting of having been the cause of the moral crisis from which Vietnamese youth suffers? This mutation of cultures from which we wanted to trace the evil is far from having pernicious effects. And it is especially important to note that uprooting does not exist in the cultural domain. For in the end, what is culture if not the need to impose on nature an intellectual and moral discipline, faith in the dignity and the greatness of man, and consequently, the concern to rely on what is most noble – his mind, his heart – and to go as far as possible in the direction of humanity and charity? Of course, the modes of culture may differ. But culture remains the same. The best proof of this is the understanding between all cultivated people, whatever their race or civilisation. Culture is a prosperous Freemasonry: its character is to be universal, 'catholic'. Transcending the frontiers of nations, the colours of races, the divergences of civilisations, it brings together all beings who share the same thought of confidence in man and in the destiny of humanity. We do not change culture, but simply

the mode of culture. All roads nevertheless lead to the same goal. Certainly, at first, you can be distraught by the novelty of the path, but you end up getting used to it by adapting to it. Vietnamese youth, diverted from the Confucian way, is currently walking on a French road. However, the same roundabout is assigned to him as the end of his efforts. It is difficult to understand, therefore, how a simple modification in the itinerary can have such disastrous effects as it is claimed.

In truth, France has made no mistake in providing the same teaching in the Metropolis and in the Colony, in wanting to 'bring unity to everything'. This search for unity, through which manifests the effort of the human spirit to dominate the diversity of reality, is necessary and advantageous. France has conceived the admirable ambition of uniting all the inhabitants of the Empire – citizens or subjects – with the bonds of culture. It has, to its credit, dared to believe in the identity of man and the unity of the spirit, regardless of ethnic differences. Reality has shown that such hopes are bold but not chimerical. Currently, hotbeds of French spirituality are blazing all over the world. From the utmost edges of Africa to the farthest reaches of Asia, minds share the same love of Descartes and Racine. The same needs for clarity in thought and generosity in the heart are implanted. To witness such a moving spectacle of such radiance of the spirit, one would have to go back to the remote times of imperial Rome. As in ancient times, Paris has become *caput urbis*, the head of a French world.¹ France is well deserving of the Latin tradition, which is that of universality. The least self-serving politics nevertheless produces obviously useful results. By seeking to satisfy idealistic appetites by affirming its faith in the civilising mission that it has assigned to itself, France has at the same time managed to establish its domination in a lasting way. The best imperialist conquest is still that of the mind. We bind man more by culture than by force. And what a service France renders to the West! Let them be reassured, those who tremble for the destinies of European civilisation! France will save Europe: outposts of French civilisation, 'marches' of culture will defend European heritage against possible barbarism.

Let no one say that this French policy of the mind only benefits the West. The East finds its advantages there. It profits from acquiring a new philosophy of existence, a new vision of the world, a new way of living and thinking. It will be able to solve problems that it once

left unresolved for lack of knowing other ways of reasoning than those it was used to. It will be able to enrich its old heritage with new acquisitions without renouncing any of the former. It will be able to reconstruct the building of its civilisation, which has become uncomfortable, thanks to the knowledge of new materials and to the science of new architectures. No, France made no mistake in offering Vietnamese youth access to culture through French routes. It is not responsible for the moral crisis of this youth. In truth, this crisis should not inspire major concerns. It may only be a growth crisis; in any case, it is certainly an adaptation crisis. Appearing in the world just as the conflict of principles arises, the current Vietnamese youth is caught in a sort of whirlpool. Distraught, unable to cling to any solid raft, it floats adrift. It has to get out of the water, climb up a hill, control the situation, understand the chaos, and bring order to it. This is the price of its serenity. The work of adaptation is being done, the time for synthesis has begun. But as long as the effort to control lasts, uncertainty, indecision, disarray, worry, doubt, all these states which precede a great peace of mind will endure.

But this peace is still far from being achieved. Current times do not favour its advent. The pangs of hunger make it impossible to think about meditation, the mental crisis is coupled with a stomach crisis. We are not talking about this divorce between concept and reality, this difference between the real France and the image that Vietnamese youth has of it in the Colony.

And here we find the miracle of culture! If Vietnamese youth does not despair of France despite the disappointing appearances presented to it, it is because it has learnt that there exists beyond the seas, an eternal France, the one it approaches from Marseilles, the one it finds in the works of literature, in the memories of History. This thought arrests many despairs, curbs many discouragements.

'Images of life'

What to do with these lofty points of philosophy on which no human being can rest and these rules that exceed our use and our strength? I often see that we are offered images of life which neither the proposers nor the listeners have any hope of following or even desiring.

—Montaigne

There is a cemetery by the sea . . .

There is a cemetery by the sea. The poet usually comes there to distract his mind by the subtle play of ideas. He attentively follows the vicissitudes of the struggle between light and shadow, he listens to the dialogue between the wind and the waves. Descending into the depths of himself, he listens to the two voices that urge him, one to withdraw into solitude to keep himself *unique*, to revel in the powerful and pure joys of intellectual analysis, the other to plunge in the din of life and action, to be a man among men so as to be able to fall asleep one day in the slumber of the earth. Tormented by these contrary appeals, the poet hesitates. But the wind rises over the sea, dissipates his uncertainties and forces him to live.

Let us not bid farewell to our youth. But let us declare closed the time of experiences, of apprenticeships, of maturations. Of so many smiles and so many tears, something must remain: the testimony of a generation that has lived and who would like not to have lived in vain. From the eighteenth to the twenty-eighth year it is permissible to squander one's time and strength, one's intelligence and one's soul, to rub shoulders with madness, to delight in disorder, to entertain dangerous dreams. The reserves of life and ardour of which youth holds the privilege can and must be spent: failures teach lessons as useful as successes to the being who is still forming. Triumphs and defeats equally contribute to personal enrichment.

But here comes the time when we will have to ration our time and our strength. We can no longer persevere through smiles and tears, nor persist in going through new ordeals, for the sterile delight of knowledge. Not that we have the presumption to believe that we have experienced all the adventures, all the miseries, all the joys (who will ever dare to claim that?), but because, past a certain age, we know that it is no longer granted to man to conquer these riches again. Obligated to return to old intellectual and sentimental habits, we only have at our disposal the ability to go deeper into the past, to revel in acquired treasures. Perhaps we are encouraged to isolate ourselves in the ivory tower where we will retain either pride, disdain for the 'formless games of glory', the joy of believing ourselves 'unique', or even excessive modesty, distrust of ourselves and of our feeble abilities. But rather than walling ourselves in our solitude and our egoism, isn't it better to be among our fellow men, to courageously accept our place and our task, and to offer to all, in all humility, our musings and our aspirations, our ideas and our feelings? In exchange for what we receive from life and

from humanity, and to affirm our will to be grateful, we present the symbolic offering of the dreams and hopes we have formed to make life more beautiful and mortals more content. We certainly have the wisdom to tell ourselves, to excuse the smallness of the gift, that the sad trifles which we bring are nothing like the sparkling jewels which we would like to bring and which we should bring had we been born with a more powerful intelligence, a more sensitive soul, a more fervent heart. What does it matter? We must be judged by our intentions as well as by our actions. From then on, no longer bound by the consciousness of our unworthiness, we will murmur with the poet: 'The wind rises, we must try to live.'

How many problems call for our concern! Elsewhere, one suffers only from one disorder – from that which results from the moral and economic crisis. The remedy will consist of a rediscovered discipline of man and a lucid and conscious domination of the world. Here, the spirits moan of additional sufferings, of a confusion between two orders of values, of a disorder engendered by the interference of two civilisations of which it remains to determine the possibilities of understanding and agreement, to achieve the harmonious, beneficial synthesis. Caught in the middle of the whirlpool of contradictory ideas, heads turn and complain of being dizzy. It is important to cure it.

The current hour is that of youth. *'The feeble security of the end of the last century is over. The life of danger, the real life of the story comes back into its rights. Everything has become unstable. Now the only men who count are the ones who dare, who have the courage to take things as they are.'*² The crisis from which the world was painfully emerging was weighing on the Earth. Distraught nations were anxiously seeking their salvation. Resigned men were uselessly undergoing all sorts of sacrifices and privations. Old ideas have gone bankrupt. We are tired of compromises and transactions. We wish for the new in doctrines and the unknown on faces. We are ready, in these moments of agony, to experience the supreme remedies. The old conditions of success have changed: we no longer speak of experience, of balance, of wisdom, but of boldness, of speed, of decision. In the fight between the hare and the tortoise, it is the hare that triumphs this time, in accordance with common sense. Rising over the world is a wind of youth.

It is astonishing that in the extreme miseries in which we see it plunged, such considerable hopes are still founded on this youth.

So much grandeur in the midst of so much servitude invites reflection. However, there is nothing natural about it. This youth, from whom miracles are expected, has lived the most precious and fruitful experience: that of pain. Because it has suffered the trials of hunger, loneliness and death, it feels great and capable of creating greatness. It is proud of it, and for no treasure would it agree to change the crown of thorns adorning its temples for the crown of roses adorning its forehead in quieter times, in a better-balanced, more stable world. Never are the possibilities of youth greater than in times of anarchy. How beautiful it is to impose one's will on the world, to master things, to discipline beings according to the wishes of the spirit, to build or rebuild, to bring order out of chaos!

But it's not enough to be young to save the world. If youth wants to carry out its mission, it must begin first by saving itself! External disorder is only an expression, only an aspect of internal disorder. Order in the world will be reborn when order is restored to man. The reconstruction of the world therefore presupposes the prior reconstruction of man.

'Mephistopheles, a man will happen . . .'

So let's try to live. But life is a masterpiece. To achieve this, it takes a man. But nature only creates the possibilities of man. *Humanity* is not a gift but a target. We are not born a man, we become one. Since the double lessons of Hellenism and Christianity were taught, we know that humanity consists in a domestic peace between the body, the mind and the heart.

But it is not enough to have exercised one's body, fertilised one's mind, refined one's heart to realise in oneself the harmonious accord of natural gifts. A clear and lucid will, conscious of the desired ends and effective methods, must preside over this work of organisation. The experiences lived, the learning carried out, lead to invaluable treasures whose value must be appreciated and whose use chosen. Everything must serve the construction of man.

The great task is therefore to become a man, to establish an order within oneself, to impose a discipline on oneself, to direct the total activity of the being towards the stability of the inner balance. It is not enough to engage flesh, spirit and soul in the charming bonds of a love marriage. It is even more important to resolve this conflict between the East and the West which our youth painfully bears. With what delicate and complex assortment of virtues it is

necessary to arm oneself to triumph over such cruel difficulties! What intelligence and reason, finesse and judgement, attention and patience! With what impartiality, what loyalty, what courage it is necessary to examine oneself, to evaluate in oneself the riches of the Far East, to discern the Western treasures brought by culture, direct or indirect trade with Europe, to note in oneself the deficiencies, gaps. From these introspections, practised with rigour, there will emerge an overall vision of the being with his strengths and weaknesses.

However, if we have the audacity to proclaim it, we will say that we feel a painful imbalance within us. We have always ignored this *summetria* in which Plato summed up his wisdom.³ Of the human trinity, our Confucius only cultivated the soul. Our morality excels in exquisite delicacies. The monuments of our literature and our legislation attest that our psychology possesses the secret of subtleties and the art of nuances. Perhaps we can even, with some plausibility, reproach our politeness for taking pleasure to the extreme in the deceptive game of appearances, and our hearts for delighting in the excessive and almost morbid refinement of feelings. And indeed, it almost always happens that we lose sight of the individual and collective value of these essential virtues of simplicity and sincerity. A greater frankness will give, in our Far Eastern societies, more ease, intimacy and charm to the relationship between beings.

But it would be a pity to ruin this strong moral culture which establishes our greatness and confers upon us some sort of flattering distinction. Let us affirm with fierce intransigence our contempt for vain preciosity and ridiculous sentimentality, but let us publish our love for true elegance which is that of gestures as much as that of the heart.

However, if we retain the soul's traditional pre-eminence, it will be important to raise the body from the thousand-year-old disdain to which Confucian thought has condemned it. In their desperate race towards idealism, most civilised peoples tend to exaggerate, casting blame on the '*inferior*' parts of humans that are considered to be major obstacles to the emancipation of the soul. Only the Greeks, whose refined aesthetic sense allowed them to discover splendours, were able to restore dignity to the body. They understood that so much harmony and proportion, life and grace, can constitute a fruitful source of beauty and art, music and poetry.

Greek philosophy led to this same discovery. A penetrating sense of the concrete, a judicious need for realism, led the thinkers of Hellas to observe the primordial role that the body plays in the economy of being, a certain influence that it exerts on the activities of the moral world. Loyally, they therefore proclaimed the need to recognise one's rights and to include corporeal culture in their pedagogy. We read in Xenophon these significant lines:

Know well that in no other struggle, in no act of life, will you have to repent for having exercised your body; indeed in all the actions that men do, the body has its uses and in all the uses where we employ it, it is essential that it be constituted as best as possible.⁴

Human balance, according to Greek thought, presupposes an architecture of all the elements that make up our being, or better yet, their intimate and tender communion. The peace of the soul, the vivacity of the spirit, the suppleness of the body, by combining their effects, bring about that state of harmonious and gentle plenitude which is called happiness.

This sensational teaching of Hellenism was forgotten by Europe itself during Christian times. It was necessary to wait until it was again heard and followed, for the Renaissance to work its miracle. And even in spite of that, in the centuries which followed the sixteenth, one felt that the precious conquests of the Greek spirit were accompanied by a precarious destiny which delivered them up to the mercy of the smallest events. Be that as it may, the East never understood the meaning of the body and consequently, the philosophy of human and earthly life. Lost in metaphysical dreams or in moral ideologies, it neglected to ponder this essential theme. It is up to our youth, in constructing the new man, to restore its greatness on a corporeal level.

To whom, therefore, did Paul Valéry give this advice: *O great soul, it is time that you form a body?*

The mind remains. Our mind is a field where only the flowers of rhetoric grow. Chinese culture has given us a taste for digressions and subtleties. There are charming digressions and exquisite subtleties. But it is heartbreaking to cling eternally to the artificial interplay of ideas and the vain music of phrases. We believe that poetry is only the shock of a sensibility and philosophy the whim of

an imagination. We are infatuated with a certain romantic literature with unhealthy scents. We turn our backs on youth, body, life. We adore autumn with its distinct melancholy, winter rains with their nostalgic song. Cheerfulness seems impure to us, we prefer aristocratic sadness. Our people are there, however, who could teach us useful lessons of will, courage, activity, irony, invigorating joy. But no! Lacking guidance, our mind loses its way with wretched habits. Our reason atrophies from the inaction to which we condemn it. We have not contracted this acute disease of precision from which Monsieur Teste suffers. We disdain order, clarity, simplicity. We do not understand the beauty of the learned achievements of logic and architecture. A Greek temple, a Latin triumphal arch, a Gothic cathedral, the geometry of Euclid, the law of Rome, the philosophy of Descartes, the poetry of Boileau, a symphony by Beethoven, a drama by Wagner, a statue by Michelangelo, a painting by Da Vinci, with all the intelligence and *technique* they imply, appear absolutely foreign to our genius. Between the West and the East, there is all the difference that separates the constructed from the given, conscious and lucid reason from capricious and uncertain chance, patient talent from fortuitous genius, culture from nature, the spirit of geometry from the mind of finesse.

What is there to say except that our youth must acquire this sense of life and of man, this cult of order and clarity, this submission to reason, this passion for logic, this spirit of geometry? Now, where better to do this than on the very shores of the Mediterranean, between Athens and Rome, under this chosen sky where Europe has conquered the titles of its greatness? It is therefore by learning about the Mediterranean that our youth will have to start their intellectual culture over again.

Thanks to the maintenance of the traditional moral culture, to the adoption of the new disciplines of body and mind, our youth will finally discover this notion of *man* that Aldous Huxley defined in luminous terms:

To be a complete, balanced man is a difficult undertaking, but the only one available to us. No one asks us to be anything other than a man. A man, do you understand. Neither angel nor demon. Man is a being who walks delicately on a tightrope, with his intelligence, his conscience and all that is spiritual at one end of the pendulum and at the other end, the body, the instinct, all that that it has of

the unconscious, the earthly and the mysterious. In balance. And it's terribly difficult.⁵

* * *

Commentary by Kelly Nguyen

Nguyễn Mạnh Tường was born in Hanoi in 1909 and came of age in Vietnam during the French colonial period. He received an exclusively French education, first at the Collège Paul Bert and then at the prestigious Lycée Albert Sarraut in Vietnam, where he graduated with his baccalaureate degree at the age of 16. He then received a scholarship to study at the Université de Montpellier in France and by the time he was 22 years old, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường had obtained a bachelor's degree with four specialisations (French literature, Greek literature, Latin literature, and philology), a law degree and a doctorate in literature.

After his studies in France, he briefly returned to Vietnam for three months in 1932 before leaving again to travel throughout the Mediterranean. His purported reason for leaving was to evade political ramifications for refusing to serve in Emperor Bảo Đại's court. For the next five years, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường visited various countries around the Mediterranean, including France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Egypt, to learn about their cultures and histories. His travels resulted in four published works: *Sourires et larmes d'une jeunesse* (*Smiles and tears of youth*, 1937), *Construction de l'Orient – Pierres de France* (*Construction of the East – Building blocks from France*, 1937), *Construction de l'Orient – Apprentissage de la Méditerranée* (*Construction of the East – Teachings from the Mediterranean*, 1939) and *Le Voyage et le Sentiment* (*Journey and intention*, 1943). Throughout these works, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường meditated on the relationship between 'East' and 'West' – the tensions between the two, the fissures within each, as well as the possibilities among them. As Nguyễn Mạnh Tường described the objective of his works, 'Đúng ý của tôi là cung cấp cho công trường Việt Nam và châu Á những nguyên vật liệu xây dựng của văn minh châu Âu' (My intention is to provide Vietnamese and Asian sites of construction with the building materials of European civilisation).⁶ He would go on to write numerous more works, in both French and Vietnamese, that explored the supposed meeting of the 'East' and the 'West'. In his own words, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường writes,

The essential problem to which I have directed my entire intellectual life is that of the meeting between West and East, in opposition to the thesis of Rudyard Kipling who denies such possibility. I assign myself the task of assisting the mutual understanding of these two worlds, on the basis of which their meeting can take place. Each world has its own scale of values which sometimes conflict with one another. The meeting, on the basis of understanding, is accompanied by mutual aid between the two worlds in order to complete and shape themselves for the greater good of humanity.⁷

And yet, as I will discuss further in the essay, he fell short of facilitating this mutual comprehension due to his entrenched coloniality; he was unable to shake off the yoke of *la mission civilisatrice* (the civilising mission) – the imperial ideology that it was France’s messianic duty to spread its culture and values throughout the world. One can catch a glimpse of this coloniality at work in the earlier quotation in which Nguyễn Mạnh Tường aimed to bring the ‘building materials of European civilisation’ to ‘Vietnamese and Asian sites’, but not vice versa.

After his Mediterranean sojourn, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường returned to Vietnam, where he built a successful career in both law and education. During these years, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường’s political ideology shifted to become more and more anticolonialist. Despite his elite background, his French education and his affinity for European culture, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường supported the August Revolution and joined the resistance movement against French colonisation of Vietnam. He maintained, however, that he never joined the Việt Minh and certainly not the Việt Cộng. Instead, he aimed to maintain his political independence, to not be beholden to any political party or figure, and to instead champion a democracy that was truly by and for the people. His democratic ideals and his critique of communism would eventually catch up with him, however. In 1956, at the height of his career, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường gave his infamous speech criticising the brutal land reforms, entitled ‘La critique sur les Erreurs commises au cours de la Réforme Agraire au Việt-Nam’. This speech resulted in his effective excommunication, and he and his family were forced to live in social exile in Vietnam until his death in 1997.

During these four decades of excommunication, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường once again turned to the Mediterranean – specifically, the literature of Greek and Roman antiquity. He believed that the Western Classics provided lessons that were applicable to Vietnamese contexts, most notably in the way that literature could effectively address sociopolitical

issues. With this lofty goal in mind, he completed three works on Greek and Roman literature: *Aiskhylos (Eschyle) và Bi Kịch Cổ Đại Hy Lạp* (Aeschylus and ancient Greek tragedy, 1996), *Virgile, Nhà Thơ vĩ Đại Của Thời Kỳ La Mã Cổ Đại* (Virgil, great poet of the Roman Empire, 1996) and *Oresteia, Bộ Ba vở Kịch Cổ Đại Hy Lạp* (The Oresteia, ancient Greek tragedy trilogy, 1997). As can be gleaned from their titles, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường consciously decided to write these works in Vietnamese and not in French since his intended audience were the Vietnamese intelligentsia. He aimed to show them an alternative way of thinking to the communist ideology that had gripped Vietnam – a ‘Western’ way.

Through this quick snapshot of Nguyễn Mạnh Tường’s life, we can see the influence that his French education, steeped in the Graeco-Roman Classics, had on his intellectual development and his intercultural identity. He belonged to a generation of Vietnamese intellectuals that experienced a marked break from the Chinese mandarinal system that had dominated Vietnam for millennia. With the mandarinal system dismantled by the French and replaced with a new education system that featured European fields of knowledge, this generation experienced an intellectual severance from previous generations and a cultural disorientation within their colonial milieu. Within this generation, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường belonged to an even smaller, more privileged category: the Vietnamese elite, who went through the French education system meant for the children of French colonials rather than enrolling in the ‘Franco-Indigenous’ schools, which had been designed for the children of Vietnamese subjects. In this way, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường received an education on a par with that in the metropole rather than one that had been devised to create inferior civil servants for the French Empire. For Nguyễn Mạnh Tường and his peers, the Chinese Classics, on which the mandarinal examinations had been based, were replaced with the Graeco-Roman Classics. In fact, the Graeco-Roman Classics were so central to a French education at that time that students had to pass entrance examinations in Greek and Latin in order to enter the French lycées. The crucial detail here is that the only schools that taught Greek and Latin were French ones, which raises the question as to the gatekeeping role that Classics played in colonial education and society more broadly.

Caught between the false binary of East and West, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường and his generation were accused of being ‘uprooted’ from their cultural heritage due to their French education. He addresses this issue in the extract reproduced above, which consists of two essays from one of his earlier works, *Sourires et larmes d’une jeunesse*. As a whole, *Sourires* comprises 11 prose pieces and one poem that illustrate ‘le drame d’une

jeunesse qui se cherche' (the drama of a youth searching for itself) as 'ce conflit qui oppose l'Orient à l'Occident, elle l'a vécu dans les profondeurs mêmes de sa chair' (it experiences the conflict between the East and the West in the very depths of its flesh).⁸ As the title suggests, the first piece of the extract, 'Déracinement?', directly addresses this issue of 'uprootedness'.

The idea that a person can become *déraciné* – cut off from their ancestral roots – was popularised by Maurice Barrès in his novel of the same name. In his essay (reproduced above), Nguyễn Mạnh Tường argues against the concept of 'uprootedness', pithily claiming that 'l'homme n'a pas de racines: il a des pieds' (man has no roots: he has feet). He contends that uprootedness cannot exist in the cultural sphere because culture is a 'prosperous Freemasonry' that transcends nations and races to unite different peoples. To elaborate on this understanding of culture, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường calls upon the Greeks to explain the inevitability and necessity of intercultural connectivity. He depicts human progress as a series of cultural interactions in which, as people move, so too do their ideas and traditions. Nguyễn Mạnh Tường thus paints a picture in which Vietnam fits into a teleological 'evolution of humanity' as it borrows from France, which borrows from Rome, which in turn borrows from Greece, which ultimately borrows from Egypt and the Near East. The East and the West are therefore not in tension with each other in Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's rendition of human history, but rather complementary. Within this framework, Vietnamese people in French society are not uprooted, but rather are participating in a natural form of cultural development. By calling upon the authority and success of Greek culture, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường demonstrates that the so-called 'uprootedness' of people is essential, rather than counter, to human progress.

However, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's paradigm of human progress reproduces the ideology of *la mission civilisatrice*, the messianic belief that it is France's duty to spread its culture and civilisation to the world. For although Nguyễn Mạnh Tường champions cultural exchange, he limits his discussion to a one-way interaction, with knowledge flowing in one direction, from Europe to Vietnam. He claims that France's civilising mission is beneficial to both the East and the West: the West will be saved from *la barbarie* (barbarism), while the East will gain 'une nouvelle philosophie de l'existence, une nouvelle vision du monde, une nouvelle méthode de vivre et de penser' (a new philosophy of existence, a new vision of the world, a new way of living and thinking).

This begs the question of why Nguyễn Mạnh Tường would want to reinforce cultural imperialism. It is too simple an answer to assume

that he had internalised the oppression due to his French education. At this time, while he was not yet an anticolonialist, he did call for more rights and freedom for Vietnamese people. Straddling this middle ground between colonialism and nationalism, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường did not unwittingly adopt *la mission civilisatrice*, but rather adapted it for liberatory purposes. For example, he argues that ‘France has conceived the admirable ambition of uniting all the inhabitants of the Empire – citizens or subjects – with the bonds of culture. It has, to its credit, dared to believe in the identity of man and the unity of the spirit, regardless of ethnic differences.’ This aspect of universality is crucial to understanding why and how Nguyễn Mạnh Tường appropriated *la mission civilisatrice*. By this point in time, European empires had long been using so-called ‘race science’, which essentialised and categorised people according to supposedly biological traits, to justify their colonisation of non-White people. Through the universality of culture, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường argues that Vietnamese people should not be seen as colonial subjects who are inferior to their European counterparts, but as humans in equal standing, with the same ability and desires to achieve cultural advancement (on a Western rubric). Nguyễn Mạnh Tường even likens the French Empire to the Roman Empire, claiming that ‘la France a bien mérité de la tradition latine qui est celle de l’universalité’ (France is well deserving of the Latin tradition, which is that of universality). By referencing the Roman Empire, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường calls on the imperial rhetoric that the French Empire had inherited the Roman Empire, but cleverly spins it to his advantage: due to this inheritance, France is now charged with uniting disparate cultures into a universal one that is open to all peoples, regardless of race.

In the second essay reproduced above, entitled ‘Images de Vie’ (Images of life), Nguyễn Mạnh Tường expands on this argument by providing specific examples of how Classical antiquity could benefit Vietnamese people. For example, he turns to Plato’s concept of *summetria* to explain how Vietnamese people suffer from ‘un déséquilibre douloureux’ (a painful imbalance): Confucius’ teachings focus on cultivating the soul, neglecting the other two facets of ‘la trinité humaine’ (the human trinity): the body and the heart. Nguyễn Mạnh Tường’s nod to Plato refers to the discussion about beauty in the *Timaeus*, where Plato argues that for a living creature to be beautiful, it must be symmetrical – that is, well proportioned – and that the most critical of all symmetries is the one between the soul and body.⁹ According to Nguyễn Mạnh Tường, Confucian morals have contributed to excellence in literature and legislation, but by failing to understand the body, it is ‘perdu dans les rêves métaphysiques ou dans les idéologies morales’ (lost in metaphysical dreams or in moral

ideologies). As a result, the East does not understand ‘la philosophie de la vie humaine et terrestre’ (the philosophy of human and earthly life). On the other hand, the ancient Greeks were able to tap into their corporeal senses and to therefore develop meaningful philosophy. According to Nguyễn Mạnh Tường’s interpretation of ancient Greek thought, human balance requires a harmonious equilibrium between ‘la paix de l’âme, la vivacité de l’esprit, la souplesse du corps’ (peace of the soul, the vivacity of the spirit, the suppleness of the body). Nguyễn Mạnh Tường concludes by asserting that an education rooted in Graeco-Roman antiquity will provide order, clarity, reason and logic – all qualities that will help ground abstract Confucian teachings to Vietnamese reality. By learning how to interpret Confucian morality through the lens of Western thought, Vietnamese youth will therefore be able to reconcile the two systems of intellect and escape the ‘crise d’adaptation’ (crisis of adaptation) that plagues its generation.

Nguyễn Mạnh Tường thus invokes *la mission civilisatrice* to advocate not for the blending of East and West, but for the influence of the West on the East. His framework of universality necessitates the continuation of a colonial education system in which, regardless of whether the purpose is domination or integration, the result is indigenous cultural erasure. At the heart of this framework, then, is the belief that Western systems of knowledge are superior to Eastern ones. Western ones can stand on their own, the West having reached its cultural apex, while Eastern ones need the West to help usher them forward. Although Nguyễn Mạnh Tường tried to adapt *la mission civilisatrice* to promote equal rights for Vietnamese people, he ended up reinforcing cultural imperialism rooted in racist beliefs. His reliance on imperial ideologies therefore continues to restrict Vietnamese liberation to the colonial sphere.

Although he was trying to work within the colonial system rather than dismantle it, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường’s work was still ground-breaking for its time in that it not only showcased his mastery of Classical antiquity, a domain that had been systematically shut to Vietnamese colonial subjects, but also demonstrated how a Classical education could be used for liberatory purposes, however limited. Where his work fell short was in its adherence to the French imperial rhetoric that granted France, and the West more broadly, the inheritance of Greco-Roman antiquity and the cultural authority associated with it. The irony in this rhetoric is the simultaneous dependance on antiquity and modernity: simply put, the French Empire, due to its Classical inheritance and the supposed superior civilisation that that inheritance fostered, could and should

spread modernity to its colonies. But this symbiotic relationship between antiquity and modernity is eclipsing a third factor: coloniality.

Walter Mignolo, building on Aníbal Quijano's work, has asserted:

'Modernity' is a complex narrative whose point of origination was Europe; a narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, 'coloniality.' Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality'.¹⁰

As understood by Quijano, a 'coloniality of power' developed alongside the rise of American and European empires and depended on the social construct of 'race' as a means to stratify colonisers and colonised and justify colonialism.¹¹ Notably for our purposes, Quijano argues that what makes coloniality so pervasive is its 'colonization of the imagination of the dominated', which champions European culture as the 'universal cultural model'.¹² As we saw earlier, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường fell prey to this rhetoric as he, turning to antiquity with an eye towards modernity, championed the concept of universality. Since this concept of universality was fabricated by Western empires to colonise not only the bodies but also the minds of their subjects, it must be dismantled in order to escape coloniality. Quijano and Mignolo thus argue that, crucially, decoloniality must consist of replacing universality with 'pluriversality'.¹³ In other words, in order to achieve decoloniality, we must embrace different epistemologies outside Western empires and beyond the Global North. The key to social liberation, then, is not proving that we can engage with the dominant culture, but claiming our right to choose which cultures to engage with, when and how.

Analysing Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's work through the lens of pluriversality reveals both the contributions and the limitations of his engagement with the Classical tradition. On the one hand, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường recognised the structures of inequities that were manipulating the Classical tradition for imperial gains, namely racism and cultural imperialism, and he appropriated them to make a case for the equality of Vietnamese people. On the other hand, by working within the framework of colonialism, he contributed to the eclipsing and devaluing of Vietnamese culture and heritage. For while Nguyễn Mạnh Tường sought to make Classics more accessible to Vietnamese people in order to counter its exclusivity and disrupt the colonial hierarchy, he did so by championing the universality and superiority of the Graeco-Roman Classical tradition – even over the Sino-Vietnamese one that had formed

the backbone of Vietnamese society for over a thousand years. Indeed, although he tries to make a case for the importance of cultural hybridity by discussing the influence of ancient Egypt and the Near East on ancient Greece and Rome, these other cultures are only mentioned in service of ancient Greece and Rome, as precursors to these Classical (with a capital C) civilisations that have dominated the Western imagination of the ancient Mediterranean world. To take a pluriversal approach to Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's work, then, is to realise the power dynamics at play that caused this cultural eclipse and to bring to light the traditions, both ancient and modern, that have been relegated to the shadows.¹⁴ To take a pluriversal approach to the Classics, then, is to make available different systems of knowledge and, in so doing, to counter the historic privileging of the Graeco-Roman Classics.

Notes

- 1 It is curious that Nguyễn Mạnh Tường uses the phrase *caput urbis* instead of *caput mundi* here. Given his extensive training in Latin literature (as clearly evidenced in his later 1999 work examining the poetry of Virgil), it is hard to believe that this is simply a mistake rather than an intentional choice. He could be referencing *caput urbis* from Cicero's *Pro Milone* (90), in which case this would have more of a connotation of respecting law and order, rather than one of imperial power. And yet, Tường is clearly comparing French cultural imperialism with Roman cultural imperialism in this passage.
- 2 Spengler, *Années décisives*.
- 3 Plato, *Timaeus* 87c–90d.
- 4 Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.12.5. Translated from the French by Kelly Nguyen.
- 5 Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, 478.
- 6 Nguyễn, 'Kỷ niệm về thầy Nguyễn Mạnh Tường'.
- 7 Nguyễn, *Un Excommunié*, 329. Translated from the French by Kelly Nguyen.
- 8 Nguyễn, *Sourires et larmes d'une jeunesse*, 9.
- 9 Plato, *Timaeus* 87c–90d.
- 10 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 3.
- 11 Quijano, 'Coloniality and modernity/rationality', 171.
- 12 Quijano, 'Coloniality and modernity/rationality', 169–70.
- 13 Quijano, 'Coloniality and modernity/rationality', 177–8; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.
- 14 In my forthcoming monograph on Vietnamese classical reception, I read Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's collection in terms of how the fictions and essays are in tension with, rather than in support of, each other. I argue that this unintended tension creates cracks within Nguyễn Mạnh Tường's argument for the universality and superiority of Graeco-Roman antiquity, which ultimately causes it to crumble.

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Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939)

Extract from volume 23 in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964). Translated from the German by James Strachey. Commentary by Richard Armstrong, Miriam Leonard and Daniel Orrells.

To deprive a people of the man whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons is not a thing to be gladly or carelessly undertaken, least of all by someone who is himself one of them. But we cannot allow any such reflection to induce us to put the truth aside in favour of what are supposed to be national interests; and, moreover, the clarification of a set of facts may be expected to bring us a gain in knowledge.

The man Moses, who set the Jewish people free, who gave them their laws and founded their religion, dates from such remote times that we cannot evade a preliminary enquiry as to whether he was a historical personage or a creature of legend. If he lived, it was in the thirteenth, though it may have been in the fourteenth, century before Christ. We have no information about him except from the sacred books of the Jews and their traditions as recorded in writing. Although a decision on the question thus lacks final certainty, an overwhelming majority of historians have nevertheless pronounced in favour of the view that Moses was a real person and that the Exodus from Egypt associated with him did in fact take place. It is justly argued that the later history of the people of Israel would be incomprehensible if this premise were not accepted. Indeed, science to-day has become altogether more circumspect and handles traditions far more indulgently than in the early days of historical criticism.

[. . .]

Another possibility is opened to us by a remarkable event in the history of the Egyptian religion, an event which has only lately been recognized and appreciated. It remains possible that the religion which Moses gave to his Jewish people was nevertheless his own – that it was an Egyptian religion, though not the Egyptian religion.

In the glorious Eighteenth Dynasty, under which Egypt first became a world power, a young Pharaoh came to the throne in about the year 1375 B.C. To begin with he was called, like his father, Amenophis (IV), but later he changed his name and not only his name. This king set about forcing a new religion on his Egyptian subjects – a religion which ran contrary to their thousands-of-years-old traditions and to all the familiar habits of their lives. It was a strict monotheism, the first attempt of the kind, so far as we know, in the history of the world, and along with the belief in a single god religious intolerance was inevitably born, which had previously been alien to the ancient world and remained so long afterwards. The reign of Amenophis, however, lasted for only seventeen years. Very soon after his death in 1358 B.C., the new religion was swept away, and the memory of the heretic king was proscribed. What little we know of him is derived from the ruins of the new royal capital which he built and dedicated to his god and from the inscriptions in the rock tombs adjacent to it. Whatever we can learn about this remarkable and, indeed, unique personality is deserving of the highest interest.

Every novelty must have its preliminaries and preconditions in something earlier. The origins of Egyptian monotheism can be traced back a little way with some certainty. For a considerable time, tendencies had been at work among the priesthood of the sun temple at On (Heliopolis) in the direction of developing the idea of a universal god and of emphasizing the ethical side of his nature. Ma'at, the goddess of truth, order and justice, was a daughter of the sun god Re'. During the reign of Amenophis III, the father and predecessor of the reformer, the worship of the sun god had already gained a new impetus probably in opposition to Amun of Thebes, who had become too powerful. A very ancient name of the sun god, Aten or Atum, was brought into fresh prominence, and the young king found in this Aten religion a movement ready to hand, which he did not have to be the first to inspire but of which he could become an adherent.

The political conditions in Egypt had begun at this time to exercise a lasting influence on the Egyptian religion. As a result of the military exploits of the great conqueror, Tuthmosis III, Egypt had become a world power: the empire now included Nubia in the south, Palestine, Syria and a part of Mesopotamia in the north. This imperialism was reflected in religion as universalism and monotheism. Since the Pharaoh's responsibilities now embraced not only Egypt but Nubia and Syria as well, deity too was obliged to abandon its national limitation and, just as the Pharaoh was the sole and unrestricted ruler of the world known to the Egyptians, this must also apply to the Egyptians' new deity. Moreover, with the extension of the empire's frontiers, it was natural that Egypt would become more accessible to foreign influences; some of the royal wives were Asiatic princesses, and it is possible that direct incitements to monotheism even made their way in from Syria.

Amenophis never denied his adherence to the sun cult of On. In the two Hymns to the Aten which have survived in the rock tombs, and which were probably composed by him himself, he praises the sun as the creator and preserver of all living things both inside and outside Egypt with an ardour which is not repeated till many centuries later, in the Psalms in honour of the Jewish god Yahweh. He was not content, however, with this astonishing anticipation of the scientific discovery of the effect of solar radiation. There is no doubt that he went a step further: that he did not worship the sun as a material object but as the symbol of a divine being whose energy was manifested in its rays.

We should not, however, be doing justice to the king if we regarded him merely as an adherent or promoter of an Aten religion already in existence before his time. His activity was a far more energetic intervention. He introduced something new, which for the first time converted the doctrine of a universal god into monotheism – the factor of exclusiveness. In one of his hymns, he declares expressly: 'O thou sole God, beside whom there is no other!' And we must not forget that in assessing the new doctrine a knowledge of its positive contents is not enough: its negative side is almost equally important – a knowledge of what it rejects. It would be a mistake, too, to suppose that the new religion was completed at a single blow and sprang to life fully armed, like Athene out of the head of Zeus. Everything suggests, rather, that in the course of the reign of Amenophis it increased little by little to ever greater

clarity, consistency, harshness and intolerance. It is likely that this development came about under the influence of the violent opposition to the king's reform which arose among the priests of Amun. In the sixth year of the reign of Amenophis this antagonism had reached such a pitch that the king changed his name, of which the proscribed name of the god Amun formed a part. Instead of 'Amenophis' he now called himself 'Akhenaten'. But it was not only from his own name that he expunged that of the detested god: he erased it too from every inscription – even where it occurred in the name of his father, Amenophis III. Soon after changing his name Akhenaten abandoned the Amun-dominated city of Thebes and built himself a new royal capital lower down the river, which he named Akhetaten (the horizon of the Aten). Its ruined site is now known as Tell el-'Amarna.

The persecution by the king fell most harshly upon Amun, but not on him alone. Throughout the kingdom temples were closed, divine service forbidden, temple property confiscated. Indeed, the king's zeal went so far that he had the ancient monuments examined in order to have the word 'god' obliterated in them where it occurred in the plural. It is not to be wondered at that these measures taken by Akhenaten provoked a mood of fanatical vindictiveness among the suppressed priesthood and unsatisfied common people, and this was able to find free expression after the king's death. The Aten religion had not become popular; it had probably remained restricted to a narrow circle surrounding the king's person. Akhenaten's end remains veiled in obscurity. We hear of a few short-lived, shadowy successors from his own family. His son-law, Tut'ankhaten, was already compelled to return to Thebes and to replace the name of the god Aten in his name by that of Amun. There followed a period of anarchy till in 1350 B.C. a general, Haremhab, succeeded in restoring order. The glorious Eighteenth Dynasty was at an end and simultaneously its conquests in Nubia and Asia were lost. During this gloomy interregnum the ancient religions of Egypt were re-established. The Aten religion was abolished, Akhenaten's royal city was destroyed and plundered and his memory proscribed as that of a criminal.

It is with a particular purpose that we shall now emphasize a few points among the negative characteristics of the Aten religion. In the first place, everything to do with myths, magic and sorcery is excluded from it. In the next place, the manner in which the sun-god

was represented was no longer, as in the past, by a small pyramid and a falcon, but – and this seems almost prosaic – by a round disk with rays proceeding from it, which end in human hands. In spite of all the exuberant art of the Amarna period, no other representation of the sun-god – no personal image of the Aten – has been found, and it may confidently be said that none will be found. Lastly, there was complete silence about the god of the dead, Osiris, and the kingdom of the dead. Neither the hymns nor the tomb inscriptions have any knowledge of what perhaps lay closest to the hearts of the Egyptians. The contrast to the popular religion cannot be more clearly demonstrated.

I should now like to venture on this conclusion: if Moses was an Egyptian and if he communicated his own religion to the Jews, it must have been Akhenaten's, the Aten religion.

I have already compared the Jewish religion with the popular religion of Egypt and shown the opposition between them. I must now make a comparison between the Jewish and the Aten religions in the expectation of proving their original identity. This, I am aware, will present no easy task. Thanks to the vindictiveness of the priests of Amun we may perhaps know too little of the Aten religion. We only know the Mosaic religion in its final shape, as it was fixed by the Jewish priesthood some eight hundred years later in post-exilic times. If, in spite of this unfavourable state of the material, we find a few indications which favour our hypothesis, we shall be able to set a high value on them.

There would be a short path to proving our thesis that the Mosaic religion was none other than that of the Aten – namely, if we had a confession of faith, a declaration. But I fear we shall be told that this path is closed to us. The Jewish confession of faith, as is well known, runs: 'Schema Jisroel Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echod'. ['Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord (*Deuteronomy* 6.4)]. If it is not merely by chance that the name of the Egyptian Aten (or Atum) sounds like the Hebrew word Adonai [lord] and the name of the Syrian deity Adonis, but if it is due to a *primaeval* kinship of speech and meaning, then the Jewish formula might be translated thus: 'Hear, o Israel: our god Aten (Adonai) is a sole god'. Unfortunately, I am totally incompetent to answer this question, and I have been able to find but little about it in the literature of the subject. But in all probability, this is making things too easy for us. In any case we shall have to come back once more to the problems concerning the name of the god.

The similarities as well as the differences between the two religions are easily discernible without giving us much light. Both of them were forms of a strict monotheism, and we shall be inclined a priori to trace back what they had in common to this fundamental characteristic. Jewish monotheism behaved in some respects even more harshly than the Egyptian: for instance, in forbidding pictorial representations of any kind. The most essential difference is to be seen (apart from their gods' names) in the fact that the Jewish religion was entirely without sun-worship, in which the Egyptian one still found support. When we were making the comparison with the popular religion of Egypt, we had an impression that, apart from the fundamental contrast, a factor of intentional contradiction played a part in the difference between the two religions. This impression seems to be justified if now, in making the comparison, we replace the Jewish religion by the Aten religion which, as we know, was developed by Akhenaten in deliberate hostility to the popular one. We were rightly surprised to find that the Jewish religion would have nothing to do with the next world or a life after death, though a doctrine of that kind would have been compatible with the strictest monotheism. But this surprise vanishes if we turn back from the Jewish to the Aten religion and suppose that this refusal was taken over from it, since for Akhenaten it was a necessity in his fight against the popular religion, in which Osiris, the god of the dead, played a greater part, perhaps, than any god in the upper world. The agreement between the Jewish and the Aten religions on this important point is the first strong argument in favour of our thesis.

[. . .]

No historian can regard the biblical account of Moses and the Exodus as anything other than a pious piece of imaginative fiction, which has recast a remote tradition for the benefit of its own tendentious purposes. The original form of that tradition is unknown to us; we should be glad to discover what the distorting purposes were, but we are kept in the dark by our ignorance of the historical events. The fact that our reconstruction leaves no room for a number of show-pieces in the Bible story, such as the ten plagues, the passage of the Red Sea and the solemn law-giving on Mount Sinai – this does not disconcert us. But we cannot treat it as a matter of indifference if we find ourselves in contradiction to the findings of the sober historical researches of the present day.

These modern historians, of whom we may take Eduard Meyer (1906)¹ as a representative, agree with the Bible story on one decisive point. They too are of opinion that the Jewish tribes, which later developed into the people of Israel, took on a new religion at a certain point of time. But in their view, this did not take place in Egypt or at the foot of a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula, but in a certain locality known as Meribah-Kadesh, an oasis distinguished by its wealth of springs and wells in the stretch of country south of Palestine, between the eastern exit from the Sinai Peninsula and the western border of Arabia. There they took over the worship of a god Yahweh, probably from the neighbouring Arabian tribe of Midianites. It seems likely that other tribes in the vicinity were also followers of this god.

Yahweh was unquestionably a volcano god. Now, as is well known, Egypt is without volcanoes and the mountains of the Sinai Peninsula have never been volcanic; on the other hand, there are volcanoes which may have been active till recent times along the western border of Arabia, so one of these mountains must have been the Sinai-Horeb which was regarded as the home of Yahweh. In spite of all the revisions to which the Biblical story was subjected, the original picture of the god's character can, according to Eduard Meyer, be reconstructed: he was an uncanny, bloodthirsty demon who went about by night and shunned the light of day.

[. . .]

Efforts to see in Moses a figure that goes beyond the priest of Kadesh, and to confirm the grandeur with which tradition glorifies him, have not ceased even since Eduard Meyer. [. . .] Then, in 1922, Ernst Sellin made a discovery which affected our problem decisively. He found in the Prophet Hosea (in the second half of the eighth century B.C.) unmistakable signs of a tradition to the effect that Moses, the founder of their religion, met with a violent end in a rising of his refractory and stiff-necked people, and that at the same time the religion he had introduced was thrown off. This tradition is not, however, restricted to Hosea; it reappears in most of the later Prophets, and indeed, according to Sellin, became the basis of all the later Messianic expectations. At the end of the Babylonian captivity a hope grew up among the Jewish people that the man who had been so shamefully murdered would return from the dead and would lead his remorseful people, and perhaps not them alone, into the kingdom of lasting bliss. The obvious connection of this with the destiny of the founder of a later religion does not concern us here.

Once again, I am not, of course, in a position to judge whether Sellin has interpreted the passages from the Prophets correctly. But if he is right, we may attribute historical credibility to the tradition he has recognized, for such things are not readily invented. There is no tangible motive for doing so; but if they have really happened, it is easy to understand that people will be anxious to forget them. We need not accept all the details of the tradition. In Sellin's opinion, Shittim, in the country east of the Jordan, is to be regarded as the scene of the attack on Moses.

We will borrow from Sellin his hypothesis that the Egyptian Moses was murdered by the Jews and the religion he had introduced abandoned. This allows us to spin our threads further without contradicting the authentic findings of historical research. But apart from this we shall venture to maintain independence of the authorities and to 'proceed along our own track'. The Exodus from Egypt remains our starting-point. A considerable number of people must have left the country with Moses; a small collection would not have seemed worthwhile to this ambitious man with his large aims in view. The immigrants had probably been living in Egypt long enough to have grown into quite a large population. But we shall certainly not be going wrong if we assume, with the majority of the authorities, that only a fraction of what was later to be the Jewish people had experienced the events in Egypt. In other words, the tribe that returned from Egypt joined up later, in the stretch of country between Egypt and Canaan, with other kindred tribes, which had been settled there for a considerable time. This union, from which sprang the people of Israel, found expression in the adoption of a new religion, common to all the tribes, the religion of Yahweh – an event which, according to Eduard Meyer, took place under Midianite influence at Kadesh. Thereafter, the people felt strong enough to undertake their invasion of the land of Canaan. It would not tally with this course of events to suppose that the catastrophe to Moses and his religion occurred in the country east of the Jordan; it must have happened long before the union of the tribes.

[. . .]

Once again, I am prepared to find myself blamed for having presented my reconstruction of the early history of the people of Israel with too great and unjustified certainty. I shall not feel very severely hit by this criticism, since it finds an echo in my own judgement. I know myself

that my structure has its weak spots, but it has its strong points too. On the whole, my predominant impression is that it is worthwhile to pursue the work in the direction it has taken.

The Bible narrative that we have before us contains precious and, indeed, invaluable historical data, which, however, have been distorted by the influence of powerful tendentious purposes and embellished by the products of poetic invention. [...] That discovery points our further path. We must uncover other similar tendentious purposes. If we find means of recognizing the distortions produced by those purposes, we shall bring to light fresh fragments of the true state of things lying behind them.

And we will begin by listening to what critical Biblical research is able to tell us about the history of the origin of the Hexateuch, the five books of Moses and the book of Joshua, which alone concern us here. The earliest documentary source is accepted as J (the Yahwistic writer), who in the most recent times has been identified as the priest Ebyatar, a contemporary of King David. Somewhat – it is not known how much – later we come to the so-called Elohist writer [E], who belonged to the Northern Kingdom. After the collapse of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., a Jewish priest combined portions of J and E and made some additions of his own. His compilation is designated as JE. In the seventh century *Deuteronomy*, the fifth book, was added to this. It is supposed to have been found complete in the Temple. In the period after the destruction of the Temple (586 B.C.), during and after the Exile, the revision known as the ‘Priestly Code’ was compiled; and in the fifth century the work was given its final revision and since then has not been changed in its essentials.

The history of King David and of his period is most probably the work of a contemporary. It is genuine historical writing, five hundred years before Herodotus, the ‘father of History’. It becomes easier to understand this achievement if, on the lines of our hypothesis, we think of Egyptian influence. A suspicion even arises that the Israelites of that earliest period – that is to say, the scribes of Moses – may have had some share in the invention of the first alphabet. It is, of course, beyond our knowledge to discover how far reports about former times go back to early records or to oral tradition and how long an interval of time there was in individual instances between an event and its recording. The text, however, as we possess it today, will tell us enough about its own vicissitudes. Two mutually

opposed treatments have left their traces on it. On the one hand it has been subjected to revisions which have falsified it in the sense of their secret aims, have mutilated and amplified it and have even changed it into its reverse; on the other hand, a solicitous piety has presided over it and has sought to preserve everything as it was, no matter whether it was consistent or contradicted itself. Thus, almost everywhere noticeable gaps, disturbing repetitions and obvious contradictions have come about – indications which reveal things to us which it was not intended to communicate. In its implications the distortion of a text resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of its traces. We might well lend the word ‘Entstellung’ [distortion] the double meaning to which it has a claim but of which to-day it makes no use. It should mean not only ‘to change the appearance of something’ but also ‘to put something in another place, to displace’.² Accordingly, in many instances of textual distortion, we may nevertheless count upon finding what has been suppressed and disavowed hidden away somewhere else, though changed and torn from its context. Only it will not always be easy to recognize it.

* * *

Commentary by Richard Armstrong, Miriam Leonard and Daniel Orrells

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was fascinated by the study of antiquity. His Jewish upbringing schooled him deeply in Jewish and biblical traditions. At the same time, he benefited from the elite Gymnasium education offered in Vienna, where he was able to study not only the sciences but also ancient Greek and Latin to advanced levels. Like many in the nineteenth century, Freud was very interested in the spectacular discoveries being made by archaeologists in the Mediterranean. Freud’s library – now held in the Freud Museum in London, his final home before his death – contains more books on archaeology than psychology. The Museum also holds his collection of Mediterranean and Asian antiquities – thousands of objects.

Freud started collecting ancient artefacts soon after his father’s death in 1896. In the same year, Freud delivered a scientific paper called ‘The aetiology of hysteria’, in which he argued that doctors should not trust their patients’ accounts of the origins of their illness; instead, it was

the task of the doctor to discover the true origins, which the patient might not be aware of or even remember. Freud compares seeking the cause of hysteria to unearthing an ancient city in which some things are visible on the surface, and some are hidden below. The true doctor digs deeper. As Freud developed psychoanalysis, he emphasised how he was interested in the 'prehistorical' – in going further into the aetiology of illness than other medical practitioners. The comparison of his therapeutic techniques to archaeology in his 1896 paper was the first of many such analogies he would make in his writings across 40 years, to describe his own attempts at excavating the unconscious. The glamorous prestige of archaeology was highly seductive to Freud, who was attempting to obtain respectability for his new 'science' of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century.³

Freud was also captivated by ancient Greek myth, especially the story of Oedipus, as represented in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Tyrannos*. In one of his high school examinations Freud had to translate a passage from this play into German. The tale provided Freud with the basis of his concept the Oedipus complex, which would become a keystone to his theories. Indeed, Freud applied the Oedipus complex to areas of life way beyond the psychology of family life. In *Totem and Taboo* (1912–13), the story of the son who murders his father to wed his mother was used by Freud to explain the origins of religion itself: in prehistorical times, Freud contended, brothers in primal hordes killed their fathers, who jealously guarded the women of the clan; the brothers then set up totems to assuage their feelings of guilt for the murders. This eventually developed into religious sentiment and worship of the father.

Freud wrote *Moses and Monotheism* between 1937 and 1939, making it his final major work before his death. It is also his final large-scale application of the story of Oedipus. Freud was deeply interested in the archaeological excavations at Amarna, a large Egyptian archaeological site containing the remains of the capital city of the Eighteenth Dynasty, built under the direction of the pharaoh Akhenaten (reigning 1350s to 1330s BCE). In the late 1880s, archaeological evidence seemed to emerge showing that Akhenaten installed the monotheistic worship of the ancient Egyptian solar god Aten.⁴

In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud argued that Moses was an Egyptian who had taken on this monotheistic worship from his pharaoh. Freud's Moses led his close followers into freedom (during an unstable period in ancient Egyptian history after Akhenaten's death), but these followers subsequently killed the Egyptian Moses in rebellion. Still later they joined with another monotheistic tribe in Midian who worshipped a volcano god called Yahweh. Freud argued that the monotheistic solar god Aten of the

Egyptian Moses was fused with Yahweh and that the deeds of Moses were ascribed to a Midianite priest who also came to be called Moses. Moses, in other words, Freud argued, is a composite figure, from whose biography the uprising and murder of the original Egyptian Amarna-cult priest has been excised. Freud goes on to argue that centuries after the murder of the Egyptian Moses, the rebels regretted their action, and they formed the concept of the Messiah as a hope for the return of Moses as the Saviour of the Israelites. Freud claimed that repressed (or censored) collective guilt stemming from the murder of Moses was passed down through the generations; this led the Jews to neurotic expressions of legalistically religious sentiment to cope with their inheritance of trauma and guilt.

So, Freud was applying the story of the Oedipal murder of the father to understand the origins of Judaism, and thereby brought together his interest in ancient Greek literature and his fascination with archaeology. Freud's writings, however, were contentious from the start. Biblical archaeologists did not take *Moses and Monotheism* seriously. Freud himself wondered whether he should have written a novel rather than a work of archaeological speculation. Freud was very aware of the complexity of the relationship between fact and fiction, between history and myth. After all, he argued that the little boy fantasises an Oedipal psychodrama, which becomes the cornerstone of male identity. If we consider *Moses and Monotheism* a little more closely, we can read it as a text written by a Jew intervening in scholarly debates about ancient Mediterranean history and modern cultural identity in the 1930s, a period of horrifying antisemitism.

Writing Jewish history

Freud's argument that Moses, the father of the Jews, had indeed lived can be seen as a product of a century of debates about religious history and doubt. Freud was writing in the wake of the contested responses to David Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, originally published in German in 1835. It was a remarkable text in which a German theologian had attempted to write a biography of Jesus Christ. The book, which turned the son of God into a human subject of biography, was a scandal and provoked a century of arguments about the Bible as a historical text.⁵ Strauss' book reflected a much wider nineteenth-century interest in (auto)biography and what it meant to write – to construct in narrative – a life. While Enlightenment intellectuals and Victorian writers repeatedly emphasised childhood as a site of natural innocence, succeeded by adult culture and corruption, Freud's account of child sexuality provided a very different understanding of the history of the self. Not surprisingly, Freud became very interested in narrating the self.

Some of his most readable publications are his case studies which blur the line between scientific report and psycho-realist bildungsroman. Freud's first major psychoanalytic publication, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), is literally a product of what Freud believed his dreams could tell him about himself. In 1910, he brought out a psychobiography of Leonardo da Vinci. In 1920, his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* offered a radically different understanding of biography, which argued that the self sought nothing but its own death. Then, in 1925, Freud wrote *An Autobiographical Study*. His biographical study of Moses was his ultimate experiment in life writing. The genre of (auto)biography was also important to Freud for a different reason. Freud repeatedly compared the history of the individual and the history of culture and civilisation. The progression from childhood via puberty to adulthood was akin to the development from 'primitive' prehistory to antiquity to modern times, for Freud. It was precisely this analogical thinking that allowed Freud to apply his psychoanalytic theories about the child to studies of the premodern world and vice versa. The antiquity of childhood and the childhood of civilisation were metaphors that Freud readily exploited throughout his writing.

In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud applies himself to writing a very particular biographical account – both of Moses as an individual and of the Jewish self, more broadly. We can see Freud's analogical thinking at work. He begins with a remarkable sentence: 'To deprive a people of the man whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons is not a thing to be gladly or carelessly undertaken, least of all by someone who is himself one of them.' Freud might have been an atheist, but he was also a Jew whose upbringing in Judaism was profoundly important for his intellectual formation. At the end of the nineteenth century, while the Jewish middle classes were becoming increasingly assimilated into bourgeois Austrian society, Vienna experienced a stark rise in antisemitism. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (published at the turn of the century), Freud writes movingly about antisemitic abuse directed at his father when Freud was a boy. While Freud was very wary of antisemitic characterisations of psychoanalysis as a 'Jewish science', the psychology of antisemitism greatly interested Freud and helped him develop his theory of the castration complex into a more overtly political commentary on white European Christian men's fear of the 'Other'. So it is not surprising, then, that Freud began his text with concern over the fact that a Jew might be depriving fellow Jews of their father figure by arguing that the historical Moses was really an ancient Egyptian and no Jew after all.

It is also crucial to remember that Freud's interest in the origins of Judaism was intensifying precisely at a time when Adolf Hitler was beginning to agitate for what he would horrifyingly call a 'final solution'. While Freud had lived with the ugly reality of antisemitism his whole life, Hitler's Germany was a whole new horrible reality on a terrifying scale. This caused Freud to ruminate on why the Jew has always inspired such hatred. Originally, he conceived of the work as a historical novel – we know this from his letters to a real historical novelist, the German Jewish writer Arnold Zweig, who moved to Mandatory Palestine to escape Germany in 1934. Like many Jewish veterans of the First World War, Zweig was deeply offended at having his German nationality cancelled so brutally, and he wrote a scathing work titled *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit* (literally, 'An accounting of German Jewry'). In this book, he attempted to describe in historical and psychological terms why the persecution of the Jews persists, and what the Jewish contribution to civilisation has been. Freud, for his part, wanted to do something similar, but in his usual way, going back to the very origins of Judaic monotheism. We see the Freudian fascination with primeval beginnings.

Freud saw *Moses and Monotheism* as a kind of a sequel to *Totem and Taboo*. Indeed, Freud says as much:

I cannot here repeat the contents of *Totem and Taboo* in greater detail. But I must undertake to fill up the long stretch between that hypothetical primaeval period and the victory of monotheism in modern times. After the institution of the combination of brother-clan, matriarchy, exogamy and totemism, a development began which must be described as a slow 'return of the repressed'.⁶

Akhenaten's introduction of monotheism, which was then taken on by Moses and imposed on the Jews, was, for Freud, the return of the original worship of the father in prehistoric times. But as Freud dramatically recounts, the story does not end there, because, as already mentioned, after the Exodus from Egypt, Moses' followers revolted and killed him. Freud based his account on the work of a biblical archaeologist, Ernst Sellin, who had argued that in the Book of Hosea could be found 'unmistakable signs of a tradition to the effect that Moses, the founder of their religion, met with a violent end in a rising of his refractory and stiff-necked people'.⁷ Freud also adapted the work of Eduard Meyer, a German historian, to continue his narrative: throwing off Moses' monotheistic religion, these Jews united with closely related tribes and began to worship a local volcano god, Yahweh.⁸ The Jews adopted

a henotheistic religion – that is, the focused, exclusive worship of one god whilst accepting that other gods also exist. ‘The monotheist idea, which had flared up with Akhenaten’, as Freud put it, ‘had grown dark once more and was to remain in darkness for a long time to come’.⁹ But what intrigued Freud was the complexity of the ancient Jewish textual tradition in that it reflected the long, contorted history of the Jews. The combination of ‘the earliest documentary source J (the Yahwistic writer)’ along with ‘the so-called Elohist writers [E]’, whose ‘compilation is JE’, plus the addition of Deuteronomy, along with ‘the revision known as the “Priestly Code”’, done ‘in the period after the destruction of the Temple (586 BC), during and after the Exile’, produced the Hebrew Bible which ‘in the fifth century [. . .] was given its final revision’.¹⁰ Freud is fascinated to show how the murder of Moses was preserved and yet also obscured in this textual tradition: ‘On the one hand it has been subjected to revisions which have falsified it [. . .] on the other hand, a solicitous piety has presided over it and has sought to preserve everything as it was’. Freud concludes with the following, provocative statement: ‘the distortion of a text resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of its traces.’ The Jewish textual tradition covered up the murder of Moses, but Freud was able to find the signs. And so, this history of the textual tradition bore witness, for Freud, to the gradual return of the repressed – the return of the worship of the single father, the monotheistic religion of Judaism.

Freud viewed the Jewish textual tradition as if it were an archaeological site composed of strata or layers. Freud wrote that, ‘If we find means of recognizing the distortions produced [in the history of the textual tradition], we shall bring to light fresh fragments of the true state of things lying behind them.’ Freud was compelled by the idea of digging way beneath the surface. The layers of the Jewish textual tradition were, for Freud, ‘like mausoleums beneath which, withdrawn from the knowledge of later generations, the true account of those early things – of the nature of the Mosaic religion and of the violent end of the great man – was, as it were, to find its eternal rest’.¹¹ In other words, the Jewish biblical tradition was an ancient monument above ground which both commemorated and obscured the historical truth.

Back in 1907, Freud had written about the comparison between his theory of repression and archaeology: ‘There is, in fact, no better analogy for repression, by which something in the mind is at once made inaccessible and preserved, than burial of the sort to which Pompeii fell a victim and from which it could emerge once more through the work of spades’.¹² For Freud, the murder of Moses has been repressed in the

Jewish textual tradition. Like the site of Pompeii, it is both present and absent, preserved but also buried. Freud demonstrates a complicated understanding of the relationship between the present and the past: the repressed past remains and yet it is not straightforwardly available. Other critics have written eloquently about Freud's sensitivity to the representation of trauma in history. As Cathy Caruth has put it, Freud seems to be suggesting that 'historical memory, or Jewish historical memory at least, is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repression, which makes the event available at best indirectly'.¹³ The trauma of the murder of Moses shows Freud that comprehending the event of trauma happens across, through and in time. There is no single, master narrative about the historical truth. The force of trauma, that chaotic psychic energy, compels the return of the past again and again with the so-called 'return of the repressed', and yet the rewriting – the reception – of the historical truth is always part of the narrative.

Jews and Greeks, antisemitism and philhellenism

Freud's history of Judaism, as mentioned above, relates to his interest in ancient Greece and Oedipus. On the one hand, as we have been examining, *Moses and Monotheism* is positioned as a sequel to *Totem and Taboo* – not only in that it tells the history of religion after the prehistorical period of the so-called primitive hordes, but also because it is the Oedipus complex which allows Freud to write his historical account of the Jews. And yet, the historical relationship between Oedipus and Moses – between Greek and Jew – is not so straightforward. The other moment in his text when Freud explicitly mentions archaeology is when he evokes Heinrich Schliemann's nineteenth-century discovery of Troy and Arthur Evans' excavations of Minoan–Mycenaean civilisation in the early twentieth century. But again, this is not to make some facile comparison between psychoanalysis and archaeology. Freud does not seek to defend psychoanalysis by looking to the prestige of archaeology. Rather Freud says quite the opposite:

With our present psychological insight we could, long before Schliemann and Evans, have raised the question of where it was that the Greeks obtained all the legendary material which was worked over by Homer and the great Attic dramatists in their masterpieces. The answer would have had to be that this people had probably experienced in their prehistory a period of external brilliance and cultural efflorescence which had perished in a historical catastrophe

and of which an obscure tradition survived in these legends. The archaeological researches of our days have now confirmed this suspicion, which in the past would certainly have been pronounced too daring.¹⁴

Even though these archaeological discoveries happened before Freud's writing of his arguments in *Moses and Monotheism*, his new psychological insight *could have shown* long before Schliemann and Evans dug into the ground that the Greeks possessed an earlier period of glorious history of which 'there is scarcely a hint [. . .] to be found in the Greek historians of a later age'.¹⁵ Rather it was Greek epic, Freud says, that recorded that dazzling prehistoric age, as the Greeks, as if 'under the spell of their childhood, which is presented to them by their not impartial memory as a time of uninterrupted bliss', looked back to the glories of the heroic past.¹⁶ The ancient textual tradition was one of 'imaginative writing' for Freud, allowing him to begin to make an analogy between Greek epic and the Jewish Bible. And yet, such an analogy does not work for Freud:

[T]he two cases are still too different. On the one hand the outcome is a poem and on the other a religion; and in the latter instance [the Hebrew Bible] we have assumed that, under the spur of tradition, it was reproduced with a faithfulness for which the instance of the epic can of course offer no counterpart. Accordingly, enough of our problem is left over to justify a need for more apposite analogies.

Rather, for Freud, it is specifically the Jewish rather than the Greek tradition which can be compared to the history of individual psychology: 'This analogy is met with in psychopathology, in the genesis of human neuroses [. . .] We give the name of *traumas* to those impressions, experienced early and later forgotten.'¹⁷ Jewish history and the history of the individual are seen to reflect one another:

Early trauma – defence – latency – outbreak of neurotic illness – partial return of the repressed. Such is the formula which we have laid down for the development of a neurosis. The reader is now invited to take the step of supposing that something occurred in the life of the human species similar to what occurs in the life of the individuals.¹⁸

Rather than the Greeks providing the universal models of what it is to be human, it is the Jews who take up the mantle of exemplarity in *Moses and Monotheism*.

This is certainly a bold move in what is a confusing text. As we mentioned earlier, Freud wrote in his introduction that by arguing that Moses was really an Egyptian and had been murdered, he was 'depriv[ing] a people of the man whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons'. Indeed, Freud's history of the Jews would have been unsettling for many Jewish readers and yet it reflected the hopes of many highly educated, bourgeois Jews in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who wanted to insert Jewish history into the grand narrative of European history more broadly. The Jewish adoption of monotheism, for Freud, represented 'the triumph of intellectuality [*Geistigkeit*] over sensuality [*Sinnlichkeit*], or strictly speaking, an instinctual renunciation'.¹⁹ Earlier in the nineteenth century, the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) had praised the Greeks' 'intellectuality' and turned to Oedipus as a model: Oedipus' solving of the riddle of the Sphinx was seen by Hegel as a symbol of the progression of Greek philosophy beyond Eastern wisdom. Freud was appropriating the Hegelian vocabulary to argue that Moses' interdiction of the making of an image of God represented an important cultural moment in history more broadly. The step to abstract thought was associated by Hegel and numerous other nineteenth-century intellectuals with the ancient Greeks. But in Freud's account, it was the ancient Jews who had already achieved that important development. This also implied a criticism of Christianity, which had fallen back into pagan representative practices with images of Jesus, Mary and the saints.

The historical relationship between Oedipus and Moses – between Greek and Jew – is, then, a complicated business. On the one hand, *Moses and Monotheism* is seen as a sequel to *Totem and Taboo* in that Oedipus conditions Freud's understanding of Moses; on the other hand, the history of the Jews provided a model for the structure of all subsequent history – including that of the Greeks. Freud's historical equivocations reflect the complex times in which he lived, when the authority of biblical texts was both fatally compromised and yet also vociferously defended. The truth of the Bible remained up for grabs.

Moses and Monotheism reflected the complexity of Freud's own self-positioning: a godless man of science, steeped in the Graeco-Roman classical tradition, brought up and educated as a Jew, subjected to antisemitism. By making Moses an Egyptian rather than a Jew, Freud was seen by some to be attacking the core of Judaism at a time when

the Jews were under immediate threat of annihilation. The postcolonial critic Edward Said has instead admired Freud's gesture of what he calls 'irascible transgressiveness'.²⁰ And far from reading *Moses and Monotheism* as an abandonment of the Jews at the time of their greatest peril, Said argued that it was an attempt to surmount the pernicious nationalist and racist theories of the 1930s. At a time when questions of racial purity had become pervasive, Freud argued – by seeing the historical Moses as Egyptian – for the hybrid identity of one of the world's great religions and the intricate crossover between 'European' and 'non-European' cultures in the history of civilisation. For Said, Freud's book was an example of 'late style': it spoke of an old Eurocentric who in the twilight of his life questioned some of his most basic assumptions about history and identity. Freud had undermined the cherished idea of the Jews as 'a chosen people' and had himself chosen the Jews to make a point about the difficulty of history.

Freud's analogy between psychoanalysis and archaeology was far from straightforward: he did *not* compare his endeavours to that of the archaeologist simply because he saw himself as excavating and possessing the past. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud argues for both the life *and* the death of Moses: he claims both to have disinterred the real Moses *and* to have deprived the Jews 'of the man whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons'. Moses was both a real-life man in the ancient world and a construction fabricated by subsequent, more modern writers – between alive and dead, a ghost in the machine. *Moses and Monotheism* represents Freud's most extended discussion of archaeological and historiographical scholarship and reflects his complicated response to the question of the relationship between the ancient past and the modern present.

Notes

- 1 Freud was referring to Meyer's 1906 monograph *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme*.
- 2 'Stelle' means 'a place', and 'ent-' is a prefix indicating a change of condition.
- 3 On Freud's interest in the ancient world and archaeology, see Armstrong, *A Compulsion for Antiquity*, and Armstrong, DeRose, Leonard and Orrells, *Freud's Antiquity*.
- 4 On the city of Amarna, see Kemp, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti*.
- 5 On Strauss' work and its impact, see Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, 7–8, 154–5, 169–70, 202–3.
- 6 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 13. (The quotations from Freud that do not appear in the excerpt reproduced in this chapter come from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74, abbreviated as SE.)
- 7 On Freud's engagement with Sellin, see Assmann, 'Freud, Sellin, and the murder of Moses'.
- 8 On Freud's use of Meyer, see Leonard, *Socrates and the Jews*, 201–2.
- 9 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 63.
- 10 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 42.

- 11 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 62.
- 12 *Delusions and Dreams*, SE 9: 40.
- 13 Caruth, 'Unclaimed experience', 185.
- 14 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 70.
- 15 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 70.
- 16 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 71.
- 17 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 71, 72.
- 18 *Moses and Monotheism* SE 23: 80.
- 19 *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23: 113.
- 20 Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, 29.

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Mary Church Terrell's *A Colored Woman in a White World* (1940)

Chapter 5: 'I enter Oberlin College.' In *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 71–80. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021) Commentary by Emily Greenwood.

In the following Fall I entered the senior class of the preparatory department of Oberlin College, which has since been abolished. I boarded in the old 'Ladies Hall', which was destroyed by fire and has been replaced by Talcott Cottage. The tables in the dining hall seated eight, and it was customary for students to choose those whom they wanted to sit at their respective tables for the term of three months. In the middle of the term some friend would invite me to sit at a table which she was arranging for the one to follow, and I would accept. Somebody else would extend me the same invitation and I would also accept that, forgetting that I had already promised to sit with another group. Each of these girls would send in my name as one of the eight who had accepted her invitation for the following term. Then, when I was seated at one table and failed to appear at another at which I was expected, naturally there would be more or less confusion, and explanations had to be made. The lady whose duty it was to attend to the dining room declared that I gave her a great deal of trouble, because too many people wanted me to sit at their table.

If I were white, it might be conceited for me to relate this. But I mention these facts to show that, as a colored girl, I was accorded the same treatment at Oberlin College at that time as a white girl under similar circumstances. Outward manifestations of prejudice against colored students would not have been tolerated for one minute by

those in authority at that time. Occasionally, a colored girl would complain about something which she considered a 'slight', but, as a rule, it was either because she was looking for trouble or because she imagined something disagreeable which was not intended. Later on, however, conditions affecting colored students changed considerably.

My associates in college were, naturally, members of my own class. Until I reached the junior year I had only one colored classmate, and she lived at home. I boarded in Ladies Hall three years all together: during my senior preparatory year, when I roomed with a girl of my own race; during my freshman year, when I roomed alone; and during my senior year, when I roomed with my colored classmate. Throughout the whole period in Ladies Hall, never once did I feel that I was being discriminated against on account of my color.

In my senior preparatory year I had one of the best teachers in the entire course—'Prin White', as he was familiarly called, who was principal of the department. Prin White taught us Greek and he was as vivacious, interesting, and inspiring as a teacher could well be. He had very high standards for his pupils. Some thought they were too high, but he succeeded in making most of us live up to them. When a student was called upon to explain the case of a noun or the mood of a verb, Prin White required him not only to give the rule for the construction, but, along with the rule, to give a sentence in Greek illustrating the point.

For a time I was the only girl in this Greek class with 40 boys. It was a joy to read the *Iliad* with Prin White. He entered so enthusiastically into the spirit of that matchless poem that his students caught the inspiration. I still have my recitation card. He marked on a scale of 6. When he handed me my card showing 5.9, he said in his quick, nervous way, fixing me with his keen, blue eyes, 'Miss Church, you should be proud of that record'. Praise from Prin White was then and still is praise indeed. And I can thrill even now, 58 years after the incident occurred, when I think of it.

I also remember another incident in my college days with pleasure and pride. It was when my Latin teacher complimented me, because I scanned a certain passage in Virgil well. I can recall those Latin lines today, and the genuine feeling with which I read them. The Greek professor in college was also one of my favorites. He looked like an ascetic, tall and straight and thin. I usually sat on the front

seat in his class and drank in every word he said. I took much more Greek than the curriculum required, both because I enjoyed the Grecian authors and because I was fond of my teacher.

One day Matthew Arnold, the English writer, visited our class and Professor Frost asked me both to read the Greek and then to translate. After leaving the class Mr. Arnold referred to the young lady who had read the passage of Greek so well. Thinking it would interest the Englishman, Professor Frost told him I was of African descent. Thereupon Mr. Arnold expressed the greatest surprise imaginable, because, he said, he thought the tongue of the African was so thick he could not be taught to pronounce the Greek correctly.

Later on Professor Frost became president of Berea College. For years before his administration[,] this institution had admitted colored and white students on terms of equality. But shortly after Professor Frost became president[,] the Kentucky Legislature passed a law, with Berea specially in mind, forbidding any school or institution to receive both white and colored students unless the one race or color should be established in a separate department not less than 25 miles from the other: and this on penalty of a fine of \$1,000 for the institution, \$1,000 for each of its teachers and \$50 for each of its pupils. In his autobiography President Frost expressed keen regret that Berea was forced to debar colored students on account of this law.

In my freshman year I attended the Bible class regularly and believe it benefited me greatly. I really looked forward to it with enthusiasm and pleasure, because I was allowed to ask questions about the passages in the Scriptures which troubled me. And no verse came nearer shaking my faith in the justice of God than that one which states, 'I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments'.

I could not understand why a just and loving father should make children suffer for the sins committed by their forefathers. The injustice of the law of heredity stunned me. It seemed terrible to me that the children of drunkards should inherit a tendency to drink immoderately and the children of thieves might have a hard time to be honest, and so on through the category of vices. The teacher was patient with me and did his best to show me why such a dispensation was just, but I was never able to see it in that light.

However, I decided not to try to understand it any longer. I finally brought a semblance of peace to my mind by saying, 'I am finite, and if I understood all the plans of the Infinite I should be equal to Him in wisdom, which would be unthinkable and absurd, of course'. Even so, my poor brain often whirled and my heart was often sad, as I wrestled with the problem of heredity.

When I tackled geometry in the preparatory department of the college I met my Waterloo sure enough! I struggled hard to do the work, but I did not understand how to go at it properly and I barely pulled through the course. How I loathed plane geometry! It wounded my pride and 'hurt my feelings', because it was so hard for me to understand.

I did a little better in solid geometry, but I did not set the world afire even in that. Finally, I grew desperate and decided it was a waste of time and energy for me to try to understand propositions, and I calmly made up my mind to commit to memory the letters on a figure and say 'big TAB is to little tab as big AB is to little ab', without having the slightest idea what it was all about. No teacher who wished to show off his class in mathematics would ever have called on Mollie Church to recite in college, any more than a teacher in the public schools would have exhibited my drawing book to display the skill to which her pupils had attained. When visitors came to our class in the public schools and asked to see our books in which we had done freehand drawing or had copied objects, no teacher ever showed mine. She usually managed to put it at the bottom of the pile.

Try as hard as I might, I could never learn to draw. If I set out to draw a straight line it would turn out to be crooked. And if I wanted to draw a crooked line it was more than likely to be straight. My brother inherited some of my mother's talent for painting and drawing, while I inherited none. My brother, Thomas Ayres Church, wrote a book on *The Roller*, a canary which is taught to sing tunes, and he drew all the illustrations himself. They were exceedingly well done. He was the first person in this country to write a book on this subject. The best publishing houses sold it and it had a ready sale.

In my freshman year I was elected class poet unanimously, and read a poem at the Class Day exercises, which were held a short while before Commencement. I chose as my subject 'The Fallen Star', and imitated the hexameter used by Longfellow in *Hiawatha*. In the

same year I wrote another poem which a classmate liked so much she quoted one of the stanzas in an essay she read at an exhibition given by her literary society when we were juniors.

Because I had written several effusions of which my teacher approved, I had been rather generally regarded as the class poet. When the time came to elect speakers for the Junior Exhibition, it was the consensus of opinion among the majority of my classmates that I would be elected class poet. After a classmate had nominated me, another presented the name of a young man who had never written a poem in his life, so far as the class had heard, and had never exhibited any talent in that direction, so far as the class knew. After a great many ballots had been cast, I wanted to withdraw my name, but some of my classmates who sat near me held me down in my seat. Finally the young man was elected. I believe I am justified in thinking that if a white girl had won the same reputation for writing poetry that I had, and had been recognized by the class as I had been in my freshman year, she would probably have been elected class poet for the Junior Exhibition instead of a young man who had previously exhibited no talent or skill in that direction at all. Some of my classmates criticized the successful candidate severely, because he did not withdraw in my favor after five or six ballots had been cast, as he probably would have done if his rival had been a white girl.

But I did not allow this episode to embitter me at all. On the contrary, it encouraged and comforted me greatly to see how many of my classmates stood by me so long. I knew also that they finally voted for the young man, so as to break the deadlock, after they saw that a few of his friends were determined to elect him. There is no doubt whatever that on this one occasion, at least, the fact that I am colored prevented me from receiving the honor which many members of my class thought my record proved I deserved.

Right after the Junior Exhibition I attended a party which was always given by one of the professors and enjoyed myself immensely. My mother had sent me a beautiful silk dress from New York, which I wore. I am sure that nobody who saw me that day thought I was suffering because I felt I had been a victim of race prejudice in failing to be elected to write a poem for 'Junior Ex'. I know now better than I did then that 'blood is thicker than water' when several racial groups come together to elect a representative for the whole.

But I received almost every other honor that my classmates or the members of my literary society could give me. While I was still in the senior preparatory class, a young woman in the senior college class rushed after me one day and insisted upon having me join Aelioian, the literary society to which she herself belonged. She was one of the most brilliant and popular members of her class, and I felt honored to have such a student solicit my membership in her society. She did not have to persuade me long to gain my consent to join Aelioian. I am glad I began work in this society so early in my course. I was eligible for admission, even though I was only a senior in the preparatory department, because a girl in that class was as far advanced in her studies as one taking the literary course would be in college.

In addition to the literary work required, the drill in parliamentary law was invaluable. All I ever knew about it I learned in Aelioian. After I went out into the 'cold world', when I was called upon to preside over meetings of various kinds, I would have been greatly embarrassed if I had not been prepared for this service by the drills given me in Aelioian. The ability to speak effectively on one's feet was also acquired in this society.

I was elected twice to represent Aelioian when it had a public debate with L. L. S., the other women's literary society. The first time I was a sophomore, and the last time I was a junior. I considered the latter selection a special honor because as a rule the society elected a senior to represent it in the public debate held with L. L. S. before Commencement. This was the most important exercise given by the society, so that no greater honor could be conferred upon a member than to be elected disputant to represent it in a debate with its rival on that occasion. For a while I was one of the editors of the *Oberlin Review*, the college paper, and I was quite excited when I saw the first article I had ever written for publication appear in print.

I enjoyed attending the Thursday lectures, at which either one of the professors or some distinguished man from out of town appeared. The literary societies brought the best orators, the most famous singers, and the finest orchestras to Oberlin, so that when one had finished her college course, if she had availed herself of the opportunities offered her, she would have seen and heard the most distinguished speakers and the greatest musicians in the United States.

A building was presented by a generous woman to the women's two literary societies, and after it was completed a committee was appointed from each society to decide how the rooms should be furnished. Aelioian placed me on a committee of three to represent it. And so, I could cite numerous instances to show that the members of my society did not discriminate against me on account of my race. Since my college society conferred upon me every honor in its gift, and my classmates failed only once to recognize me as I believe they would have done under similar circumstances if I had been white, I feel I have little reason to complain about discrimination on account of race while I was a student in Oberlin College. It would be difficult for a colored girl to go through a white school with fewer unpleasant experiences occasioned by race prejudice than I had.

I attended all the class receptions and every social function which the college gave and was sure of a cordial reception wherever I went. The sister-in-law of the acting president of the college decided to have a lawn tennis club, when that game was just beginning to be popular, and I was one of twelve girls she invited from the whole institution to become a member of it. If I attended Oberlin College today, I am told, I would not be so free from the annoyances and discriminations caused by race prejudice as I was fifty-six years ago.

Although for many years there was as much 'social equality' to the square inch in Oberlin College as could be practiced anywhere in the United States, I have heard the authorities state that there had never been a case of intermarriage between the races in the whole history of the school. The prediction of the prophets and the near prophets in this particular was never fulfilled. All sorts of dire calamities were threatened by those who strongly opposed the admission of colored students. It was predicted that if white and colored students were allowed to associate with each other on terms of "social equality," the most disgraceful things would be happening all the time. There would be intermarriages galore, of course, and the whole tone of the school would be low. The opponents of equal opportunities for colored people have proved over and over again that they have not the gift of prophecy.

For a long time I led the singing in a Sunday evening prayer meeting in Ladies Hall. At one of these meetings an incident occurred which made an indelible impression upon my mind. It was customary for those who attended these meetings to bear testimony concerning

their experiences as Christians or to offer prayer. On one such occasion I stated that, although I tried to be a Christian, I sometimes did things which I knew a good Christian should not do.

'For instance', I said, 'I sometimes whisper in a class, when I don't intend to violate the rule or disturb the order, because I am thoughtless but not deliberately obstreperous. I fear also that I giggle and laugh too much and am not serious enough'. And then I expressed the hope that the Christians present would pray for me that I might change my giddy ways and become more quiet and sedate.

As soon as I had finished, a tall, pale, very thin woman, heavily swathed in black, leaned forward from the back seat, fastened her sad eyes upon me, pointed her bony finger at me, and said most impressively, 'Young woman, laugh and be merry while you can, and as much as you can. Don't try to suppress laughter and be serious in youth. Some day when you grow older, when the cares and sorrows of life press hard upon you, you'll want to laugh and can't'.

About a week after that this woman committed suicide in Cleveland, Ohio, by jumping into Lake Erie. Both her husband and her young daughter had died within a short time of each other and she could not become reconciled to their loss. She had come to study in the college, hoping to divert her mind from grief, but she did not succeed. Many a time since that Sunday evening prayer meeting I have tried to laugh when the sorrows and cares of life have pressed hard upon me, and couldn't.

While I was still in college I had the first bitter experience of inability to secure employment on account of my race, during a summer vacation which I was spending with my mother in New York City. I thought it would be a fine thing then to earn money with a lot of leisure on my hands. I had heard my college friends talk about desirable positions which students were able to secure during summer vacations. One of them had been employed by a wealthy woman who wanted a young, intelligent girl to read aloud to her, write letters for her, and act in the capacity of secretary. I thought I would try to get such a job. Accordingly, I fared forth several times to answer advertisements calling for such service. At least three of the women whom I went to see told me that I possessed just the qualities they desired and were very complimentary indeed. I thought I had secured employment three times, but three times I was doomed to disappointment.

Just as I was leaving her room one of the women who had practically engaged me said: 'I observe you are quite swarthy. You speak English too well to be a foreigner, unless you were born in the United States, or came here when you were a baby. What is your nationality?' 'I am a colored girl', I replied. If I had told her I was a gorilla in human form, she could not have been more greatly shocked. Never before in all her life had she come in contact with an educated colored girl, she said. She really didn't know there were any in the world. While she had no prejudice against colored people herself, she said, her servants were white and she was certain they would leave if she employed a colored girl.

On a certain Friday afternoon one of the women whom I went to see engaged me positively and directed me to begin work with her Monday morning. But on Sunday afternoon a messenger brought me a letter saying that her daughter had seen me, as I was leaving the house, and had asked about my nationality. Her coachman would come at seven o'clock that evening for a reply, she wrote. When he came I gave him a note in which I frankly admitted my racial identity. At ten o'clock that night the coachman returned with an answer to my confession of race in which my employer told me she was very sorry to cancel her agreement with me, but under no circumstances could she employ a colored girl.

Months before I graduated from Oberlin I realized that the carefree days of my youth would soon be a thing of the past. I dreaded leaving my friends behind and 'going out into the cold world'. But the desire to get my diploma and receive my degree was an obsession with me. When I said my prayers at night I used to emphasize the fact, as much as I dared while talking to the Lord, that He could send any affliction whatsoever upon me He saw fit, if He would only let me live to graduate. I begged Him earnestly not to let me die before Commencement Day.

I do not see how any student could have enjoyed the activities of college life more than I did. Learning my lessons as well as I could was a sort of indoor sport with me. I had my troubles and trials, of course, because occasionally I broke the rules by going skating without permission, for instance, or breaking the study-hour rule, or sitting up after ten o'clock, but that was all included in the course, I thought. I learned one thing outside of the curriculum. Breakfast began at quarter past six in the morning. That did very well in the fall and spring, but in the cold, bitter winter it was terrible to have

to arise while it was dark as midnight in a room with a temperature miles below zero, make a fire to keep from freezing to death, and dress in time to be at the breakfast table at fifteen minutes past six.

I did not eat very much at that period. But students were obliged to be in the dining room for morning prayers. So I calculated to a nicety the exact time when the bell would ring for the students to turn from the table to hear the Bible read. I would hop out of bed just five minutes before that happened, and I learned to dress myself so quickly that I was never late for morning prayer during the whole time I boarded in Ladies Hall.

Neither one of my parents came to see me graduate from college. My mother sent me a wonderful black jet dress, for the young women who graduated from the 'gentlemen's course' always dressed in sombre black then. She also sent me a pair of opera glasses as a graduation present. While the gift was greatly appreciated, it did not compensate me for her absence on an occasion to which I had looked forward with such anticipation of pleasure for so many years.

* * *

Commentary by Emily Greenwood

Many students of Classics in North America have a passing acquaintance with Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954) as the undergraduate student whose fine pronunciation of ancient Greek in an Oberlin College classroom in January 1884 surprised the English writer Matthew Arnold, 'because, he said, he thought the tongue of the African was so thick he could not be taught to pronounce the Greek correctly'. This anecdote, from Terrell's autobiography *A Colored Woman in a White World* (1940), is often cited as a historical example of the racing of the modern discipline of Classics. While there is no getting around Arnold's blundering race-typing, it is a shame that Terrell's reputation as a scholar is yoked to Arnold's ignorance. Thanks to the research and advocacy of Michele Valerie Ronnick, the field of Classics has rediscovered the distinguished Black classicists of Terrell's generation.¹ Among Terrell's (née Mary Church) peer group at Oberlin was the educator and feminist scholar Anna Julia Cooper (née Anna Julia Haywood), who graduated alongside Church with an AB degree in 1884.² The educator and classical scholar William Sanders Scarborough had also graduated from Oberlin a decade previously, in the class of 1875.

A Colored Woman in a White World met with a tepid reception when it was first published and, although studied by scholars, it has been little remarked and appreciated in the intervening decades. The record of Terrell's activism and political participation has fared better. With the concerted move in scholarship to restore Black women's history, historians have emphasised Terrell's role in co-founding the Colored Women's League in Washington in 1894 and the creation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), of which she was elected the first president, in 1896.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has placed Terrell's race work in the context of Black women's groups in the decades following Reconstruction, many of which pursued subtle strategies of subversive assimilation, advocating for civil rights while also representing and upholding conservative social ideas and class interests.³ Terrell's 'respectability politics', to use Higginbotham's term, were shaped by her identity as a very light-skinned African American woman who grew up with the privileges of wealth and the relative social mobility afforded to the Black elite. Terrell's parents were born into slavery but amassed wealth after emancipation through sharp business acumen, and her father became a self-made millionaire. This class consciousness comes to the fore in Terrell's account of her thrill, in her freshman year at Oberlin, at attending the Presidential Inaugural Ball in Washington DC as the guest of Mrs B. K. Bruce, wife of Senator Blanche Kelso Bruce of Mississippi.⁴

Some of the class tensions in Black women's solidarity in this period come into sharper view if we consider the relationship between Terrell and Ida B. Wells, the famous teacher, journalist, newspaper editor and anti-lynching campaigner. The two women were acquaintances; both came from Memphis. They knew each other as children and worked together as part of the Black women's club network on social justice causes. Along with Anna Julia Cooper, Helen Cook, Charlotte Grimké, Mary Jane Peterson and Evelyn Shaw, Terrell and Wells joined in forming the Colored Women's League in 1892, in Washington DC. For her part, Terrell completely suppresses Wells in her autobiography, even when narrating episodes in which Wells was a key player. Although Wells' autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, was left unfinished when Wells died in 1931 and would not see publication in Terrell's lifetime, Wells acknowledges Terrell's sterling educational achievements.⁵ Commenting on the creation of the NACW in 1896, Wells introduces her as 'Mrs. Terrell, a graduate of Oberlin College who had been a teacher in Washington High School for a number of years, herself being the wife of a prominent attorney in Washington and believed to be the most highly educated woman we

had in the race'.⁶ But Wells also accuses Terrell of having sidelined her in the organisation of meetings for reasons of 'selfish ambition', allegedly because Terrell feared that Wells might challenge her leadership.⁷

The publication of a new edition of *A Colored Woman in a White World*, in 2021, reflects the rehabilitation of Terrell as a political activist, thinker and writer in the past decade. In *Beyond Respectability: The intellectual thought of race women* (2017), Brittney Cooper has reconsidered Terrell's model of 'dignified agitation' and offered a fresh interpretation of Terrell as a critical theorist of racial uplift. Recent research on the civil rights struggle in Washington DC has highlighted Terrell's pivotal direct action and legal campaign to desegregate Washington restaurants between 1950 and 1953, culminating in a legal victory at the Supreme Court on 8 June 1953. Joan Quigley's book *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the struggle for racial justice in the nation's capital* (2016) and Mary Elizabeth Murphy's *Jim Crow Capital: Women and Black freedom struggles in Washington DC 1922–1945* (2018) have brought this history to full light. Like Brittney Cooper, Quigley and Murphy have argued for the work of Terrell and her peers as an important bridge to the subsequent history of the Civil Rights Movement.

It bears noting that Terrell revised her politics and priorities over the course of her long life, aligning herself with more radical, youthful movements and protests in her later years. In fact, Joan Quigley has referred to the period after 1940, when Terrell published her autobiography, as the 'radicalization of Mary Church Terrell', and Cooper argues that by 1951, Terrell had moved 'from proper and dignified, to dignified, disgusted, and defiant'.⁸ Although Terrell's active career as a speaker and campaigner on the lecture circuit began in 1898, her shift in orientation, tone and tactics is a warning against interpreting the autobiography, which was written in the period between 1927 and 1935, in light of her more militant activist phase.⁹

The extract featured here forms the fifth chapter in Terrell's autobiography and covers her education at Oberlin College, spanning the years 1880–84. After an early childhood in Memphis, Terrell's parents took the decision to send her away to school for a better education. In the first instance, Terrell went to a kindergarten-type Model School attached to Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. From there she moved on to public schools before transferring to Oberlin High School for her college preparatory education.

Terrell's account of her classical education at Oberlin College and her credentials as a classical scholar (such as her grade of 5.9/6 in Prin White's *Iliad* class and praise for her scansion of Virgil from her Latin

teacher) conform to the indexical use of Classics as a badge of cultural and intellectual attainment in an era where Black Americans were acutely conscious that their achievements were proof of the standing of the race. But there is also joy in the way in which Terrell writes about her classical studies: 'It was a joy to read the *Iliad* with Prin White.' By Terrell's account, she took the four-year Classical 'gentleman's' degree course because this was where her intellectual passions led her.¹⁰ This academic interest in the subject then led Terrell to accept teaching positions, in spite of her father urging her not to and offering to support her financially. She taught first at Wilberforce from 1885 to 1887, and then as a Latin teacher at the Colored High School in Washington DC from 1887 to 1888.

Terrell's autobiography is threaded through with the past conditional – 'what could have been'. It traces her personal striving and ambition through her education and her social and professional dreams, intertwined with a collective sentiment of African American racial striving and uplift. The autobiography narrates Terrell's many impressive achievements, but as she reaches adulthood, these achievements are offset with regret and disappointment at thwarted potential – for all that could have been, were it not for racial discrimination and prejudice. The closing paragraphs of the autobiography (which runs to almost five hundred pages) articulate this wistful space of loss cogently:

Considering that I have lived in a country in which my race is regarded as inferior, whose representatives are terribly circumscribed and limited in various ways and are socially ostracized in the bargain, I have had a fairly fortunate existence and my lot might have been much harder, I must confess. [. . .] While I am grateful for the blessings which have been bestowed upon me and for the opportunities which have been offered, I cannot help wondering sometimes what I might have become and might have done if I lived in a country which had not circumscribed and handicapped me on account of my race, but had allowed me to reach any height I was able to attain.¹¹

Rather than using her Classical education as a social credential, Terrell reviews it through the lens of irony, highlighting the conditionality of participation by African Americans in the American Republic, no matter how accomplished they may be. Specifically, Terrell's description of her Classical education employs the pervasive device of side-shadowing, familiar from narratological studies. A term coined by Gary Morson, side-shadowing throws the contingency of the past into high relief. As

a narrative device, 'sideshadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might-bes [. . .] while we see what did happen, we also see the image of what else could have happened. In this way, the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text.'¹²

Matthew Arnold had embarked on a lucrative lecturing tour of America in October 1883, sponsored by Andrew Carnegie. The tour spanned the period 24 October 1883 to 8 March 1884, and saw Arnold give a rotating set of three lectures at different venues in the North East and Midwest. His lecture at Oberlin took place on 16 January 1884, with the title 'Literature and science' – a lecture that Arnold had first delivered as the Rede Lecture at the University of Cambridge in 1882.¹³ At Oberlin, Arnold spoke in the 'Thursday Lectures' slot – a weekly slot for lectures from Oberlin faculty and visiting speakers. Terrell herself would later be invited back to Oberlin to lecture in one of these slots.¹⁴ At the time of the lecture tour, British Prime Minister William Gladstone had recently promoted Arnold to the position of Chief Inspector of Schools and Arnold was granted leave to travel to America. Arnold's long experience as an Inspector of Schools in Britain did not equip him for his encounter with Mary Church – the child of parents born into slavery – at a College founded by abolitionists, where the educational ethos was predicated on the idea that no race had a monopoly on education and intelligence.

Reading Terrell's account of Matthew Arnold's crude race-typing, it is difficult to identify the narrative logic and authorial integrity in an anecdote which seems, at first reading, to entrap the author in a crude game of racial ontology. With the publication of Terrell's autobiography, some 56 years after the incident concerned, this episode of the pedagogy of ignorance enters African American memory as another sorry exemplum of the kinds of myths about Black folk that circulated in the dominant culture. But perhaps a careful reading of Terrell's narration of the encounter, which employs the same inquisitive philological spirit that Terrell demonstrated as a student of Classics at Oberlin, can reveal her signifying power.

There is sardonic commentary in Terrell's description. Notice the pivot in Arnold's reported speech: Arnold, acting on the assumption that the light-skinned Mary Church was white, refers to 'the young lady'; on being told of her African descent, he speaks of 'the tongue of the African' as a generic male subject ('he thought the tongue of the African was so thick he could not be taught to pronounce the Greek correctly'). Similarly, Terrell's account of Arnold's exaggerated reaction convicts him: 'Thereupon Mr. Arnold expressed the greatest surprise imaginable.'

Although the surprise is focalised through Arnold, for Terrell and her intelligent readers, it is Arnold's ignorant speculation which is the real object of surprise.

Returning to the scene with Arnold, Terrell's use of participial motivation is suggestive. When Terrell writes, 'Thinking it would interest the Englishman, Professor Frost told him I was of African descent' (my emphasis), there is an inscrutable gap between Professor Frost's expectation of how this information would interest Arnold and the ethnological inference that Arnold draws.¹⁵ Also inscrutable is the question of how Terrell knows about Professor Frost and Matthew Arnold's conversation about her.¹⁶ Framed by Terrell, Arnold is an incidental figure here, a blundering outsider whose crude remark encapsulates the sanctioned ignorance against which Terrell would crusade in the decades to come. He is a useful idiot who is all the more useful for his eminent reputation as an experienced inspector of schools and for his writings on education and culture.

So much for Arnold; it is just as much a sleight of reading to allow Professor Frost's role in this passage to go unmarked. Terrell juxtaposes the account of Arnold's visit to Frost's class – where Frost is apparently in the guise of progressive instructor, proud of Oberlin's commitment to gender and racial equality – with the prolepsis, in the very next paragraph, which informs us of Frost's regret at the segregation of Berea College in Kentucky while he was President of the College.

The Professor Frost in question is William Goodell Frost (1854–1938), grandson via the maternal line of the famous abolitionist William Goodell, whose impressive antislavery campaigning included the 1853 publication *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice Shown by Its States, Juridical Decisions, and Illustrative Facts*. We know quite a bit about William Goodell Frost's upbringing, education and career thanks to his third-person autobiography *For the Mountains*, published in 1937, named for his romantic affinity for the Appalachian region. We also know how proud he was of his family's antislavery stance and the impression that this made on him as a boy. In the autobiography Frost twice refers to an episode where he witnessed the underground railroad in action. Frost had himself graduated from Oberlin in 1876, taught Greek in Oberlin's preparatory department that year. In the following summer, when the professor of Greek resigned in 1877, he was tapped to take over the position and went to Harvard for a year of postgraduate study to help him prepare.

Terrell's praise of Frost's teaching is sincere, and her note about his regret at being unable to prevent the segregation of Berea College casts Frost in a positive light and numbers him in the privileged category of the

members of the dominant race who have done or attempted to do the right thing. But at the same time, this three-way encounter between Arnold, the clueless colonial; Frost, the son of a fiercely progressive, antislavery family; and Mary Church, the child of slaves¹⁷ serves to illustrate the mournful lag between emancipation, the aims of Reconstruction immediately after the Civil War, and the unreconstructed race attitudes that persisted. By foreshadowing Frost's failed struggle to keep Berea mixed in the year 1904, some 20 years in the future at this point in the narrative, Terrell reminds readers of the steepness of the civil rights struggle and the false dawn in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Before her recent rehabilitation, Terrell's *A Colored Woman in a White World* was treated as a work of failed witness.¹⁸ At the time of publication, it was undermined from the start by the Preface by H. G. Wells, which damned the book with faint praise, commenting, 'I shall put it on my shelves not among the masterpieces of art, but as the living Mary Church Terrell, the most subtle, almost inadvertent, rendering of the stresses and views and impulses that characterize the race conflict as it appears in America.'¹⁹

According to Terrell, when she confided her plans to write an autobiography, H. G. Wells had urged her to be explicit but not sentimental. And yet, within the complex codes of racial sensibility in America, Terrell knew from hard experience – on the lecture circuit and through her earlier, thwarted forays into publication – that explicitness was a rhetorical device to be used sparingly in the work of Black authors hoping to address a wider American public in this period. Terrell's literary tactics in the autobiography were tactful, pressing the levers of truth with middle-class decorum and politeness, but she does document the racial crimes and sins of the 'dominant race' as she observed and encountered them. This was part of a larger commitment to literary witness. As Elizabeth McHenry has shown, Terrell has left a voluminous and carefully curated archive of short stories, essays, articles and other writings, together with a record of extensive correspondence with editors who repeatedly rejected her work on the grounds that it did not fit their publications. McHenry suggests that we see these 'literary acts' as an eloquent witness: 'They are evidence of her failure only in that they illustrate her refusal to accept the stale and static modes of representing Blackness deemed "acceptable" by the American public and her rejection of the policies put in place by the white publishing industry to monitor and control the voices of African Americans.'²⁰ As Terrell's account of her education at Oberlin demonstrates, the Classics classroom was overshadowed by the history of race in America, but it was also a powerful training ground and locus for signifying.

Notes

- 1 See, e.g., Ronnick, 'Twelve Black Classicists'.
- 2 On Anna Julia Cooper and Black Classicism see Hairston, *The Ebony Column*, 121–58, and Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 31–59 for the broader educational context for Cooper.
- 3 Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 185–229; see especially pp. 206–7 for a discussion of Terrell.
- 4 Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 81–2. Senator Blanche Kelso Bruce was the first African American senator to be elected and to serve a full term. The inauguration in question must have been that of President Chester Alan Arthur in 1881.
- 5 *Crusade for Justice* was subsequently edited and published by Alfreda Duster, Wells' daughter, in 1970.
- 6 Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 243.
- 7 Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 260.
- 8 Quigley, *Just Another Southern Town*, 114–42. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 84.
- 9 Quigley, *Just Another Southern Town*, 114–5.
- 10 Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 64.
- 11 Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 471–2.
- 12 Morson, *Narrative and Freedom*, 118.
- 13 For dating Arnold's lecture at Oberlin, see Shannon Gilstrap's and Woody Depew's GIS mapping of Arnold's lecture tour at <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1NHbmP-lo88rb-sjRK926jzYYr9jl&ll=42.34179828280581%2C-80.31469334999998&z=6>. (Accessed 17 March 2022).
- 14 Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 213.
- 15 Matthew Arnold was deeply invested in contemporary debates about ethnology and race as expressed in national cultures: see Faverty, *Matthew Arnold, the Ethnologist*.
- 16 I owe this observation to Dr. Mary Rosalie Stoner.
- 17 Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 31: 'My parents were not so fortunate, for they were both slaves. I am thankful that I was saved from a similar fate'.
- 18 McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature*, 188–234.
- 19 Preface by H. G. Wells, in Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 1st edition (1940), n.p.
- 20 McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature*, 228.

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C. L. R. James's *Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece, Its Meaning for Today* (1956)

The complete pamphlet from the 1992 edition published by Bewick Editions. Commentary by Matthew Quest.

Direct democracy

The Greek form of government was the city-state. Every Greek city was an independent state. At its best, in the city-state of Athens, the public assembly of all the citizens made all important decisions on such questions as peace or war. They listened to the envoys of foreign powers and decided what their attitude should be to what these foreign powers had sent to say. They dealt with all serious questions of taxation, they appointed the generals who should lead them in time of war. They organized the administration of the state, appointed officials and kept check on them. The public assembly of all the citizens was the government.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Greek Democracy was that the administration (and there were immense administrative problems) was organized upon the basis of what is known as sortition, or, more easily, selection by lot. The vast majority of Greek officials were chosen by a method which amounted to putting names into a hat and appointing the ones whose names came out.

Now the average CIO bureaucrat or Labour Member of Parliament in Britain would fall in a fit if it was suggested to him that any worker selected at random could do the work that he is doing, but

that was precisely the guiding principle of Greek Democracy. And this form of government is the government under which flourished the greatest civilization the world has ever known.

Modern parliamentary democracy elects representatives and these representatives constitute the government. Before the democracy came into power, the Greeks had been governed by various forms of government, including government by representatives. The democracy knew representative government and rejected it. It refused to believe that the ordinary citizen was not able to perform practically all the business of government. Not only did the public assembly of all the citizens keep all the important decisions in its own hands. For the Greek, the word *isonomia*, which meant equality, was used interchangeably for democracy. For the Greek, the two meant the same thing. For the Greek, a man who did not take part in politics was an *idiotes*, an idiot, from which we get our modern word idiot, whose meaning, however, we have limited. Not only did the Greeks choose all officials by lot, they limited their time of service. When a man had served once, as a general rule, he was excluded from serving again because the Greeks believed in rotation, everybody taking his turn to administer the state.

Intellectuals

Intellectuals like Plato and Aristotle detested the system. And Socrates thought that government should be by experts and not by the common people. For centuries, philosophers and political writers, bewildered by these Greeks who when they said equality meant it, have either abused this democracy or tried to explain that this direct democracy was suitable only for the city-state. Large modern communities, they say, are unsuitable for such a form of government.

We of Correspondence believe that the larger the modern community, the more imperative it is for it to govern itself by the principle of direct democracy (it need not be a mere copy of the Greek). Otherwise we face a vast and ever-growing bureaucracy. That is why a study, however brief, of the constitution and governmental procedures of Greek Democracy is so important for us today. Let us see how Greek Democracy administered justice. The Greek cities for a time had special magistrates and judges of a special type, like those that we have today. When the democracy came into

power, about the middle of the 5th Century B.C., there began and rapidly developed a total reorganization of the system of justice. The quorum for important sessions of the assembly was supposed to be 6,000. The Greek Democracy therefore at the beginning of each year, chose by lot 12 groups of 500 each. These 500 tried the cases and their decisions were final. The Greek Democracy made the magistrate or the judge into a mere clerk of the court. He took the preliminary information and he presided as an official during the case. But his position as presiding officer was merely formal. The jury did not, as in our courts today, decide only on the facts and look to him for information on the law. They decided on the law as well as on the facts. Litigants pleaded their own case, though a litigant could go to a man learned in the law, get him to write a speech and read it himself. The Greeks were great believers in law, both written and unwritten. But the democrats believed not only in the theory of law, but in the principles of equity and we can define equity as what would seem right in a given case in the minds of 500 citizens chosen by lot from among the Athenian population.

No experts

He would be a very bold man who would say that that system of justice was in any way inferior to the modern monstrosities by which lawyers mulct the public, cases last interminably, going from court to court, and matters of grave importance are decided by the position of full stops and commas (or the absence of them) in long and complicated laws and regulations which sometimes have to be traced through hundreds of years and hundreds of law books. When the Russian Revolution took place and was in its heroic period, the Bolsheviks experimented with People's Courts. But they were timid and in any case, none of these experiments lasted for very long. The essence of the Greek method, here as elsewhere, was the refusal to hand over these things to experts, but to trust to the intelligence and sense of justice of the population at large, which meant of course a majority of the common people.

The organization of government

We must get rid of the idea that there was anything primitive in the organization of the government of Athens. On the contrary,

it was a miracle of democratic procedure which would be beyond the capacity of any modern body of politicians and lawyers, simply because these believe that when every man has a vote, equality is thereby established. The assembly appointed a council of 500 to be responsible for the administration of the city and the carrying out of decisions.

But the council was governed by the same principle of equality. The city was divided into 10 divisions and the year was divided into 10 periods. Each section of the city selected by lot 50 men to serve on the council. All the councillors of each section held office for one tenth of the year. So that 50 people were always in charge of the administration. The order in which the group of 50 councillors from each section of the city should serve was determined by lot. Every day, the 50 who were serving chose someone to preside over them and he also was chosen by lot. If on the day that he was presiding, the full assembly met, he presided at the assembly.

The council had a secretary and he was elected. But he was elected only for the duration of one tenth of the year. And (no doubt to prevent bureaucracy) he was elected not from among the 50, but from among the 450 members of the council who were not serving at the time.

When members had served on the council, they were forbidden to serve a second time. Thus every person had a chance to serve. And here we come to one of the great benefits of the system. After a number of years, practically every citizen had had an opportunity to be a member of the administration. So that the body of citizens who formed the public assembly consisted of men who were familiar with the business of government.

No business could be brought before the assembly except it had been previously prepared and organized by the council. When decisions had been taken, the carrying out of them was entrusted to the council. The council supervised all the magistrates and any work that had been given to a private citizen to do. The Greeks had very few permanent functionaries. They preferred to appoint special boards of private citizens. Each of these boards had its own very carefully defined sphere of work. The coordination of all these various spheres of work was carried out by the council. A great number of special commissions helped to carry out the executive work. For example, there were 10 members of a commission to see after naval affairs, and 10 members of a commission to hear

complaints against magistrates at the end of their term. One very interesting commission was the commission for the conduct of religious ceremonies. The Greeks were a very religious people. But most of the priests and officials of the temples were elected and were for the most part private citizens. The Greeks would not have any bunch of Bishops, Archbishops, Popes and other religious bureaucrats who lived by organizing religion. Some of these commissions were elected from the council. But others again were appointed by lot.

At every turn we see the extraordinary confidence that these people had in the ability of the ordinary person, the grocer, the candlestick maker, the carpenter, the sailor, the tailor. Whatever the trade of the individual, whatever his education, he was chosen by lot to do the work the state required. And yet they stood no nonsense. If a private individual made propositions in the assembly which the assembly considered frivolous or stupid, the punishment was severe.

Democratic drama

Here is some idea of the extent to which the Greeks believed in democracy and equality. One of the greatest festivals in Greece, or rather in Athens, was the festival of Dionysus, the climax of which was the performance of plays for four days, from sunrise to evening. The whole population came out to listen. Officials chose the different playwrights who were to compete. On the day of the performance, the plays were performed and, as far as we can gather, the prizes were at first given by popular applause and the popular vote. You must remember that the dramatic companies used to rehearse for one year and the successful tragedians were looked upon as some of the greatest men in the state, receiving immense honor and homage from their fellow citizens. Yet it was the public, the general public, of 15 or 20 thousand people that came and decided who was the winner. Later, a committee was appointed to decide. Today such a committee would consist of professors, successful writers and critics. Not among the Greeks. The committee consisted first of a certain number of men chosen by lot from each section of the city. These men got together and chose by lot from among themselves 10 men. These 10 men attended as the judges. At the end of the performances, they made their decision. The 10 decisions were placed in the hat. Five were drawn out. And the one who had the

highest vote from among these five received the prize. But even that does not give a true picture of the attitude of the Greeks towards democracy.

Despite the appointment of this commission, there is evidence that the spectators had a preponderant influence on the judges. The Greek populace behaved at these dramatic competitions as a modern crowd behaves at some football or baseball game. They were violent partisans. They stamped and shouted and showed their likes and dislikes in those and similar ways. We are told that the judges took good care to notice the way in which popular opinion went. Because, and this is typical of the whole working of the democracy on the day after the decision, the law allowed dissatisfied citizens to impeach the members of the commission for unsatisfactory decisions. So that the members of the commission (we can say at least) were very much aware of the consequences of 15 disregarding the popular feeling about the plays.

Yet it was the Greeks who invented playwriting. In Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, they produced three tragedians who, to this day, have no equals as practitioners of the art which they invented. Aristophanes has never been surpassed as a writer of comic plays. These men obviously knew that to win the prize, they had to please the populace. Plato, the great philosopher, was, as can easily be imagined, extremely hostile to this method of decision. But the Greek populace gave the prize to Aeschylus 13 times. They were the ones who repeatedly crowned Aeschylus and Sophocles, and later Euripides, as prize winners. It is impossible to see how a jury consisting of Plato and his philosopher friends could have done any better. There you have a perfect example of the Greek attitude to the capacities, judgment and ability to represent the whole body of citizens, which they thought existed in every single citizen.

Slavery and women

There are many people today and some of them radicals and revolutionaries who sneer at the fact that this democracy was based on slavery. So it was, though we have found that those who are prone to attack Greek Democracy on behalf of slavery are not so much interested in defending the slaves as they are in attacking the democracy. Frederick Engels in his book on the family makes an analysis of slavery in relation to Greek Democracy and modern

scholars on the whole agree with him. In the early days, Greek slavery did not occupy a very prominent place in the social life and economy of Greece. The slave was for the most part a household slave. Later, the slaves grew in number until they were at least as many as the number of citizens.

In later years, slavery developed to such a degree, with the development of commerce, industry, etc., that it degraded free labour. And it is to this extraordinary growth of slavery and the consequent degradation of free labour that Engels attributes the decline of the great Greek Democracy.

However, it is necessary to say this. In the best days of the democracy, there were many slaves who, although denied the rights of citizenship, lived the life of the ordinary Greek citizen. There is much evidence of that. One of the most important pieces of evidence is the complaint of Plato that it was impossible to tell a slave to go off the pavement to make way for a free citizen (especially so distinguished a citizen as Plato) for the simple reason that they dressed so much like the ordinary citizen that it was impossible to tell who was a citizen and who was a slave. In fact, Plato so hated Greek Democracy that he complained that even the horses and the asses in the streets walked about as if they also had been granted liberty and freedom. Near the end of the period of radical democracy, Demosthenes, the greatest of Athenian orators, said that the Athenians insisted on a certain code of behavior towards the slaves, not because of the slaves, but because a man who behaved in an unseemly manner to another human being was not fit to be a citizen. There were horrible conditions among the slaves who worked in the mines. But on the whole, the slave code in Athens has been described by competent authorities as the most enlightened the world has known.

It was also stated by many that the position of women in Athens during the democracy was very bad. Naturally in these days, they did not have the vote. But for many centuries we were taught that the women of the Greek Democracy were little better than bearers of children and housekeepers for their husbands. Yet some modern writers, on closer examination of the evidence, have challenged the old view, and we believe that before very long, the world will have a more balanced view of how women lived in the Greek Democracy.

The founders of Western culture

Now if the ancient Greeks had done little beside invent and practice this unique form of human equality in government, they would have done enough to be remembered. The astonishing thing is that they laid the intellectual foundation of Western Europe. Today when we speak about philosophy, logic, dialect; when we speak of politics, democracy, oligarchy, constitution, law; when we speak of oratory, rhetoric, ethics; when we speak of drama, of tragedy and comedy; when we speak of history; when we speak of sculpture and architecture; in all these things we use the terms and build on the foundations that were discovered and developed by the Greeks.

Correspondence is not sure about science, but in every other sphere of human endeavor, whatever the methods, routines, procedures, etc. that are used by people in intellectual and political association with each other, these were discovered, invented, classified and analyzed by the people of ancient Greece.

They not only invented or discovered these things. The men who invented and discovered and developed them — sculpture, politics, philosophy, art and literature, medicine, mathematics, etc. — these men are still to this day unsurpassed as practitioners of the things that they invented or discovered. If you were writing a history of modern civilization, you might find it necessary to bring in perhaps half a dozen Americans. Let us be liberal. A dozen. You will be equally in difficulty to find a dozen Englishmen. But in any such history of Western Civilization, you would have to mention some 60 or 80 Greeks.

Here are some of the names. Epic poetry — Homer. Dramatic poetry — Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripedes. Comedy — Aristophanes. Lyric poetry — Pindar and Sappho. Statesmen — Solon, Themistocles and Pericles. Sculpture The Master of Olympia and Phidias. Oratory — Demosthenes. History — Thucydides and Herodotus. Philosophy — Socrates, Aristotle and Plato. Science and mathematics — Pythagoras and Archimedes. Medicine — Hippocrates.

These are only some of the best known names. And the fact which should never be forgotten and which indeed we should make the foundation of all our thinking on Greece is that by far the greatest number of them lived, and their finest work was done, in the days when the Greek Democracy flourished.

Modern comparison

This is the greatest lesson of the Athenian democracy for us today. It was in the days when every citizen could and did govern equally with any other citizen, when in other words, equality was carried to its extreme, that the city produced the most varied, comprehensive and brilliant body of geniuses that the world has ever known. The United States today has a population of 155 million people. In other words, 1500 times the population of Athens. In economic wealth, any two-by-four modern city of 20,000 people probably contains a hundred times or more of the economic resources of a city like Athens in its greatest days. Furthermore, for a great part of its existence, the total citizen population of Athens could be contained in Ebbets Field or at any of a dozen football grounds in England. This will give you some faint idea of the incredible achievements not of ancient Greece in general, but of Greek Democracy. For it was the democracy of Greece that created these world-historical achievements and they could not have been created without the democracy.

Greece did not only produce great artists, philosophers and statesmen at a time when their work laid the foundation of what we know as civilization. The Greeks fought and won some of the greatest battles that were ever fought in defense of Western Civilization. At the battles of Marathon, Plataea and Salamis, a few thousand Greeks, with the Athenian democrats at their head, defended the beginnings of democracy, freedom of association, etc., against the hundreds of thousands of soldiers of the Oriental despotic monarchy of Persia. In those battles in the 5th Century, Oriental barbarism, which aimed at the destruction of the Greeks, was defeated and hurled back by the Greeks fighting against odds at times of over 20 to 1. The Oriental despots knew very well what they were doing. They came determined to crush the free and independent states of Greece. Never before and never since was so much owed by so many to so few, and as the years go by the consciousness of that debt can only increase.

Athenian democrat — what kind of man?

This has always been an important question but at the stage of society that we have reached, it is the fundamental question: What

kind of a man was this Greek democrat? Karl Marx has stated that the future type of man, the man of a socialist society, will be a “fully developed individual, fit for a variety 20 of labors, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers.” Here is how Pericles, one of the greatest statesmen of the Greek Democracy, described the ordinary Greek citizen:

Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility.

Marx and all the men who have written of a society of democracy and equality had to place it in the future. For our Greek, this conception of the citizen was not an aspiration. It was a fact. The statement occurs in perhaps the greatest of all the Greek statements on democracy, the speech of Pericles on the occasion of a funeral of Athenians who had died in war.

The Greek democrat achieved this extraordinary force and versatility because he had two great advantages over the modern democrat. The first was that in the best days of the democracy, he did not understand individualism as we know it. For him an individual was unthinkable except in the city-state. The city-state of democracy was unthinkable except as a collection of free individuals. He could not see himself or other people as individuals in opposition to the city-state. That came later when the democracy declined. It was this perfect balance, instinctive and unconscious, between the individual and the city-state which gave him the enormous force and the enormous freedom of his personality.

Pericles shows us that freedom, the freedom to do and think as you please, not only in politics but in private life, was the very life-blood of the Greeks. In that same speech, he says:

And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-today life in our relations with each other; We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do

we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect.

We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.

Human "gods"

Those simple words need hard thinking for us to begin to understand them today. The United States is notorious among modern nations for the brutality with which majorities, in large things as in small, terrorize and bully minorities which do not conform; in Great Britain, the conception of "good form" and "what is not done" exercises a less blatant but equally pervasive influence. The Greek democrat would have considered such attitudes as suitable only for barbarians. One reason why the Greeks so hated the Persians was that a Persian had to bow down and humble himself before the Persian King — the Greek called this "a prostration" and this too he thought was only fit for barbarians. Instead, in the midst of a terrible war, he went to the theatre (which was a state-theatre) and applauded a bitterly anti-war play by Aristophanes, and on another occasion, when the ruler of Athens, accompanied by foreign dignitaries, attended the theatre in his official capacity, Aristophanes ridiculed him so mercilessly in the play that he sued the dramatist — and lost the case.

Another great advantage of the Greek democrat was that he had a religion. The Greek religion may seem absurd to us today, but any serious study of it will show that it was as great an example of their genius as their other achievements. Religion is that total conception of the universe and man's place in it without which a man or a body of men are like people wandering in the wilderness. And the religious ideas of a people are usually a reflection and development of their responses to the society in which they live. Modern man does not know what to think of the chaotic world in which he lives and that is why he has no religion.

So simple and easy to grasp in all its relations was the city-state that the total conception with which the Greeks conceived of the

universe as a whole and man's relation to it was extremely simple and, despite the fact that it was crammed with absurdities, was extremely rational. The Greek gods were essentially human beings of a superior kind. The Greeks placed them on top of a mountain (Olympus) and allowed them their superiority up there. But if any citizen looked as if he was becoming too powerful and might establish himself like a god in Athens, the Athenian Democracy handled him very easily. They held a form of referendum on him and if citizens voted against him, he was forthwith banished for ten years, though when he returned, he could get back his property. Gods were strictly for Olympus.

Around all religions there is great mystery and psychological and traditional associations which are extremely difficult to unravel. But, although the Greek no doubt recognized these mysteries, his relation to them was never such as to overwhelm him.

Thus in his relation to the state, and in his relation to matters beyond those which he could himself handle, he understood what his position was and the position of his fellow men in a manner far beyond that of all other peoples who have succeeded him.

Working politics

In strict politics the great strength of the system was that the masses of the people were paid for the political work that they did. Politics, therefore, was not the activity of your spare time, nor the activity of experts paid specially to do it. And there is no question that in the socialist society the politics, for example, of the workers' organizations and the politics of the state will be looked upon as the Greeks looked upon it, a necessary and important part of work, a part of the working day. A simple change like that would revolutionize contemporary politics overnight.

The great weakness of the system was that, as time went on, the proletariat did little except politics. The modern community lives at the expense of the proletariat. The proletariat in Greece and still more in Rome lived at the expense of the community. In the end, this was a contributory part of the decline of the system. But the system lasted nearly 200 years. The Empires of France and Britain have not lasted very much longer. And America's role as a leader of world civilization is mortally challenged even before it has well begun.

The Greeks were a sophisticated people

It is obvious that we can give here no more than a general account of Greek Democracy. There are great gaps in our knowledge of many aspects of Greek life; and even the facts that scholars have patiently and carefully verified during centuries can be, and are, very variously interpreted. There is room for differences of opinion, and Greek Democracy has always had and still has many enemies. But the position we take here is based not only on the soundest authorities, but on something far more important, our own belief in the creative power of freedom and the capacity of the ordinary man to govern. Unless you share that belief of the ancient Greeks, you cannot understand the civilization they built.

History is a living thing. It is not a body of facts. We today who are faced with the inability of representative government and parliamentary democracy to handle effectively the urgent problems of the day, we can study and understand Greek Democracy in a way that was impossible for a man who lived in 1900, when representative government and parliamentary democracy seemed securely established for all time.

Take this question of election by lot and rotation so that all could take their turn to govern. The Greeks, or to be more strict, the Athenians (although many other cities followed Athens), knew very well that it was necessary to elect specially qualified men for certain posts. The commanders of the army and of the fleet were specially selected, and they were selected for their military knowledge and capacity. And yet that by itself can be easily misunderstood. The essence of the matter is that the generals were so surrounded by the general democratic practices of the Greeks, the ordinary Greek was so vigilant against what he called “tyranny”, that it was impossible for generals to use their positions as they might have been able to do in an ordinary bureaucratic or representative form of government.

Pericles cries

So it was that the Greeks, highly sophisticated in the practice of democracy, did not, for example, constantly change the men who were appointed as generals. Pericles ruled Athens as general in command for some 30 years. But although he ruled, he was no dictator. He was constantly reelected. On one occasion, he was

tried before the courts but won a victory. On another occasion, Aspasia, the woman with whom he lived, was brought before the court by his enemies. Pericles defended her himself. He was a man famous for his gravity of deportment, but on this occasion, Aspasia was so hard pressed that he broke down and cried. The jury was so astonished at seeing this, that it played an important role in the acquittal of Aspasia. Can you imagine this happening to a modern ruler? Whether democratic or otherwise?

The Greek populace elected Pericles year after year because they knew that he was honest and capable. But he knew and they knew that if they were not satisfied with him, they were going to throw him out. That was the temper of the Greek Democracy in its best days.

This democracy was not established overnight. The early Greek cities were not governed in this way. The landed aristocracy dominated the economy and held all the important positions of government. For example, rich and powerful noblemen, for centuries, controlled a body known as the Areopagus and the Areopagus held all the powers which later were transferred to the council. The magistrates in the courts were a similar body of aristocrats who functioned from above with enormous powers such as modern magistrates and modern judges have. The Greek Democracy had had experience of expert and bureaucratic government.

It was not that the Greeks had such simple problems that they could work out simple solutions or types of solutions which are impossible in our more complicated civilizations. That is the great argument which comes very glibly to the lips of modern enemies of direct democracy and even of some learned Greek scholars. It is false to the core. And the proof is that the greatest intellectuals of the day, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others (men of genius such as the world has rarely seen), were all bitterly opposed to the democracy. To them, this government by the common people was wrong in principle and they criticized it constantly. More than that, Plato spent the greater part of his long life discussing and devising and publishing ways and means of creating forms of society, government and lay which would be superior to the Greek Democracy. And yet, Plato owed everything to the democracy.

He could think and discuss and publish freely solely because he lived in a democracy. We should remember too that the very ideas of what could constitute the perfect society he was always seeking,

came to him and could come to him only because the democracy in Greece was itself constantly seeking to develop practically the best possible society. It is true that Plato and his circle developed theories and ideas about government and society which have been of permanent value to all who have worked theoretically at the problems of society ever since. Their work has become part of the common heritage of Western Civilization.

But we make a colossal mistake if we believe that all this is past history. For Plato's best known book, *The Republic*, is his description of an ideal society to replace the democracy, and it is a perfect example of a totalitarian state, governed by an elite. And what is worse, Plato started and brilliantly expounded a practice which has lasted to this day among intellectuals — a constant speculation about different and possible methods of government, all based on a refusal to accept the fact that the common man can actually govern. It must be said for Plato that, in the end, he came to the conclusion that the radical democracy was the best type of government for Athens. Many intellectuals today do not do as well. They not only support but they join bureaucratic and even sometimes totalitarian forms of government.

The intellectuals who through the centuries preoccupied themselves with Plato and his speculations undoubtedly had a certain justification for so doing. Today there is none. What all should study first is the way in which the Greeks translated into active concrete life their conception of human equality. The Greeks did not arrive at their democracy by reading the books of philosophers. The common people won it only after generations of struggle.

How the democracy was won

It would seem that somewhere between 650 and 600 B.C., the first great stage in the development of Greek Democracy was reached when the laws were written down. The people fought very hard that the law should be written so that everyone should know what it was by which he was governed.

But this was not accidental. As always, what changed the political situation in Greece were changes in the social structure. Commerce and (to a degree more than most people at one time believed) industry; the use of money, played great roles in breaking down aristocratic distinctions, and over the years, there was a great

social levelling, social equality, due to the growth of merchant and trading classes, to the increase of the artisan class, of workmen in small factories and sailors on the ships. With these changes in Greek society, the merchants made a bid for power in the manner that we have seen so often in recent centuries in European history and also in the history of Oriental countries. Solon was the statesman who first established a more or less democratic constitution and, for that reason, his name is to this day famous as a man of political wisdom. We see his name in the headlines of newspapers, written by men who we can be pretty sure have little sympathy with what Solon did. But the fact that his name has lasted all these centuries as a symbol of political wisdom is significant of the immense change in human society which he inaugurated. A few years before the end of the 6th Century B.C., we have the real beginning of democracy in the constitution of Solon.

Solon's constitution

The citizens of the city-state were not only those who lived in the city, but the peasants who lived around. Solon was supported by the merchants and the urban classes, and also by the peasants. The growth of a money economy and of trade and industry, as usual, had loaded the peasants with debt and Solon cancelled the burden of debt on them. So that in a manner that we can well understand, the growth of industry and trade, and the dislocation of the old peasant economy provided the forces for the establishment of Solon's great constitution. It was the result of a great social upheaval.

To give you some idea of the state of the surrounding world when Solon was introducing his constitution, we may note that 30 years after Solon's constitution, we have the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the king in the Bible who was concerned in that peculiar business of Shadrack, Meshak and Abednego. And this is the answer to all who sneer about the greatness of Greek Democracy. You only have to look at what the rest of the world around them was doing and thinking.

But although Solon's constitution was a great and historic beginning, the democracy that he inaugurated was far removed from the radical democracy, the direct democracy of later years. For at least a century after Solon, the highest positions of the state could only be filled by men who had a qualification of property and

this property qualification was usually associated with men of noble birth. The constitution in other words, was somewhat similar to the British constitution in the 18th Century. The real relation of forces can be seen best perhaps in the army. In cities like Athens, the whole able-bodied population was called upon to fight its wars. Political power, when it passed from the aristocracy, remained for some decades in the hands of those who were able to supply themselves with armor and horses.

Power of rowers

About 90 years after Solon, there was another great revolution in Athens. It was led by a radical noble, Cleisthenes by name. Cleisthenes instituted a genuinely middle class democracy. As in Western European history, the first stage in democracy is often the constitution. Then later comes the extension of the constitution to the middle classes and the lower middle classes. That was what took place in Greece.

The great masses of the people, however, the rank and file, were excluded from the full enjoyment of democratic rights. The ordinary citizen, the ordinary working man, the ordinary artisan, did not have any of the privileges that he was to have later. The way he gained them is extremely instructive.

The development of commerce gradually transformed Athens first into a commercial city, and then into a city which did a great trade in the Mediterranean and the other lands around it. But a few years after the establishment of this middle class democracy by Cleisthenes, we have the period of the great Persian invasion. In 490 B.C., we have the battle of Marathon, in 480, the battle of Salamis, and in 479, the battle of Plataea, in which the whole population fought. Much of this war was fought at sea. Thus, commercially and militarily, Athens became a naval power. But the ships in those days were propelled by the men who rowed them. Thus the rowers in the fleet became a great social force. The Greeks always said that it was the growth of democracy which had inspired the magnificent defence of Greece against Persia. But after that victory was won, the rowers in the fleet became the spearhead of the democracy and they were the ones who forced democracy to its ultimate limits.

Proletarians of Piraeus

The port of Athens was, as it is to this day, the Piraeus. There, for the most part, lived the sailors of the merchant fleet and the navy and a number of foreigners, as takes place in every great naval port. The leaders in the popular assembly were sometimes radical noblemen and later were often ordinary artisans. But the proletarians of the Piraeus were the driving force and they were the most radical of the democrats.

The struggle was continuous. The battle of Plataea took place in 479 B.C. A quarter of a century later, another revolution took place and power was transferred definitely from the nobles who still retained some of it, to the radical democracy. Pericles, an aristocrat by birth, was one of the leaders of this revolution. Five years after, the lowest classes in the city gained the power of being elected or chosen for the Archonship, a very high post. It was Pericles who began to pay the people for doing political work. From 458, the radical democracy continued until it finally collapsed in 338 B.C.

Class struggle

The struggle was continuous. The old aristocratic class and some of the wealthy people made attempts to destroy the democratic constitution and institute the rule of the privileged. They had temporary success but were ultimately defeated every time. In the end, the democracy was defeated by a foreign enemy and not from inside. One notable feature of Athenian democracy was that, despite the complete power of the popular assembly, it never attempted to carry out any socialistic doctrines. The democrats taxed the rich heavily and kept them in order, but they seemed to have understood instinctively that their economy, chiefly of peasants and artisans, was unsuitable as the economic basis for a socialized society. They were not idealists or theorizers or experimenters, but somber, responsible people who have never been surpassed at the practical business of government.

How shall we end this modest attempt to bring before modern workers the great democrats of Athens? Perhaps by reminding the modern world of the fact that great as were their gifts, the greatest gift they had was their passion for democracy. They fought the Persians, but they fought the internal enemy at home with equal,

if not greater determination. Once, when they were engaged in a foreign war, the antidemocrats tried to establish a government of the privileged. The Athenian democrats defeated both enemies, the enemy abroad and the enemy at home. And after the double victory, the popular assembly decreed as follows:

Athenian Oath

If any man subvert the democracy of Athens, or hold any magistracy after the democracy has been subverted, he shall be an enemy of the Athenians. Let him be put to death with impunity, and let his property be confiscated to the public, with the reservation of a tithe to Athena. Let the man who has killed him, and the accomplice privy to the act, be accounted holy and of good religious odor. Let all Athenians swear an oath under the sacrifice of full-grown victims in their respective tribes and demes, to kill him. Let the oath be as follows: "I will kill with my own hand, if I am able, any man who shall subvert the democracy at Athens, or who shall hold any office in the future after the democracy has been subverted, or shall rise in arms for the purpose of making himself a despot, or shall help the despot to establish himself. And if anyone else shall kill him, I will account the slayer to be holy as respects both gods and demons, as having slain an enemy of the Athenians. And I engage, by word, by deed, and by vote, to sell his property and make over one-half of the proceeds to the slayer, without withholding anything. If any man shall perish in slaying, or in trying to slay the despot, I will be kind both to him and to his children, as to Harmodius and Aristogeiton and their descendants. And I hereby dissolve and release all oaths which have been sworn hostile to the Athenian people, either at Athens, or at the camp (at Samos) or elsewhere." Let all Athenians swear this as the regular oath immediately before the festival of the Dionysia, with sacrifice and full-grown victims; invoking upon him who keeps it good things in abundance, but upon him who breaks it destruction for himself as well as for his family.

That was the spirit of the men who created and defended the great democracy of Athens. Let all true believers in democracy and equality today strengthen ourselves by studying what they did and how they did it.

* * *

Commentary by Matthew Quest

C. L. R. James (1901–89), native of Trinidad, is most famous as the author of *The Black Jacobins* (1938), a historical study of the Haitian Revolution, and *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), an autobiographical meditation on the game of cricket. His other works include *World Revolution* (1937), *Notes on Dialectics* (1948), *Facing Reality* (1958), *Party Politics in the West Indies* (1962) and *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (1977).

Every Cook Can Govern (1956), henceforth ECCG, was a study of classical Athens and the contemporary meaning of its democracy. James underscored that it was a direct democracy that clashed with elite representative government, especially as how most understood it in the middle of the twentieth century. James's Athenian direct democracy saw ordinary people taking responsibility for economic planning, judicial affairs, foreign relations and all educational and cultural matters. This would mean nothing if it did not require making ethical decisions under arduous circumstances. He was clear that slavery and the subordination of women ultimately killed the democracy and that an improved direct democracy should be the proper measure of struggle for modern politics.

While James would have to grapple with the presence of slavery and the subordination of women in ancient Athens, he also wrote about the popular courts and the theatre as evidence of direct democracy. He wished his audience to see a fundamental problem with the civil rights and welfare state conception of empowerment under a republic or nation-state. Equal opportunity to enter the rules of hierarchy and social-democratic trickle-down economics, even in an emerging plural society, were signs of domination. For James, a more direct democracy was possible if labour held the reins of society.

ECCG is a central text for the field of classical reception studies, especially where race is concerned. It pushes past the limits of discussions of 'stolen legacies' and 'Aryan' models of the Graeco-Roman heritage. It is a Black revolutionary's text which argues for the radical democratic content of labour movements and anticolonial revolt. Classical reception studies reminds us that antiquity can authorise diverse contemporary identities, cultures and politics. Often the same texts from Graeco-Roman antiquity inspire fascists and imperialists, but also revolutionary socialists who push beyond a welfare state of mind toward direct democracy.¹ ECCG, first a sketch in a discussion bulletin, then an article in the radical independent Marxist journal *Correspondence*, and finally a political pamphlet, was not accompanied by scholarly footnotes. It was a stylised

vision for proletarians who could read and accept its historical claims toward political ends; research has reconstructed the competent scholarly authorities James relied on to construct his narrative.

Understanding James's legacies requires grasping the broader contexts of the world in which he lived. These include receptions of antiquity in the early twentieth century in the transition from the Victorian to the Edwardian era, mid-century global Marxism and resistance to Stalinism, the Cold War, decolonisation, and shifts in Pan-African and labour movements. James lived an international life, marked by intermittent sojourns in the Caribbean, Britain and the United States. He also spent significant time in Canada, Greece, Spain, France and Africa (including Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania). James's education as a young Caribbean colonial prepared him for a place among middle-class British literary intellectuals, where the ancients were used to add an aesthetic dimension to the responsibilities of citizenship. The transition from the Victorian era to the Edwardian era in the literary life of the British Empire was marked by a questioning of elitism among the lower middle classes and an increased interest in the lives of commoners.

There was a suggestion that a Eurocentric education did not prepare a colonised person to question British imperialist ideologies. Even if such an education seemed weak on challenging empire, it could nevertheless give an impetus to inquire about the lives of everyday people and question the formally educated.² Far from being 'a paradoxical Pan Africanist' like many scholars suggest,³ all over the African world many famous intellectuals and anticolonial rebels before and after James's generation (among African Americans, Caribbeans and Africans) had a similar education: exposure to Latin, Greek, British and French language, literature, history and philosophy. This was not only the educational foundations at elite Oxbridge-style colonial schools, or missionary schools, but at historical segregated black schools in the United States. In fact, Barbara Goff's study of West African classical receptions suggests that for many colonised people the Graeco-Roman classics became 'a secret language' of empowerment. They stimulated cultural nationalism and anticolonial self-confidence.⁴ It is true that in contrast to burdened African diaspora communities, those in the former colonial world who were raised with their own African or Asian ethnic and religious rites of passage were able to maintain more of an independence of mind when exposed to the Graeco-Roman classics. Those with an appreciation for mythology, cosmology, faith lives and theatre were able to more easily cross boundaries with the European ancients. And we must remember the pioneers of African studies, if not Europhiles, used Graeco-Roman

and biblical antiquity to find their way to the wonders and beauty of Ancient Egypt and Nile Valley peoples. It is notable that in 1939, James gave public lectures on precolonial African civilisations, before forging this Greek thought experiment in 1955–6.

James was a cultivator of the popular will in many historical moments. An early founder of modern Pan-Africanism, he was a leader in Britain of the Ethiopia solidarity movement against Italian invasion in the 1930s; he was also a mentor and colleague of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Trinidad's Eric Williams, anticolonial leaders of the 1950s and 1960s. He was a major organiser of the Sixth Pan-African Congress, which he then boycotted, in Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa Tanzania in 1974. All of these personalities had mastered the Graeco-Roman world as thought experiments for critical thinking.

James was a cofounder of the Leon Trotsky movement, in both Britain and the United States. In the 1930s, partially as a successful playwright, he became a public celebrity in Britain. In contrast, in the 1940s he was an underground man, an illegal immigrant, a civil rights and labour journalist, and a strategist in the American Trotskyist movement. James particularly helped US sharecroppers, autoworkers, miners, steelworkers, ordinary Black people and women come to a global perspective on politics through his discourses on Europe, the Caribbean and Africa. He founded his own collective within the Leon Trotsky movement, the Johnson-Forest Tendency (1940–51), which emerged later as independent, small revolutionary organisations: the Correspondence group (1951–62), and the Facing Reality group (1962–70).

From 1947 to 1958, James consolidated the pillars of his own original doctrine. This included a vision of a future socialist society that was distinguished by direct democracy, workers' self-management, a discarding of the Leninist vanguard party, autonomous movements of Blacks and women, and a revolt against totalitarian bureaucracy and state capitalism. James's original theorising surfaced during the early Cold War, when global consensus was that the world was divided between imperial regimes that claimed to be 'free-market democracies' and totalitarian one-party states that called themselves 'communist'. This was an important context for his Athenian thought experiment on direct democracy, which appears to expose the limits of both these approaches. James and his circle recognised that global political economy in all sectors of the world, even in peripheral territories, was state capitalist. There was a desire for state planning that pursued economic growth at the expense and suppression of independent labour. Some societies made a big show of public and nationalised property or a welfare state, suggesting

that wealth was accumulated and redistributed for the development of commoners. James insisted that a police state could not be a defender of the gains of working people.

Owing to the separation of politics and economics, and in fact the lack of any direct role for ordinary people in governing at all, new thinking was required to transcend decaying Marxist frameworks. For the new society would not be distinguished by plenty of goods for all and higher wages, but the revolt against value production itself, keeping in mind that workers and farmers produced and distributed everything but also needed to directly govern. It was in this global context, where humans were told that both communism and capitalism were regimes above society, not for popular or majority rule, while one hierarchy pointed the finger at the other as authoritarian and imperial, that James pursued thought experiments that clarified the pursuit of direct self-government by workers as a revolutionary path. One of these thought experiments was ECCG. In 1955–6, James was pursuing the meaning of the type of democracy found in the classical Athenian city-state for modern politics. This publication anticipated by a few months the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The events in Hungary were significant, as working people, through popular councils and assemblies, confronted and for a time overthrew the Soviet Union's imperialism – before they were contained and repressed by tanks. Oppression of the workers or democratic majority in the name of 'a worker's state', wielding the legacy of the Russian Revolution of 1917, was difficult for toilers to rise against. Ordinary people, or the grassroots democratic majority, had to conclude that, whether under the banners of socialism or democracy, the majority could indeed rule.

ECCG still speaks to us in the new millennium, a time in which we are dissatisfied with how the meanings of 'republic', 'nation-state' and 'democracy' are confused, and neither socialists nor progressives consistently care whether working people govern society or not. At first, ECCG was written to challenge elite representative government, as expressed in the trade union hierarchy of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) labour movement in the United States and in the Fabian Labour Party politics of Britain. Whereas the Athenian citizen appeared to directly govern by popular assembly, council and committee, and whereas famous intellectuals associated with that society, such as Plato and Aristotle, seemed to both resent and benefit from that society's popular democratic character, it seemed like the white European elites who carried on about ancient Greece as the foundation of Western civilisation were in decline, because they had falsified the proletarian

nature of this heritage from antiquity. This was something bold to say during the Cold War and McCarthyism, a period of state repression of communists and free speech in the United States. But James was living in a moment of transition between the Age of the CIO labour movement (1933–55) and the age of liberation in the so-called Third World (1947–93), and civil rights movements (1955–65).

The world was also animated by the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955–6, led by Rosa Parks and Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Furthermore, in 1956, Gamal Nasser's Egypt clashed with the British imperialists over control of the Suez Canal. This meant that as Athens of ancient times was placed in the public sphere for discussion, interest in Egypt, as an anticolonial movement, but also as a source of antiquity heritage, was renewed. Kwame Nkrumah was also leading Ghana to independence from British colonialism in early 1957.

Emily Greenwood's *Afro-Greeks* helps us to see that James's Greeks appeared as 'movable tropes and changeable analogies' in the American Trotskyist movement in the 1940s and in both Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and Eric Williams's Trinidad in the 1950s and 1960s. They could be wielded against elitist politics and sometimes subtly justified them.⁵ They could be leveraged to encourage popular self-mobilisation, federation and state planning. And the fact that ancient Greece, as symbol, was distinguished by slavery and the subordination of women could be used to undermine the authority of whatever moderns appealed to this archaic heritage. The aesthetic beauty of ancient Greek civilisation was often exploited as a signifier for great political and intellectual achievements. But with the dawning of the Age of Black Power and post-war decolonisation, could great civilisations be distinguished by slavery and the subordination of women?

During the Black Power era (1965–75), most famously in Montreal in 1968 at the famous Black Writers Congress, James lectured brilliantly on the Haitian Revolution, comparative world revolution, slave rebellions and anticolonial rebellions. But in other conversations, he asserted – to hisses and sneers – that classical Athens was the greatest civilisation the world had ever known. Walter Rodney facilitated a conversation that inquired whether the word 'civilisation' had outlived its usefulness.⁶ Further, with greater knowledge of the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism, Africans could no longer accept discussions of civilisation where the colonised and enslaved were condemned and excluded. Classical Athens could be discarded as a thought experiment on democracy, given that we are alert to slavery and subordination of women in that ancient society. Surprisingly, James questioned even less

the Athenians' inconsistent respect for immigrants and that society's imperial impulses in their foreign relations. How can such a blemished society embody civilisation at its best?⁷

One response to such a conundrum might be to remember that in world history, revolutions marked by socialist and radical democratic impulses have always emerged out of violent and decaying environments, including imperialist war and civil war and systems of racism, capitalism, fascism and patriarchy. If great civilisations and admirable governments have ever existed, their measure cannot be that people were never abusive or subordinated. Rather, how everyday people respond to such challenges, the flaws of human nature, is what makes a great government and civilisation. Direct democracy as a form of freedom and self-government is not just a beautiful projection. Its decentralised and horizontal character can prevent tyrants from abusing military and technological power and justifying the killing of multitudes. If the Athenian city-state did not restrain abuses in times of war, it is something we must learn for the future.

ECCG started conversations among both Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers and rebellious post-Black Power Caribbean groups, like Trinidad's New Beginning Movement, and the Antigua Caribbean Liberation Movement in the 1970s. This led them to critique vanguard parties and elite representative government and advocate direct democracy and worker self-management. These movements identified with the Haitian Revolution, Castro's Cuba and Ujamaa Tanzania as models, and acknowledged Hungary and Athens less so; however, especially for those in the Caribbean, James's Greeks lived in small places with large visions that could not be ignored. A parallel archipelago of islands across global time and space, Greece was received (by James and the direct democracy tendency in the Caribbean New Left) as the embodiment of civilisation that proved that the Caribbean could also be seen as a civilisation. Without such radical vistas, the Caribbean could be seen as an insular place that would never overcome its colonial past. James's Athenian vision, combined with his Marxism, led many in the Caribbean to conclude that they were a modern people who could federate for popular self-government.

As James's ECCG insisted, 'history is a living thing, not a body of facts'.⁸ In contrast to professional historians who object to teleology (a projected purpose) and instead favour over-determining contingency (chance, luck), he always stridently wrote against scholars and activists who, surprisingly, could be exposed as believing that working people's and colonised people's lives had no purpose at all. Radical and progressive

people often saw the poor as powerless, as people who were foolish or didn't value ideas, who merely struggled to eat and pay the rent. They were seen as unable to directly govern; instead, they were merely the objects of welfare and developmental policies. James contested that a reader who did not think differently could not grasp what the Greek civilisation had achieved. ECCG was meant to restore character and purpose to ancient history and modern politics. The following are some examples.

James used the trope of Athens to transform modern workplaces. He wished them to be not only centres of insurgent strikes but also the politics for designing a new society. The great strength of James's Athenian city-state was that people were paid for political work. Politics was not an activity for one's spare time, nor the initiative of experts; it was part of the working day. This 'Athenian vision could revolutionize contemporary politics'.⁹ Besides using the trope of classical Athens to question the CIO labour movement in the USA and the Fabian Labour Party in Britain, whose bureaucracies usurped labour's identity and power, James presented Athens as mirroring, for those who were familiar with these more modern histories, the popular councils, committees and assemblies of the French, Haitian, Russian, Spanish and Hungarian Revolutions.

While acknowledging the atmosphere of wars (the Peloponnesian and Persian), James saw that evolving democracy (both in ancient Greece and in modern times) most often functioned and embodied a stable and deliberative city-state civilisation. Although James highlighted the Athenian government's rejection of elite representative government and government by experts, he does underline that they delegated some authority, like choosing military leaders in times of war; however, these leaders were kept in check. Pericles comes to embody the strengths and problems of the power to instantly recall those who are perceived to be unaccountable.¹⁰ James clearly suggests that direct democracy, while impressive, could lead to mistakes in evaluations.

James discussed the popular courts in classical Athens, where the judges or magistrates were merely clerks of the court. Ordinary people – 'the grocer, the candlestick maker, the carpenter, the sailor, the tailor' – decided not just on immediate cases but also on the meaning of the law. His view of the Greek method of justice was that they trusted the intelligence of commoners over legal experts and administrators.¹¹ Popular audiences, not expert philosophers or literary critics, decided which of the famous plays written by Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and Aristophanes should win awards. The ancients were seen in the twentieth

century as having produced the high culture of the Western canon, but these plays were evaluated and chosen by commoners for awards. This fact subverts the elitist reception of the ancients. A committee chosen by lot, like many government decisions in the city-state, interpreted and responded to the partisan crowd.¹² Elsewhere James compared this process to the famous methods of deciding a winner of amateur night at Harlem's Apollo Theatre in New York City.¹³

ECCG, in moving away from Plato's and Aristotle's contempt for direct democracy, suggested that an understanding of ancient history in independent Marxist terms was crucial for conceptualising democratic possibilities. James's use of Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War allowed for transcendence of what he initially perceived as the 'old tale-telling' of Herodotus towards a more lucid and proportionate knowledge of politics. Although James recognised Herodotus as a great historian, even the inventor of history, he thought Thucydides was better at documenting facts than Herodotus.

James's early account of the influence of Thucydides on his perspective suggests that the glorification of Athenian democracy 'drown[s]' out the 'groans' of Athenian slaves over historical time.¹⁴ This is one indication that James saw a dynamic tension early on between the issues of democracy and slavery in antiquity, and that the tropes and analogies of his discussion could change. In fact, in the early 1970s, James began to see Thucydides as 'severe' in contrast to Herodotus who, while not believing every 'song' and 'fantastic story' he recorded, paved the way toward understanding ancient 'Egypt' but also what everyday Greeks, before the democracy bloomed more fully, had thought.¹⁵

James was aware that the forces of liberalism in Renaissance Europe nourished themselves on the 'vivid artistry and republican sentiments' of Thucydides.¹⁶ This means he had to stretch Thucydides beyond an interpretation that could support a republic to one that legitimated direct democracy. Nevertheless, Thucydides became a Marxist text in the hands of James to project a type of class struggle.¹⁷ As such, James's ECCG traces an evolution from Solon's era, when the legislative politics of Athenian democracy laws was supposedly systematised for the first time, so that the evolving democracy could appeal to the ancient Greek toilers and check government abuse. This allowed James to argue that direct democracy emerged in Pericles' time, when the power of rowers and the 'proletarians' of Piraeus began to impact society.¹⁸

James suggests that there were elements of class struggle in classical Athens, even though the Athenians never attempted to carry out socialist doctrines. James's stylised vision for proletarians who

could read and accept its historical claims toward political ends was a product of research. The competent scholarly authorities James relied on to construct his narrative included Alfred Zimmern (1879–1957) and Michael Rostovtzeff (1870–1952).¹⁹ These scholars may have used some Marxist sociological categories, but they were not particularly informed by radical aspirations, and certainly not by James's left libertarian and autonomist interpretation of independent socialism. Where James found evidence of the social motion of ordinary people in the ancient world, he gathered these fragments of popular, self-directed liberating activity, enhanced and amplified them, and made these the main currents of his chronicle.

Furthermore, James's ECCG anticipated the interest in Marxist historiography that classicists took up in the second half of the twentieth century. For example, in the academic year 1972/73, the historian G. E. M. de Ste. Croix delivered the Gray Lectures at the University of Cambridge. These lectures, which explored the application of Marxist concepts to the study of ancient history, developed into *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (published in 1981). While this book has provoked much debate, if we do not also read works such as James's ECCG, we will possess a jejune understanding of the international, colonial and decolonial contexts for Marxist engagements with antiquity.

Notes

- 1 Quest, 'Direct democracy and the search for identity for colonized people', 237–8.
- 2 Quest, 'Direct democracy and the search for identity of colonized people', 244–5, 252.
- 3 On James as a paradoxical Pan-Africanist, see Teelucksingh, 'Black and bold'.
- 4 Goff, 'Your Secret Language', 65–6.
- 5 Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*, 187, 212, 220.
- 6 See Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.
- 7 Quest, 'Direct democracy and the search for identity for colonized people', 251–2, 255.
- 8 James, *Every Cook Can Govern*, 24.
- 9 James, *Every Cook Can Govern*, 23.
- 10 James, *Every Cook Can Govern*, 24–5.
- 11 James, *Every Cook Can Govern*, 10–11.
- 12 James, *Every Cook Can Govern*, 14–15.
- 13 See McLemee, 'Introduction', xxxi–xxxii.
- 14 For discussion of Thucydides see James, 'Trotsky's place in history', 119.
- 15 For discussion of Herodotus that is more affirming of the thought of everyday people in Egypt and Greece, see James, 'Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*', 95.
- 16 James, 'Trotsky's place in history', 119.
- 17 James, 'Trotsky's place in history', 119; for discussion of Herodotus' comparative errors, in a children's story format, see James' *The Nobbie Stories for Children and Adults*, especially 'The Remarkable Greeks (Parts 1–2)', 46–51, and 'Delphi and Herodotus Discussion', 51–5.
- 18 James, *Every Cook Can Govern*, 30.
- 19 See Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth*, 12, 54–5, 136, 158, 276; Rostovtzeff, *A History of the Ancient World*, 289–91, 316–8, 320.

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Martin Luther King, Jr's 'Letter from a Birmingham jail' (1963)

'Letter from a Birmingham jail' is an open letter written by the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, on 16 April 1963. The letter was initially circulated in mimeograph form and then widely reprinted. The original draft of the letter seems not to have survived, although a few carbon copies exist. King revised the letter and published it in his memoir *Why We Can't Wait*, published by Harper & Row in 1964. For copyright reasons, we cannot print the letter here.¹

Commentary by Patrice Rankine

'Letter from a Birmingham jail' was composed by Martin Luther King, Jr, in response to another letter, entitled 'A call to unity', written by a group of white clergymen in reaction to civil rights demonstrations taking place in Birmingham, Alabama, at the time. The clergymen were critical of what they called 'outsiders', and they urged these Black civil rights protesters not to demonstrate publicly but to use the courts if they thought their rights were being denied. On 12 April – Good Friday – King, along with other protesters, was arrested and incarcerated in a jail in Birmingham, where he was subjected to unusually harsh conditions. In the letter, King compares himself to the apostle Paul. Such a comparison is not unsurprising, seeing as he was imprisoned over Easter weekend, a crucial moment in the Christian calendar. But King also invoked the Athenian philosopher Socrates in his letter. This chapter explores what was at stake in King's identifications.

The Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr (1929–68) was a legendary civil rights leader in the United States. He was at the spearhead of such consequential assaults on the system of segregation as the Montgomery

bus boycott (1955), the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963) and the March from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama (1965), which was a campaign for voting rights of African Americans. His maternal grandfather, Adam Daniel Williams, was pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. When King, Sr married Alberta Williams, he became assistant pastor at Ebenezer, serving under his father-in-law. Upon Adam Daniel Williams' death, King, Sr became pastor.²

Given the religious soil in which King, Jr was cultivated, he would grow into the role of co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church along with his father, but he could just as easily have been a professor of philosophy or theology, as is evident in his fixation on 'academic freedom' in his letter and elsewhere. Before accepting his 'calling', as he put it, to the ministry, he considered a professorship, deanship and another administrative position. His education and intellectual curiosity had prepared him for any of these roles. King attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, which is among the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States, and also his father's alma mater. King's mother, Alberta, attended Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute (now called Hampton University), another HBCU. Many HBCUs were established throughout the 1800s as an instrument of Black uplift in antebellum America and increasingly after the Emancipation Proclamation, most notably the colleges and universities that arose out of the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890. The Acts set aside funds for the industrial, technological and agricultural education of students in the United States. Morehouse College, home of the Ciceronian Literary Society, was established in 1867, initially as a Baptist seminary. King enrolled at Morehouse in 1944 at 15 years old, earning a Bachelor of Arts (BA) from the college.

At Morehouse, King had as his mentor the notable African American educator Benjamin Mays, who mastered Greek in response to a classmate's teasing him about his reading ability.³ After graduating from Morehouse, King continued his education at Crozer Theological Seminary, from 1948 to 1951, where he earned a Bachelor of Divinity. The biblical archaeologist James B. Pritchard was his professor of Old Testament history, one of the many influences that explain the seamless ties between the Judeo-Christian and the Graeco-Roman threads in King's thought – what we might call his reception of the classics.

From the tutelage of Prichard and others at Crozer, including earlier Crozer graduate Samuel DeWitt Proctor – an important Black theologian and educator who became president of Virginia Union University (another HBCU) – King went on to gain his Doctor of Divinity from Boston

University. His dissertation, which was later the subject of controversy over unattributed citations, compared the views of Christian philosopher Paul Tillich and the theologian Henry Nelson Wieman on the nature of God, or, as King put it, 'creativity' or 'the creative event'.⁴ Searching for his own insights on the creative event that some people call God, King traces the intellectual genealogy of Wieman's thought to well-known intellectuals like John Dewey, an American philosopher. As King put it in his dissertation, Wieman 'speaks of processes of creation, and also describes the production of good as issuing from a context of events'. As it pertains to Tillich, his monistic idea 'is reminiscent of Plotinus, Hegel, Spinoza and Vedanta thought'. Elsewhere, King would also point to 'Plato and Aristotle down to Rousseau, Hobbes, Bentham, Mill, and Locke' as important thinkers in his formation.⁵

King's indiscriminate melding of disparate readings is notable in the Birmingham letter. The educational roots of his ideas can be found in his college, seminary and university education. He absorbed Western religious, philosophical and literary traditions. He was not only a preacher, pastor or politician, but also a careful thinker who weighed and evaluated his forerunners before amalgamating and melding together particular models: Jesus, Gandhi and Socrates, his chief examples of nonviolent resistance to oppression, whether racial or otherwise. These figures form a 'cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12: 1–2) that comprise King's classical humanism. For him, these antecedents contextualised his immediate, local concerns for civil rights in a longer arc – the moral universe that, in his view, would bend toward justice.⁶

The system of segregation in the United States was the existential evil against which King shaped his classical humanism in the 'processes of creation' that would result in some 'good' outcome. The enslavement of Africans in the Dutch, Spanish, French and British colonies of North America extended back into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. American President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 during the Civil War (1861–5) was an important step toward the enfranchisement of the formerly enslaved people. This liberatory move, however, faced regressive challenges by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1896, the US Supreme Court ruled in favour of 'equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races', upholding Louisiana state law in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

King spoke often about the everyday impact of this legal separation on Black people, their families and their communities, but he also addressed its deleterious effects on the purportedly non-Black psyche. In his speeches and writings, he would recall the first time that he

experienced segregation, as a boy on the cusp of entering school. He had a white friend and learnt that they would not attend the same school. The boy's father told him that they would no longer play together, which devastated King, but King also speculated about the pernicious impact of this decision on his friend. In addition to this incident, King recalls a police officer pulling his father over for neglecting to yield at a stop sign. Having been called 'boy' by the officer, King, Sr clarified that there was only one boy in the vehicle – King, Jr – and that he would not be responding to that name. King, Jr learnt early on from his father his sense of 'somebodiness', a term he uses frequently throughout his writing. Somebodiness, or personhood, confronts the 'thingification' that slavery and, thereafter, the system of legal segregation imposed on Black selfhood. In addition, segregation robbed white people of dignity by depriving them of just relationships with other persons, whom they render 'it' rather than 'thou'.

In his opposition to thingification, King calls upon the civil disobedience of Henry David Thoreau, which he understands to be part of a deeper legacy, or genealogy, of Western ideas. Thoreau does not cite Socrates directly in his 1848 'Civil disobedience' – his letter from jail in Concord, Massachusetts, where he was put for not paying his Massachusetts poll tax – but he wonders why a government, through unjust laws, should always 'crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther'. Thoreau does not expect, 'like Orpheus', to change nature and have rocks rejoice, but he can oppose such injustices as slavery, unjustified wars or the poll tax.⁷

In the vein of Socrates and Thoreau, King wrote his 'Letter from Birmingham jail'. He was imprisoned for breaking local laws by occupying segregated lunch counters along with his fellow organisers, such as the members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). From the letter's first words, he takes the opportunity to respond to his critics, fellow clergy who had written to denounce the boycotts. Although he claims that the criticism against his work of nonviolent resistant is too frequent for him to regularly engage with it, the 'genuine good will' of the source in this case calls for a response. He quips that his abundant free time as a prisoner has given him the opportunity to write at length. From the letter's first words, King in at least two ways grafts himself onto a long heritage from which he will expressly draw. First, as a response (as opposed to an opening salvo) his letter is an *apologia*, a defense against his critics, like Plato's *Apology*, where Socrates finds himself in the courtroom for the first time at 70 years old to refute charges of impiety and treason. Secondly, King, who often borrows from literature and performance, sets the scene for dramatic action: spatially he is onstage

with Thoreau and, flattening time, with Socrates.⁸ In the *Apology*, Plato recreates the courthouse apologia. Socrates does not write it himself. Plato dramatises the jailhouse experience of his philosophical protagonist in the *Crito*, for example, where Socrates discusses his response to the injustice of imprisonment.

By drawing from these philosophical dramas, King can momentarily step out of an expressly Christian and racially segregated context onto a broader world stage. His role-playing allows him to take on historical personae from the past and enact them in the present, on an antagonistic American civic stage. The immediacy of the conflict, its nowness, in contrast to the timelessness of liberalism, drives King's insistence that Black people can and should no longer wait patiently for their freedom and full integration into the American way of life. The 'fierce urgency of now', as King puts it elsewhere, aligns with a Pauline idea of *kairos* (*Galatians* 4: 4–7), a 'fullness of time' that dramatises, historicises and renders human action legible in an otherwise meaningless universe of things and events.⁹

A depth and breadth of erudition is notable in King's letter, as is the flattening of time, his long reach into antiquity for its relevance to the present. Trained to regard biblical examples as of a piece with broader Western texts and ideas, King roots his response to his critics in a deeper antiquity, calling upon 'the prophets of the eighth century BC' as precedent for his resistance to injustice. He compares himself with Paul, who 'carried the gospel [. . .] to the far corners of the Graeco-Roman world'.¹⁰ It is Socrates, however, who provides the theoretical position that King will take. In the *Apology*, Socrates refers to himself as a gadfly,¹¹ one who provokes the community (the *polis*), not necessarily by telling people how to act, but rather by pointing out the contradictions in their actions. By cross-examining those in the *polis* who claim to know the right way to act,¹² Socrates creates a dialectic, a dramatic tension between the commonly held position and its potential alternative. In the same way, King is among the 'nonviolent gadflies' whose '[n]onviolent direct action' would 'foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue'. He focuses on the word 'tension', saying that he is not afraid of it, repeating it seven times during a single paragraph.¹³ He contrasts 'violent tension' to 'nonviolent tension', and he directly cites Socrates as his example:

Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and

objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.¹⁴

Reaching back again to Socrates as Athens' gadfly, King agitated in segregated America, a cave where, through racism, truth-seekers have been confined in darkness and only know shadows on the walls. The contrast between the 'dark depths' of prejudice and the 'majestic heights' of understanding and brotherhood directly refers to Socrates' allegory of the cave, from Plato's *Republic*.¹⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois had already in 1903 applied this allegory to the racial situation in the United States in *The Souls of Black Folk*, representing a veil that divides Black truth-seekers and their white counterparts.¹⁶ King's 'tension' also dramatises the process whereby chains are loosened, the slow adjustment to the light from above, the coming to understanding of the true light of the sun. He uses this imagery elsewhere, in his later reflections on time spent in prison: 'You will never know the meaning of utter darkness until you have lain in such a dungeon, knowing that sunlight is streaming overhead and still seeing only darkness.'¹⁷ The process of creation is one filled first with tension, and by citing the long history of human oppression and opposition to it, King hopes to locate the American situation in space and time, for his opponents. To borrow again from King's cadence in 'I have a dream', 'now is the time' for integration – the *kairos* – not the time to wait in a cave.¹⁸

It is worth scrutinising King's impression of Socrates, who is in the letter a paradoxical, Romantic figure. That is, King's Socrates is neither a static interpretation nor the only possible one. From as early as Justin Martyr in the second century CE, for Christian writers Socrates was akin to Christ; as such, both Socrates and Justin were viewed as martyrs for their causes. As Emily Wilson puts it, 'the dying Socrates led Justin to the dying Christ'.¹⁹ This tradition of Christianising Socrates – making him a martyr – is consistent throughout Erasmus in the sixteenth century. His *Paracelsus* (1516) draws a parallel between Socrates and Jesus in the immortality of the soul, its superiority over the body, and the importance of not paying back evil for evil, justice as *not* simply helping friends and harming enemies.

There is an implicit problem with the paradigm, however: King did not want to be a martyr. Within a year of his leadership of the first collective action for civil rights in Montgomery, Alabama, namely the bus boycott of 1955, King and his colleagues faced almost a dozen credible threats on their lives. On 30 January 1956, King's house in Montgomery,

where he was serving as pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, was bombed. Threats to a public figure like King were not even always ideological. On 20 September 1958, a Black woman, Izola Ware Curry, stabbed him with a steel letter opener. King writes that had he sneezed, the weapon would have penetrated his aorta, and he would have drowned in his own blood, at 29 years old.²⁰ He knew that he risked his life in the Civil Rights Movement, but he did not want to die. Thus, it is not Socrates the Christianised martyr that King is describing, despite the consistent return to imagery from Plato's *Republic* – such as the cave, darkness and the struggle for light.

In contrast to the Christian martyr, King's Socrates is an active, living, heroic personality. This Socrates is also not the figure from the Enlightenment, who is disobedient to reason, which renders him tragic, for example in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1832). In this case, Socrates' death is a result of his headstrong unwillingness to compromise, which we see in his sarcastic idea that as punishment for his actions, he should be sentenced to dinner as one of Athens' most esteemed heroes.²¹ King's public posture of humility would not allow him to countenance this Socrates. Rather, he bypasses these receptions of Socrates for one that aligns with Thoreau's Romanticism, one who stands for a just cause in the face of unjust laws, what Antigone called the 'unwritten and unshakable laws' (*agraphta, asphalês nomima*).²² King makes conscious intellectual choices to create a composite of Western precedents. His Socrates is both rational and spiritual, inspired by an inner voice of truth; he is also Dionysian, upturning a community that does violence against him, but doing so with care, or 'love', as he puts it. It is curious that King does not mention, in 'Letter from a Birmingham jail', Mahatma Gandhi – another Socratic figure (see Chapter 14 in this book) whose Indian liberation struggle against the British is cited by King elsewhere as inspiration for nonviolent resistance in the United States.²³ Gandhi was perhaps too far from the Christian, Western models for Birmingham.

King's creation of a composite Socrates of the Black church is evidence of his deliberate intellectual process. He understands that he is crafting out of ancient paradigms tools for Black liberation, ideas and precedents as nonviolent weapons in what he sees as a particular militancy. Whereas some white people have used Christianity as a tool for Black oppression, King reappropriated the ideas as liberating. He refers to the 'myths and legends' of the Bible in the same vein as the non-biblical narratives from antiquity. In all these instances, individual heroic action is important in the struggle for freedom. Just as Socrates wanted

to bring people out of the bondage of ‘myths and half truths’ to ‘creative analysis’ and ‘objective appraisal’, so King desires to shatter contemporary illusion as it pertains to race and civil rights.²⁴ He locates his process of creation, his creative engagement with Western traditions, ideas and figures, within a segregated United States. By inscribing the cause of the American Negro into this heritage, King aims to rewrite the thingification of formerly enslaved people, the ‘I it’ relationship that ‘ends up relegating persons to the status of things’.²⁵ In addition to individual, heroic action, King forges a Dionysian, communal force that is more Nietzschean than Hegelian: the formerly enslaved constitute a collective, community response to an opposing evil, a Western civilisation that in its treatment of ‘the least of these’ had lost its way (Matthew 25:40). This collective at times expresses itself not in the dialectic reason of Western philosophy, but rather in the *Weltschmerz*, the world-weariness of song, as another creative, even divine, force: ‘We shall overcome someday’.

After the Civil Rights Movement and a purported time of post-racialism, with the election in 2008 to the US presidency of Barack Obama, the son of a Black Kenyan and a white woman from Kansas, some Black writers have come to regard the ‘tension’ King worked to resolve as not yet reconciled – or even irreconcilable.²⁶ They see in Western ‘civilisation’ an irredeemable humanism and pernicious liberalism. For example, the Enlightenment thinkers King cites, whether Rousseau or Locke, did not inscribe the African in their ideas about liberty. Theirs was a freedom that came at grave cost to other persons and species – indeed, a freedom the destructiveness of which is planetary. As Charles Mills argues in *The Racial Contract*, the social contract writers created whiteness, crafting the very thingification of nonwhites that King sees manifesting in the United States. The “‘back to nature” optimism’ of Rousseau, as King puts it, was a natural state where Europeans imposed their social realities and structures on the savages (such as Indians and Africans).²⁷ King sees himself in a tradition of reinscribing into classical humanism people who had only been rendered Black by others, therefore ‘Black(ened)’.²⁸ As early as Phillis Wheatley, William Sanders Scarborough, Anna Julia Cooper and W. E. B. Du Bois, the idea persists that liberal education in the classics would humanise the formerly enslaved, who had in the United States been deprived of access to learning and the edification that came with it. Classical humanism could universalise the experiences of Black(ened) people. Such an august role for the classics motivated authors as diverse as Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison and Ishmael Reed. King can be read within this broader context. He believed in the rhetorical appeal of classical humanism.

The ongoing violence against Black(ened) people, however, continued in the United States after the landmark Civil Rights gains of 1964 and 1965, the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, respectively. This anti-Black violence spans from the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 to the murder of George Floyd in 2020, haunting America hundreds of years before the twentieth century and, sadly, continuing indefinitely into the twenty-first. This dire situation has led some writers to reject the very concept of classical humanism. Frank B. Wilderson III, for example, is at the spearhead of a school of thought known as Afropessimism, which sets a no-way-out scenario for Blackness as a condition of being-in-the-world without a positive resolution, at least not one outside of the person's own beingness.²⁹ According to this reading, such civil rights triumphs as the 1954 US Supreme Court Decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which desegregated American schools, only led to more covert and insidious forms of racial and economic segregation.

King's humanism is also fraternal, or patriarchal. In 'Letter from a Birmingham jail' he cites other men and relegates the humanity of Black women to the 'respected title "Mrs"', whatever his efforts to advocate for their humanity. Despite his friendship with James Baldwin, gay and transgender, feminist or womanist humanity is found nowhere in his thought. Writing about Black women, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson argues that 'the human' as a construct was always ever malleable, or plastic, with groups being accepted as human only as it suited the situation.³⁰ King wanted his little girls to live in a world where they would be judged as human. Along with posthumanist and transhumanist writers, Jackson interrogates 'the human' – and humanism – generally, dislodging the genus and species from its dominant position in a self-created (and self-serving) hierarchy. 'Letter from Birmingham jail' does not answer the question of justice in human society once and for all, but it marks an important moment in the strategy of classical humanism for Black(ened) people in the United States, a hundred years after their emancipation from slavery.

Notes

- 1 The full text of the letter can be found freely on the internet. There is a copy at https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html (accessed 14 August 2024) and a PDF of a carbon copy at https://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf (accessed 15 August 2024).
- 2 See Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- 3 Mays 1971.

- 4 On the controversy, see Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You*. The quotes are from Chapter V of the dissertation, titled 'A comparison and evaluation of the concepts of God in the thinking of Wieman and Tillich', available at <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/chapter-v-comparison-conceptions-god-thinking-paul-tillich-and-henry-nelson>.
- 5 See Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr*, 17.
- 6 See King, 'Statement on ending the bus boycott'.
- 7 Thoreau, 'Civil disobedience'.
- 8 See Rankine (2013).
- 9 King, 'I have a dream'.
- 10 King, 'Letter'.
- 11 Plato, *Apology*, 30e.
- 12 Through *elenchus*: Plato, *Apology*, 24b–28a.
- 13 King, 'Letter'.
- 14 King, 'Letter'.
- 15 514b–518d.
- 16 See Du Bois, *Writings*.
- 17 Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr*, 184.
- 18 King, 'I have a dream'.
- 19 Wilson, *The Death of Socrates*, 145.
- 20 See Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr*, 118.
- 21 Plato, *Apology*, 35e–38b.
- 22 Sophocles, *Antigone*, l. 454–455, my translation.
- 23 See, for example, King's sermon on 22 March 1959, delivered at his home church, Dexter Avenue Baptist, in Atlanta, Georgia: 'Palm Sunday Sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi', available at <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/palm-sunday-sermon-mohandas-k-gandhi-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church>.
- 24 King, 'Letter'.
- 25 King, 'Letter'.
- 26 On the contested idea of post-racialism, see the discussion in Baker and Simmons (2017).
- 27 Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr*, 24.
- 28 See Jackson, *Becoming Human*, and Wilderson, *Afropessimism*.
- 29 See Wilderson, *Afropessimism*.
- 30 See Jackson, *Becoming Human*.

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Afterword: Plural possibilities

Sarah Derbew

*Every language has a right to be developed as literature . . . literature, after all, is the exploitation of the possibilities of language.*¹

In *Classics and Race: A historical reader*, we have sought to rework the parameters of ‘Classics’ and ‘race’.² As part of our transparent scholarly practices, we acknowledge the volume’s scant inclusion of scholarship written and circulated in African and Asian countries.³ This does not reflect any hierarchy of knowledge production that privileges writers of the Global North over those of the Global South.⁴ Rather, our emphasis on sources from the United States and Europe aims to spotlight the diversity of voices that exist in some of the most successful, and violent, imperial nations. As we continue to produce antiracist scholarship from our vantage point in the Global North, we invite readers to consider pathways for future research projects that recognise plurality within unequal landscapes.

In the spirit of plurality, we offer an opening epigraph that demonstrates the global significance and stakes of language. Taken from Nigerian scholar Obiajunwa Wali’s (1963) essay ‘The dead end of African literature’, the quote above exemplifies Wali’s call for a democratic approach to the literary canon. Calling for writers to produce African literature in African languages, Wali challenges the uncritical valorisation of literature based on colonial linguistic hierarchies. As Wali astutely points out, there is no inherent hierarchy of languages. Rather, colonisers manufactured an ecosystem in which they categorised their language and literature as superior to all others. Resisting these colonial practices, Wali underscores the ongoing need to remove the linguistic guardrails that colonial powers imposed on their subject nations. Buoyed by Wali’s call for the liberation of language, we have proposed an expansive rendering of ‘Classics and race’ in this volume. From an Ethiopian monarch visiting Jerusalem to an

enslaved West African living in Spain, from a modern-day Socrates born in the United States to one born in India, from African American feminists to Caribbean Marxist intellectuals, from Afro-Brazilians to the indigenous people of Mexico, all are part of our 'Classics and race' canon.

Following Wali's declaration, a generation of African scholars, including Kenyan literary icons Grace Ogot (1930–2015) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1938–), began to write in their mother tongue.⁵ Despite this trend, Wali's linguistic preferences received pushback from some of his contemporaries. One such critic, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1930–2013), suggests that African languages are 'tributaries [that] feed the one central language enjoying nation-wide currency'.⁶ In other words, Achebe hopes that African literature written in African languages can flourish while also highlighting the wide reach of English literature among Anglophone readers from different countries. Adding to his dual perspective, Achebe celebrates the ways that Anglophone African writers have reworked English, an inherited language steeped in colonial history, into an exciting medium of communication that connotes both universality and specificity.

Taken together, Wali's and Achebe's impulses to interrogate colonial legacies have inspired us to produce a volume with wide-ranging, sometimes contradictory, perspectives on Classics and race. For example, we include an art historian's disparagement of ancient Egyptians as well as a novelist's interruption of White-supremacist appropriations of Classics, not to mention investigations of various religious encounters with Classics (Islam, Judaism, Christianity). In addition, we have championed Wali's and Achebe's linguistic advocacy in our multilingual corpus. Namely, we have incorporated primary sources from numerous Romance languages (French, Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese) while also increasing access to material typically outside of the purview of Greek and Roman antiquity, such as Ge'ez (classical Ethiopic).

Tapping into our diverse intellectual community, we highlight another important contribution to the discourse on 'Classics and race' that readers can explore further: Classical reception in Africa, which examines dialogues between ancient Graeco-Roman texts and modern African masterpieces. Classical reception in Africa has the potential to unsettle presumed limitations of space and time. For instance, scholars working on Classical reception in West Africa and southern Africa have built bridges between different geographies and time periods without privileging Graeco-Roman pasts.⁷ By centring Africa in their scholarship, they promote a restorative model of Classics that addresses colonial exploitations of race without being beholden to them.

Outside of the academy, contemporary African writers simultaneously spotlight their home countries and pull Classics into their fold. In particular, African novelists include explicit references to ancient Greek and Latin texts, which in turn renders the Classical canon part of African literature (and vice versa). Some writers have penned opening epigraphs that allude to ancient Greek heroes, such as Ethiopian novelist Maaza Mengiste, who cites Homer's *Iliad* and Aeschylus' tragedy *Agamemnon* at the start of her book *The Shadow King* (2019). Opting for a Trojan hero, Zambian writer Namwali Serpell begins her novel *The Old Drift* (2019) with an epigraph from Book 6 of Vergil's *Aeneid*. African novelists have also made broader thematic links to the world of Greek epics, such as Nigerian writer Chigozie Obioma, whose *An Orchestra of Minorities* (2019) traces the journey of an Odyssean-like traveller traversing different continents and cosmic spaces.⁸ Kenyan novelist Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor offers another contemporary twist on an Odyssean journey from the perspective of a young girl living on the Kenyan island of Pate in *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019). Altogether, these writers have made connections between Classics and Africa without relying on romanticising or defensive tropes. Moving away from hierarchies that prop up the ancient Graeco-Roman world at the expense of the African world, they have developed a model of Classics based on shared ownership.

In closing, we have presented a volume that promotes a plural reading of the Classical canon. As part of our commitment to global Classics, we have worked with a wide range of contributors and source material.⁹ In defiance to those who exploit the language of 'race' to justify violence, we have drawn attention to some resources available for those who opt to resist inequalities in the discipline and to explore Classics and race anew.¹⁰ Armed with tools of literary possibilities, we have redrawn the parameters of ancient studies for present generations. It is our sincere hope that future generations of thinkers will continue this important work.

Notes

- 1 Wali, 'The dead end of African literature', 333.
- 2 Following disciplinary conventions, I use the uppercase 'C' for 'Classics' to refer to the current discipline of Greek and Roman antiquity. Elsewhere (Chapter 1 in this volume), I use the lowercase 'c' ('classics') to include both the discipline of Graeco-Roman antiquity and the study of ancient societies beyond the Mediterranean.
- 3 While this volume features the work of intellectuals born in Africa, such as Chapter 7 on Jacobus Johannes Capitein, Chapter 5 on Juan Latino, and Chapter 9 on Phillis Wheatley, these intellectuals worked outside of their home countries. The only chapter featuring a primary

- source that circulated in an African country is Chapter 1, on the *Kebra Nagast* from Ethiopia. The scholarship of two intellectuals born in Asia appear in this volume (Chapter 19 on Nguyen and Chapter 14 on Gandhi).
- 4 In resistance to any presumed hierarchy of knowledge production, we (the editors) have foregrounded African thinkers in other publications, such as the 2016 reader on the Congolese philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe (edited by Pierre-Phillipe Fraiture and Daniel Orrells) and Sarah Derbew's 2024 article 'Doublespeak in Ancient Greek and modern Ethiopian satire' about the Ethiopian satirist Hama Tuma.
 - 5 In 1962, Grace Ogot, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Obiajunwa Wali attended the first African Writers conference at Makerere University in Uganda. Nearly 20 years later, Ogot published folk tales and novels in Dholuo, the language of the Luo people, including *Ber Wat* [The Goodness of a Relative] in 1981 and *Simbi Nyaima* [The Village that Sank] in 1983. Around the same time, in 1986, Ngũgĩ published his literary manifesto, *Decolonising the Mind*, in which he vowed to write all future works in his native Gikuyu (the language of the Gikuyu people) and Kiswahili (a language originally spoken by the Swahili people of the East African coast). See also Mugane, 'The great English heist in African studies', and the Safal-Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature, which celebrates writers who produce literature in Kiswahili: <https://www.safalgroup.com/cornell-kiswahili-prize/>.
 - 6 Achebe, 'English and the African writer', 28. See also Ogot, 'The African writer'. On the other side of the Atlantic, the St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott questions the parameters of language in his poem 'A Far Cry from Africa'. Walcott writes, 'Where shall I turn, divided to the vein? | I who have cursed | The drunken officer of British rule, how choose | Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?'.
 - 7 For Classical reception in Anglophone West Africa, see Goff and Simpson, *Crossroads in the Black Aegean*, and Goff, 'Your Secret Language'; for Lusophone and Hispanophone Africa, see Rizo and Henry, *Receptions of the Classics in the African Diaspora of the Hispanophone and Lusophone Worlds*; for Anglophone southern Africa, see Wetmore, *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky*, Parker, *South Africa, Greece, Rome, Masters*, Nzungu and Parker, *(U)Mzantsi Classics*, and Mlambo, *Land Expropriation in Ancient Rome and Contemporary Zimbabwe*; for East Africa, see McKechnie, Nyamilandu and Kambalu, *A Monument More Lasting than Bronze*, and Greenwood, 'Reception studies'. Consider also Classical reception in Vietnam (see Nguyen, 'Pham Duy Khie'm, classical reception, and colonial subversion' and Chapter 19 in this volume) and the Caribbean (see Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*; M'Connell, *Black Odysseys*; Padilla Peralta, 'Santo Domingo and the politics of classical reception in the Caribbean'; Andújar, 'Philological reception and the repeating odyssey in the Caribbean'; M'Connell, *Derek Walcott and the Creation of a Classical Caribbean*).
 - 8 Obioma also narrates the tale of four brothers attempting to escape an Oedipus-like prophecy in his first novel *The Fishermen*.
 - 9 See also Bromberg, *Global Classics*.
 - 10 See also Eccleston and Padilla Peralta, 'Racing the Classics', in which they discuss the origins of their multi-year fellowship programme 'Racing the Classics', slated to begin in 2025.

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Classics and Race: A historical reader provides scholars and students with an exploratory intellectual history of the complex relationships between Classics and racist/anti-racist thought-systems. It collects together a series of readings of historical primary sources from the late medieval period until the mid-twentieth century, bringing to light how the classical tradition and post-ancient constructions of race have informed each other. Each reading is accompanied by an essay, written by a leading specialist who offers a discussion of the primary source.

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