The Reception of Classical Antiquity in
Anglophone Postcolonial Caribbean Literature of
the Twenty-First Century

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I, Annemarie Schunke, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

The sharp increase in publications on classicisms in the Black Atlantic over the last two decades points to the continuing significance of the Classics to postcolonial cultures but also to the unceasing importance of postcolonial cultures to the reshaping of Graeco-Roman antiquity and its legacies in the twenty-first century. Despite the topicality and political relevance of this area of research to current Caribbean culture, past investigations in the field have predominantly focussed on twentieth-century classical reception, the Hispanic or French Caribbean and other areas of the world, or have been limited to specific aspects of twenty-first century Antillean literature such as the reception of Greek drama.

This study investigates the reception of Graeco-Roman antiquity in twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean literature. It spotlights three aspects that are central to the contemporary Caribbean classical tradition: modern dealings with epic, classical reception in Caribbean women writers and the relevance of notions of exile and migration to Caribbean Classics. Through the analysis of pieces of prose fiction and poetry as well as through a survey conducted among twenty-first century West Indian literary voices including Ishion Hutchinson, NourbeSe Philip, Lorna Goodison and Shara McCallum, I relate the status and uses of the Classics in the present-day Caribbean to their colonial legacy, especially as a pillar of the British Empire's education system. Simultaneously, however, I argue that classical civilisations and literatures not only continue to be appropriated by Anglophone Caribbean writers for the sake of maintaining and extending a distinctive, regional tradition of reading the Graeco-Roman Classics but also to serve anti-imperialist, canon-redefining as well as anti-racist, feminist and history- and identity-establishing purposes.
Impact Statement

UCL’s Research Strategy aims to “deliver impact for public benefit” and I believe that my PhD project contributes to this goal inside and outside the academic world.

With regard to the benefits of my work in academia, I am convinced that the insights into classical reception in twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean literature which I provide, draw attention to largely neglected, yet valuable pieces of West Indian poetry and prose fiction. Through my analyses, I hope to add to the current state of scholarship, highlight research desiderata in the field of Classics and postcolonialism and contribute to debunking the long prevailing misconception of the Classics as a Eurocentric, hegemonic discipline and to making them more inclusive.

Moreover, as I stress throughout my work, classical references carry significance beyond the confinements of academia and literature. Local traditions of classical reception are symptomatic of a nation or region’s relationship to knowledge and power; therefore, the study of the former allows for conclusions about the latter, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Given the history of the Classics and their many misappropriations in the service of European colonisation and White supremacy, it is crucial for scholars of Classical Reception Studies in- and outside of Europe to counter such propaganda. I try to do my part in this effort by highlighting the value of contemporary Caribbean classical reception in literature to the discipline of Classics but also its potential for postcolonial nations that find themselves coming to terms with the legacy of colonialism and in the long, arduous process of identity- and nation-building. In this approach, I pay special attention to present intersections of Greece and Rome with coloniality, gender, social status and race.
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Introduction

“The shoemaker said once upon a time there was a thing called the Roman Empire and it didn't matter when precisely this thing was. But the thing was real for them”

After renowned Barbadian writer George Lamming passed away on the 4th of June 2022, the Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Amor Mottley said the following about the giant of the Caribbean intellectual tradition and his first and most famous novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*:

Wherever George Lamming went, he epitomised that voice and spirit that screamed Barbados and Caribbean. And while he has written several novels and received many accolades, none of his works touches the Barbadian psyche like his first — *In the Castle of My Skin*, written back in 1953, but which today ought still to be required reading for every Caribbean boy and girl. (Mottley in Graham)

Said novel, which draws on Lamming’s own upbringing on the outskirts of Bridgetown, is a coming-of-age story of a boy during the first half of the twentieth century. This period, the 1930s to 1940s, were marked by tensions between tradition and modernity, between plantation and plot (cf. Wynter) and by the dissolution of one form of community and anxiety about the future of community in the Anglophone Caribbean, themes that are reflected in several great Caribbean novels of the twentieth century (Kamugisha Beyond Coloniality 15f.).

Interestingly, in his description of the ordinary residents of the Barbadian capital of this period – in his account that according to Mottley “screams Caribbean” and “touches the Barbadian psyche” in such a way that it “ought to be required reading for every Caribbean boy and girl” even nowadays – Lamming repeatedly draws on Graeco-Roman civilisations. Despite great societal changes affecting Barbados and the villagers who Lamming portrays, they are nonetheless reflecting on the Roman Empire because this “thing was real for them”, classical civilisations mattered to them.

What this excerpt from *In the Castle of My Skin* points to is not just the ubiquity of ancient Graeco-Roman civilisations in the Anglophone Caribbean due to colonial education curricula of the twentieth century. Latin and Greek were introduced to the colonies of the United Kingdom as prestigious European ‘goods of export’ and central pillars of the British colonial school system (Makris passim) in regions under British rule and, consequently, also in the British West Indies (Greenwood Afro-Greeks 69ff.) since

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1 George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (213).
these cultural forms were attributed great value in Europe and were considered to aid the
colonial ‘civilizing mission’. As a result of this, knowledge of classical languages and
civilisation\(^2\) signified education and culture and was a marker of social class and elite or a
means of socio-economic advancement in the British colonies (Vasunia 5 and 8ff.;
Greenwood \textit{Afro-Greeks} 4 and 73-88).\(^3\) However, what the above quote and classical
references in \textit{In the Castle of My Skin} also illustrate is that the Classics mattered to
Caribbean people and the Caribbean intellectual tradition of the twentieth century in other
ways. An important reason for their appeal was that they served as contact points to the
Caribbean experience, not least based on geographical and resulting cultural similarities
with the Mediterranean, and as such as cultural materials that contributed to the
articulation of Caribbean identity that has been so central to nation- and identity building
in the aftermath of colonialism in the region (cf. Greenwood \textit{Afro-Greeks} 251f.).

Moreover, what the shoemaker’s words in \textit{In the Castle of my Skin} also allude to is
a crucial factuality which accounts for the great importance of reception studies beyond
the Humanities: they provide substantial insights into the self-understanding of nations
through the investigation of their perspectives on Rome and ancient Greece. Changing
responses to antiquity can be read as indicators of cultural change and (re-)negotiation
of relationships with the past that bear political significance for the receiving cultures
and have a value beyond their role in classical studies. Within a postcolonial context,
this observation is particularly relevant with regard to ‘the continuity of empires’ and,
thus, the positioning of countries towards Europe as the origin of colonial powers.\(^4\)

Shortly after the publication of \textit{In the Castle of My Skin}, between the 1960s and
1980s, most of the British colonies in the Caribbean Basin gained independence from the

\(^2\) Throughout this work, I use the terms ‘classical’ and ‘Classics’ to refer to Graeco-Roman
civilisations for reasons of simplicity and following academic and linguistic conventions. However,
I am aware of the problematic nature of this usage of the term and it is crucial to stress that I do
not suggest that other (ancient) cultures do not have their own ‘classics’ or that these are not on a
par with or equally valuable as Graeco-Roman artefacts. Cf. Greenwood \textit{Afro-Greeks} 13 and
240ff.

\(^3\) Cf. Bhabha’s concept of ‘mimicry’ (\textit{Location of Culture} 85–92), the “‘epic’ project of the civilizing
mission to transform the colonized culture by making it copy or ‘repeat’ the colonizer’s culture”
(Moore-Gilbert 120).

\(^4\) For lengthy discussions of the issues of continuity of empires or the ‘validization’ of modern
empires through the Roman Empire, how the British used such argumentation to champion the
English language and culture and justify the oppression of local cultures in their colonies as well
as the concept of \textit{translatio studii et imperii} (“the transfer of culture along with power/empire”;
Greenwood \textit{Afro-Greeks} 112) cf. Makris, Greenwood \textit{Afro-Greeks} 112-185; van Zyl Smit 373-385;
Vasunia 7ff and 20ff.
Along with the transfer of political and economic sovereignty, the newly gained independence also meant efforts to remove the relicts of cultural and psychological dependency to aid the formation of national identities. Central to the latter have been endeavours to decolonise the formerly externally examined, Eurocentric education curricula that had been imposed by the British – processes that are arguably still in progress to this day (Denny passim; Robertson passim).

Since British colonial education had been based upon a triple foundation of the ‘civilisation-bringing’ disciplines Classics, public school sports and English literature (Makris), the teaching of ancient Greek and Latin languages and civilisations has been targeted as part of decolonisation efforts in the West Indies. Fewer and fewer schools and universities in the English-speaking Caribbean Isles continue to teach the Classics in the twenty-first century, as I demonstrate in chapters one and three. Thus, the question arises how the perception and uses of the Classics – which had previously played a central role in the islands’ cultural canons both as signifiers of education undeniably linked to British imperialism and as materials that served the purpose of cultural resistance to empire and played a role in the establishment and expression of Caribbean national identity following independence – have changed in Anglophone Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century.

Despite the gradual abolition of Classics teaching in the area, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, allusions to Graeco-Roman civilisations have continued to be considerable in number in Anglophone Caribbean fiction and poetry, such as in the works of Jacqueline Bishop, Vahni Capildeo, Kwame Dawes, Curdella Forbes, Lorna Goodison, Ishion Hutchinson, Anthony Kellman, Shara McCallum, Monique Roffey, whose works I discuss in detail in the following chapters, as well as Celeste Mohammed, Ingrid Persaud and Robert Edison Sandiford, to name only a few Caribbean writers who play with Graeco-Roman cultural assets in their writing. As Hardwick asserts, “classical texts, images and ideas are culturally active presences” in our current times (Reception Studies 112), and this observation evidently still holds true for the Anglophone Caribbean context. As classical references in writings by previously mentioned twenty-first century authors suggest, the “thing” George Lamming’s fictional shoemaker referred to, the Roman Empire, is still real for modern Caribbean nations and people, even though the current times see the first generations of entirely postcolonial authors.

5 Apart from those countries which remain non-sovereign and, therefore, British overseas territories (Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat).
Despite these recent generations of Anglophone Caribbean authors never experiencing colonial Classics teaching first-hand – unlike their predecessors who shaped the Caribbean literary landscape such as Kamau Brathwaite, Austin Clarke, C. L. R. James, Derek Walcott –, Greece and Rome continue to matter in their literature. When reading reviews of recent Caribbean novels or poetry collections, one frequently encounters descriptions of these works as being ‘steeped in the Classics’ (e.g. McDermott in his review of Ishion Hutchinson’s volume of poetry *Far District*). Nonetheless, the uses of the Classics and their effects and significance in contemporary Anglophone Caribbean literature and culture are usually not explored in more detail.

For the above reasons, the study of classical reception in contemporary Anglophone postcolonial literature of the twenty-first century promises to be particularly exciting since it provides the possibility of an understanding of these nations’ current relationship to the Classics, and, consequently, to knowledge and power, decades after the end of colonialism. In my analyses of literary works in the following chapters, I am particularly interested in perceptions of Greece and Rome among those generations of Caribbean people and literati who never directly experienced colonial education curricula. I explore which aspects of Graeco-Roman culture continue to matter in contemporary Caribbean pieces of literature. I address such questions as to whether references to the Classics in postcolonial Anglophone West Indian literatures of the twenty-first century appear to have been liberated from their colonial connotations and refigured drawing on local contexts. Moreover, I am interested in investigating to which extent Roman and Greek literature, culture and myth continue to offer ways – and which new ways – of self-identification and nation-building for the formerly colonised, which resist imposed identities, negate any debts to British or European influences and represent a medium to express modern Caribbean experiences and conditions. I explore whether Caribbean Classics as a distinct, local tradition of reading Greece and Rome continue to provide materials for cultural resistance and anti-imperial critique in twenty-first century literature from the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean Basin, and foremost Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Given the nature of the project at hand, two branches of critical literary theory are of primary relevance: postcolonial and diaspora theory as well as reception theory. In the following, I will present my theoretical approaches in order to locate this study in the realm of Classics, reception studies and postcolonial studies and to provide a framework
for my analysis. I will start by summarising the discourse in the discipline of Classics which this work integrates itself into.

The Classics in (Post-)Colonial and Black Atlantic Contexts

Roughly since the turn of the millennium, and certainly in response to postcolonial critical theory such as Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) or Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* (1994), there has been a realisation in the discipline of Classics that the study of classical receptions in non-European contexts is important, timely and of irrefutable cultural and political relevance (Moyer et al. 23f.). In the twenty-first century, reception studies in postcolonial contexts have enjoyed great popularity among Classics scholars because of their political topicality with regard to notions of identity, gender, race and coloniality and their impact beyond the study of classical languages and literature. At the same time, Classics continued to have a Eurocentric focus and Classics departments around the globe currently grapple with the Herculean task of decolonisation – of curricula, modules and reading lists but also with regard to outreach, admissions and funding. After all, the discipline’s popularity throughout the centuries had been partly based on the narrative of Greece and Rome as the primary cradle of world civilisation and, vice versa, of Europe and its cultural legacy as the immediate continuation of Graeco-Roman culture and, therefore, superior to other cultures. This study hopes to contribute to debunking misappropriations of the Classics for racist and White supremacist purposes and to contribute to the important and overdue scholarly discourse which the traditionally Eurocentric discipline of Classics has seen evolve in the past two to three decades, that has represented a shift to more inclusive, intercontinental approaches to how classical antiquity is received and (re)constructed in (post-)colonial literature from around the globe.

Classical Civilisations and Extra-European Influences

Even nowadays, academic discourse on the relationship between Classics, their tradition of reception inside and outside of Europe and related issues of race or coloniality often revolve back to questions of cultural exchange in antiquity and especially the Black Athena controversy. Debates surrounding the existence of contact zones between ancient Rome and Greece – as the ‘roots of European culture’ – and other ancient civilisations date back to as early as the late sixteenth and seventeenth century (Marchand 11ff.).
Initially, it was predominantly Christian scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – “the first in which Northern Europeans came into frequent contact with peoples from other continents” (Bernal *Black Athena I* 201) – who rejected theories of the influence of Middle Eastern communities on ancient Greece (ibid. 189–196) in order to detach the ancient Greeks from early Semitic, or more generally African, peoples, champion ancient Greece as “the ‘childhood’ of the ‘dynamic’ ‘European race’” (ibid. 189) and celebrate their own cultural heritage as unique and the most influential in the development of world civilisation.

In the 18th and 19th century, and very much in consequence of Romanticism and along with an increased intensity of racism in Europe, another wave of interest in the origins of Greek (and therefore European) culture as well as in the cultural exchange between classical civilisations and those east or south of the Mediterranean Sea could be observed among Western European (and foremost British and German) scholars. These intellectuals denied the idea of the ancient Greeks owing any cultural debts to peoples hailing from continents other than Europe (Marchand 292ff.). As Bernal emphasises:

If I am right in urging the overthrow of the Aryan Model\(^6\) and its replacement by the revised Ancient one\(^7\), it will be necessary not only to rethink the fundamental bases of ‘Western Civilization’ but also to recognize the penetration of racism and ‘continental charvinism’ into all our historiography, or philosophy of writing history. The Ancient Model had no major ‘internal’ deficiencies, or weaknesses in explanatory power. It was overthrown for external reasons. For 18th- and 19th-century Romantics and racists it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe but also as its pure childhood, to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites. Therefore the Ancient Model had to be overthrown and replaced by something more acceptable. (*Black Athena I* 2)

During the 1950s, scholarly engagement with the topic started to gain new momentum. In 1954, Cheikh Anta Diop published one of the most important black intellectual, Afrocentrist condemnations of Eurocentric historiography, *Nations Nègres et Culture*. Another noteworthy publication of the same year was George M. James’s *Stolen Legacy* (1954), which explored the roots of Western philosophy, arguing that it had originated in North Africa and merely been ‘stolen’ by the ancient Greeks, thus dismissing

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\(^7\) I.e. of “viewing Greece as essentially European or Aryan” (Bernal *Black Athena I* 1).

\(^8\) Which, among other assumptions, highlights that “Greek civilisation is the result of the cultural mixtures created by […] borrowings from across the East Mediterranean” (Bernal *Black Athena I* 2).
their cultural legacy. The following decades saw a number of controversial academic publications on contact between Greece and Rome and oriental or African civilisations during antiquity as well as on related topics such as the Black presence in antiquity and the Africanity of Egypt.\(^9\) At the end of the 1980s, Bernal (*Black Athena I and II*, 1987 and 1991), largely following George M. James’s (1954) line of argumentation, famously contended (supported by archaeological, historiographical and philological evidence) that ancient Greece had been colonised by the Egyptians and Phoenicians and that its civilisation and culture thus had their roots in North Africa – an observation which, according to Bernal, racist Western scholarship had failed to recognise ever since the shift in perception of ancient Greece in the 18\(^{th}\) century. Other scholars, in consequence, made it their task to refute Bernal’s “Afrocentrist claims” which according to them “blatantly contradict the historical evidence” (Lefkowitz, abstract) in order to defend the alleged ‘purity’ of Graeco-Roman culture and its role for the development of Western civilisation. The academic debate surrounding *Black Athena* has continued into the early years of the twenty-first century with Bernal, Lefkowitz and other scholars contributing to it.\(^{10}\) From a reception studies viewpoint, Orrell’s et al.’s inspired volume *African Athena* has been particularly noteworthy since, as opposed to previous volumes, it explicitly shifted focus to the cultural and political implications of the juxtaposition of African and Graeco-Roman cultures that has been at the core of Black Athena debates.

For this study on the role of the Classics in the postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean, it is important to be aware of previously mentioned publications for three principal reasons. Firstly, they include some of the earliest and most influential works exploring classical antiquity beyond a European framework, even though some of the above mentioned approaches were very much still characterised by a Eurocentric understanding of the Classics. Therefore, the mentioned academics shaped the debates which have provided the framework for recent studies on classicisms in (post-)colonial regions, which this work is responding to. Secondly, they provide revelatory insights both into how Rome and ancient Greece have been viewed in relation to other non-European ancient high civilisations since the Renaissance, and what they signify in the modern world inside and outside of Europe. The heated and highly controversial scholarly


exchange in this field has illustrated how politically charged the study of the ancient Mediterranean world and its legacy in relation to non-European, colonial contexts can be. Diop’s works and especially Bernal’s *Black Athena* may have been controversial and flawed with regard to their conformance to academic standards. However, their merit in highlighting and challenging the White European dominance and racially-charged mindsets – which at times can only be conceived of as blunt racism (cf. Moyer et al. 5; Gilroy 190, 215) –, that have in past centuries been characteristic of scholarship on Mediterranean antiquity, needs to be acknowledged. Thirdly, this tradition of hegemonic Western scholarship and worldviews in European Classics and Humanities more generally, which were ultimately thrust on the Caribbean as part of colonial curricula that were ignorant of local cultures, matter since they are symptomatic of the distortion and mockery of the history of Black Atlantic people by European intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{11} Twenty-first century Caribbean authors are in some respects still writing back against this legacy. They are contributing to the restoration of a sense of local historical consciousness and identity, which engagement with ancient Greek and Roman civilisations forms an element of – one out of many in the vast Caribbean artistic and literary repertoire.

*Classics in Postcolonial and Black Atlantic Contexts: The Current Status of Scholarship*

Thanks to the discourse on Classics and (post-)colonialism that has emerged in our discipline since roughly the beginning of the millennium, we are gaining an enhanced understanding of the interconnections between Greece and Rome and areas beyond Europe. Of course, each postcolonial region has distinct discourses of Greece and Rome that were shaped by their resonance with native local traditions. Recent scholarship has reflected these unique local relationships to Graeco-Roman civilisations in a plethora of works that are focused on different geographical areas but also periods (the colonial vs. the postcolonial), genres and writers.\textsuperscript{12} Nonetheless, a common conclusion in these works appears to be that the status of Greece and Rome in (former) colonies has been “overdetermined by the clash of the colonizer and the colonized” (Moyer et al. 10), in the

\textsuperscript{11} Note also that some of the overtly racist pieces of scholarship that shaped the mentioned academic discourse such as Sanders’ “Hamitic Hypothesis” (1969) in *The Journal of African History* were published by the very university – Cambridge University Press – that had set and marked School Certificate examinations in the Anglophone Caribbean colonies (Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board, OCSEB; cf. Greenwood 70ff.).

sense of a counter-discourse and writing back of postcolonial authors against the hegemonic, imperial European claim to ownership of the Classics – an observation that is relevant for the Caribbean context, even in the twenty-first century.

Parallel to this rise in interest in the role of Classics in (post-)colonial contexts in the last 15 years, a subdiscipline which is primarily concerned with the interrelations between (Anglophone) Black Atlantic cultures and literature and the legacy of the ancient Mediterranean civilisations has emerged. It is worth noting that this branch of research has to date been more preoccupied with drama reception than any other genre or aspect of Graeco-Roman culture (cf. Goff/Simpson (2007), Rankine (2013), McConnell (2013), Bosher et al. (2015), Andújar/Nikoloutsos (2020)). Moreover, while a much stronger focus in this area of study has been on African American authors and their uses of Graeco-Roman artefacts, relatively little attention has thus far been dedicated to the study of classical reception in the Anglophone Caribbean. In addition to McConnell’s Black Odysseys, which discusses responses to Homer’s Odyssey in African diaspora literature including by Caribbean authors such as Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott, Emily Greenwood’s pioneering work Afro-Greeks needs to be mentioned. In the 2010 volume, Greenwood explores the relationship between the culture and literature of the twentieth-century Caribbean – with principal interest being dedicated to Kamau Brathwaite, Austin Clarke, Merle Hodge, C. L. R. James, V. S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott and Eric Williams – and the cultural products of the ancient Mediterranean. She convincingly demonstrates the ambivalent, complex connection Caribbean writers of the twentieth century had with ancient Greece and Rome: on the one hand, these ancient Mediterranean cultures were very much perceived as being “tainted by empire and colonialism” (Afro-Greeks 251) among West Indian literati – thanks to the colonial education system imposed on the region, which championed the Classics. On the other hand, Greenwood shows that Caribbean writers of the twentieth century appropriated and manipulated Graeco-Roman languages and literature to employ them in the service of anti-imperialism.

Since 2013, there have been notably fewer academic publications both in the area of Classics and (post-)colonial literature and specifically on classical reception in Black Atlantic contexts (even though Black Lives Matter movements of recent years and ensuing decolonisation efforts that have shaped university landscapes and Classics departments around the globe indicate a potential spike in interest in years to come).

Consequently, Anglophone postcolonial Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century has thus far received relatively little thought in reception studies. However, as I alluded to above, the twenty-first century represents the first era of entirely postcolonial Caribbean literature in the sense that the authors grew up or spent large parts of their lives in independent nations and will most likely not have experienced colonial school curricula with a focus on classical languages and civilisations first-hand. These socio-political changes in the Anglophone Caribbean – caused by the end of colonialism and phasing out of colonial education models – means that the exploration of the connections and mutual influence between the Roman Empire and ancient Greece on the one hand and contemporary Anglophone Caribbean countries on the other hand promises to be particularly exciting due to different routes to Graeco-Roman culture and literature having opened up to aspiring authors and, consequently, potential shifts in the status and uses of the Classics.

Moreover, while reception of drama in postcolonial settings on both sides of the Atlantic has attracted significant scholarly interest, contemporary works of prose fiction and poetry of the African diaspora and particularly from the Anglophone Caribbean deserve more attention than they have previously been granted in classical reception studies. Considering the large number and complexity of classical allusions in Caribbean works of fiction and poetry, as I hope to show by way of example of select novels and pieces of poetry, their consideration and examination in the field of classical reception studies is timely.

Lastly, it seems appropriate to stress that this work places emphasis on geographical as well as racial distinctions of postcolonial classical traditions. The latter have been topical in previous discourses on African diaspora classicisms, as keywords such as Black Athena, Black Aegean and Black Odysseus have suggested. While race is doubtless a principal category to be aware of in any study on Caribbean classicisms including this one, other notions such as gender, sexuality, (post-)coloniality, history and identity, power and resistance and their intersections are equally important to this work. The equal valuation of different intersectional categories in this work is not least reflected in the decisions to dedicate significant attention to literature by Caribbean women writers as well as to include works by Caribbean authors who identify as Black as well as writers who identify as White, such as Trinidadian Monique Roffey.
Before I outline the structure and focal points of this work in more detail, however, I would like to exhibit the network of theoretical approaches to classical reception and postcolonialism this work exists in and draws on.

**Conceptual and Methodological Basis of This Work**

At the heart of my research is the theory of transformation, developed by Böhme et al., which evolved from the field of classical reception studies and offers a comprehensive model for the examination of historical change (Böhme “Einladung” 8). Transformation theory places emphasis on the reciprocity between ancient Graeco-Roman cultures and later, receiving cultures: at its basis lies the assumption that the past as well as the present do not exist as invariable entities but are constantly created, changed, enriched as well as negated, neglected or deconstructed through processes of transformation. Therefore, the starting point, in the form of an ancient notion or object, as well as the product of any process of transformation reciprocally generate one another and are conditioned by the cultural context of antiquity as well as that of the respective receiving society (Böhme “Einladung” 11).

The classification of transformational processes is founded on the assumption of three basic modi: inclusion, exclusion and recombination of ancient notions in contemporary societies (Bergemann et al. 47). In light of this fundamental hypothesis, the transformation theory suggests a markedly open list of currently fourteen different kinds of transformation: appropriation, assimilation, disjunction, encapsulation, focalisation/neglect, hybridisation, ignorance, creative destruction, montage/assemblage, negation, reconstruction/addition, substitution, translation, reinterpretation/inversion (ibid. 47-54). However, Bergemann et al. emphasise that most instances of transformation involve various types of transformational processes and that multi-layered, complex chains of transformations, which may span centuries, occur frequently.

In the interaction of antiquity and subsequent cultures, according to the theory of transformation, the ancient Greek and Roman cultures are not simply ‘received’ but an image of classical antiquity is constantly constructed by successive cultures and ‘agents
of transformation’ (Bergemann et al 40f.). Simultaneously, receiving, interacting cultures identify themselves and position themselves towards other contemporary cultures through transformations of classical antiquity, with regard to the arts and humanities, but also sciences and politics, very much in the spirit of Glissant’s notion of Relation in *Poétique de la Relation*. Consequently, the merit of the theory of transformation is its emphasis on the modern-day cultural, but also political significance of the investigation of twenty-first century classicisms. As Black Athena debates have demonstrated, the study of non-European classical traditions, especially in formerly colonised regions, still carries political weight. For these reasons, the transformation theory is particularly suited to the exploration of the interrelations of the ancient Mediterranean archipelago and postcolonial cultures such as the Caribbean islands.

Due to the bidirectional concept of the impact antiquity and posterior cultures have on one another, the transformation theory lends itself to describing processes which create a “counterculture of antiquity”, in the sense in which Moyer et al. define the term, following Charles Martindale’s *Redeeming the Text* (Moyer et al. 6 and 21f.). Central to both Martindale’s work and the transformation theory is the idea that the revisioning of ancient worlds by modern cultures represents a counterculture of antiquity, a reshaping of Greece and Rome and their literature through their reception in contemporary works. In this sense, the transformation theory is also suited to the context of postcolonial Caribbean reception since it responds to and is compatible with Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic as a “counterculture of modernity” (Gilroy 1–40).

For the mentioned reasons, the transformation theory is thus particularly suitable for the study of the interrelatedness of Graeco-Roman cultures and postcolonial Caribbean nations and their literatures since it explicitly acknowledges and admits room for the exploration of the cultural and political implications of the standings and uses of Greece and Rome in these societies. Moreover, it responds to and shares ideas with

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14 While agents of transformation have tremendous influence on the nature of processes of transformation, they are not necessarily people with specific intentions. In many cases, agents of transformations can be institutions, various kinds of media and techniques, through which transformational processes are performed and which influence objects of the ancient as well as the posterior culture. Moreover, in the case of complex chains of transformations, which develop a dynamic of their own, agents can at times even become entirely indiscernible (“Einladung” 13). Chains of transformations are the norm in twenty-first century Caribbean reception since relations to antiquity are usually not direct but mediated by intervening acts and agents of transformation, be they European, African or Caribbean.

15 “They have pretended to forget that, in literature, just like everywhere else in the world, one of the full-senses of modernity is provided henceforth by the action of human cultures’ identifying one another for their mutual transformation” (*Poétique de la Relation* 24)
postcolonial and diaspora theory, which provides the framework for the analysis of pieces of Caribbean literature and the assessment of the significance of classical references in them in the wider cultural context they are rooted in. In addition to Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, the transformation theory is also complementary to other central approaches in the realm of (Caribbean) postcolonial studies such as Brathwaite’s or NourbeSe’s theoretical writings, which I draw on throughout this work. The theory of transformation corresponds to some of the postcolonial theories that are the most relevant to the study of classical references in contemporary Caribbean literature, based on dominant themes and tendencies observed in reading contemporary pieces of West Indian literature. Said approaches, which thus provide an appropriate framework for the analysis of postcolonial Caribbean literature, include those by Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant, as I am going to show next.

The Theory of Transformation and Postcolonial Theory: Homi Bhabha’s Location of Culture (1994)

Some of the most central concepts of the transformation theory on the one hand, and postcolonial theory in the Caribbean context on the other hand, are those of *creolisation/créolité/Antillanité* (Glissant *Poetics of Relation* 33ff.) or *cultural hybridity*, which are also defining concepts in Bhabha’s approach to postcolonial theory. In accordance with the connotations of the term among the Romans, in modern scholarship it commonly refers to a mixture – of substances, characteristics, social groups etc. –, and in the Caribbean context the ethnic, cultural and linguistic fragmentation and mixing that is formative framework for cultural identity in this region, which has become home to so many transplanted people, colonised and colonising (cf. Brathwaite *Contradictory Omens*). Bhabha conceives of hybridity as interaction between different cultures in the consequence of contact zones created by colonialism – such as

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16 Cf. Gilroy 2ff. on the importance of the concept of hybridity for Black Atlantic contexts. The concept of hybridity has always been closely linked to postcolonialism. The term ‘hybrid’ first occurred in literary texts at the beginning of the 17th century in reference to pigs (Sollors 216). Less than thirty years later, the first recorded usage of the word to refer to a person was in Ben Jonson’s comedy *The New Inn* (1629), where the term is used to refer to an Irish woman who had been married to a Welshman (Schmidt 8). Schmidt suggests that the term hybrid is used because of the woman’s Irishness, rather than her “dual identifications with Wales and Ireland” (ibid.). Given that Ireland was under English rule at the time, the word ‘hybrid’ has thus carried colonial connotations since its very first occurrences in the English language. It is important to note the pejorative nature of the term, due to its etymology as a term to refer to pigs.

17 The term derives from ancient Greek ὑβρίς “wanton violence, insolence, lust, lewdness” and its Latin modification *hybrida* “a half-bred or cross-bred person or animal”.

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the introduction of the Classics as precious Western cultural assets to the British West Indian colonies through the education system – and the mixing of cultures and creation of new transcultural forms – such as Caribbean Classics – as a product of differences or “otherness” (67).

One of the main similarities between Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and the theory of transformation is the idea of cultures being fluid in a twofold sense. Firstly, both approaches conceive of cultures as entities that are not fixed but ever modified. Secondly, both theories highlight that cultures have a reciprocal effect on each other. It is important to note that neither of the theories regard cultures as symmetrical. On the contrary, both approaches stress differences in power, reputation, status and dominion existent between cultures, which determine the nature of their relationship and consequently, the way in which subjects of each culture identify themselves in reaction to intercultural contact (Böhme 11; Bhabha 19ff.). Nonetheless, both Bhabha and Böhme et al. concede that contact between disparate cultures “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 4). With regard to the study of classical reception in the anglophone Caribbean of the twenty-first century, these observations have significant implications since they point to the wider cultural and socio-political significance of the status of the Classics in contemporary literature of the West Indies, in particular regarding postcolonial power structures.

Applying the theory of transformation and Bhabha’s remarks on hybridity in *The Location of Culture* to the study of Caribbean classicisms, they serve to underline that observations on the positioning of Caribbean authors towards Greece and Rome, whether they present these ancient civilisations as cultural authorities worthy of emulation, distance themselves from them or exploit them for their subjective agendas, does not only allow for remarks on the status of the Classics outside of a European context. Rather, they are markers of cultural political change with regard to postcolonial dynamics of power. They permit comments on the positioning of Anglophone Caribbean authors towards European hegemonic cultural canons and, thus, Europe and especially the United Kingdom in the twenty-first century. Thus, in light of Bhabha’s remarks and their significance for Caribbean classical reception, it will be pertinent to explore whether in postcolonial Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century, the Classics offer ways of self-identification that bypass and challenge imposed cultural identities and whether classical references represent a means of cancelling out assumed or imposed (cultural) hierarchies.
In his work *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, postcolonial theorist Fanon takes a psychoanalytical approach to the question of how identity, and specifically blackness, are constructed and explores this matter predominantly within a French imperial context. While Fanon’s remarks on black identity are at times very problematic, the relevance of his remarks to the analysis of Caribbean literature, not least due to Fanon’s Caribbean heritage, is evident. Moreover, Fanon’s approach shares central parallels to the theory of transformation, which further underlines its pertinence to Caribbean reception studies.

Central to Fanon’s argument is the notion of an inferiority complex that is ingrained into colonised subjects through economic disadvantages as well as disavowal of their traditional local culture by the colonists. This inferiority complex, in turn, leads the colonised to internalise the idea of the inherent superiority of the imperialists’ culture – in the Anglophone Caribbean context for example the Classics as valuable European cultural assets (*Black Skin, White Masks* xiv–xv; 2)\(^{18}\). Fanon argues that the interaction of colonisers and colonised drives the ‘black man’ to negate his own roots and assimilate, appropriate and imitate the allegedly more civilised culture of the colonists. Similar to Bhabha’s and the theory of transformation’s idea of the asymmetry of cultures, Fanon’s postcolonial theory in *Black Skin, White Masks* thus also entertains the notion of an imbalance or hierarchy between the cultures in exchange. Fanon and the transformation theorists both ascribe this imbalance, the Freudian notion that no such thing as a neutral depiction of the other culture is possible, to a sense of yearning for ‘lost civilisations’, “une nostalgie du passé” (Fanon 94), which renders one of the cultures a lionised, unattainable form of civilisation worthy of emulation: in Fanon the coloniser’s culture, in the theory of transformation classical antiquity.

However, Fanon is highly critical of this imbalance, which is according to Fanon further enforced by colonial school curricula imposed on the colonies that do not celebrate and impart but diminish local history and culture (126), an observation that is crucial in the case of the British Caribbean colonies and their Classics teaching. Fanon admonishes that the resulting desire of the ‘black man’ to emulate the coloniser’s culture reenforces racist structures since it is prompted by “[i]nferiorization [which] is the native

\(^{18}\) All page numbers refer to the English translation by Richard Philcox: *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008).
correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say: *It is the racist who creates the inferiorized.*” (73; 78) With regard to the study of Caribbean Classics, Fanon’s remarks underline that race is a meaningful category (even though, as I stated previously, not the only one), which will be reflected in my analysis of primary works.

Moreover, the categorisation of forms of reciprocity of cultures in Fanon’s work displays many overlaps with that of the theory of transformation. Fanon categorises cultural transformations as acts defined by acceptance or denial of history (65; 205), which is in the theory of transformation reflected in the three basic modi of transformation: inclusion, exclusion and recombination of classical societies and concepts in modern cultures. Both systems accommodate processes of intercultural exchange that will become relevant in subsequent chapters, such as innovation and invention, negation and affirmation as well as assimilation and appropriation (Fanon 200–204; 173; xiv–xv, 2 etc.; Bergemann et al. 47ff.).

Furthermore, despite Fanon’s concept of a necessarily oppressive history that runs through his work (103ff.), it is crucial to observe that Fanon himself refers to the importance of classical antiquity for the present time in his argument (94, 99 and especially 102). In doing so, Fanon associates ancient Greece and Rome as well as a classical education with colonialism and, thus, the oppressors. At the same time, he paradoxically highlights the significance knowledge of and involvement with world history can have for subjects, particularly at the bottom of power hierarchies, in rewriting their own history and forming their identity. Fanon’s references to classical antiquity illustrate that even though history may be dominated by a certain group and used for their political motives, it is open to everyone for interpretation, inspiration and retelling in order to ‘regain a valid historic category’, an observation that is crucial with regard to Caribbean Classics of the twenty-first century, as I will show in chapter one in particular.

Overall, in light of Fanon’s remarks, it becomes clear that ancient Greece and Rome are not any more integral to the British Empire or British culture than they are to Caribbean people. One aim of this study is to highlight the ways in which occupying oneself with history and cultures of the past, particularly Rome and ancient Greece, does

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19 “In a frenzy I excavated black antiquity. [...] Once this had been dug up, displayed, and exposed to the elements, *it allowed me to regain a valid historic category*. The white man was wrong, I was not a primitive or a subhuman [...]” (109; my italics)

20 Cf. Bhabha 67 on stereotypes and the structures of power and dominion behind them that can only be rebutted by engaging with them.
have topical relevance for individuals – especially in the Caribbean due to its rich history and unique mix of cultural influences – and, thus, for the self-understanding of nations as well as current political dynamics. Considering Fanon’s remarks on history and identification, I will examine how engagement with classical antiquity offers formerly colonised nations the chance of making history ‘their own’; of addressing the oppressive history of Classics (as an aspect of their history) and its colonial colourings and putting them to use for the purpose of self-identification and for creating a Caribbean Classics, which challenges persistent global postcolonial power hierarchies, especially with regard to race but also gender and other intersecting factors.


Glissant’s theory of cultural resistance comprises four central concepts, which he developed throughout his non-fictional works as well as novels, but perhaps most importantly in *Poétique de la Relation*: Relation, opacity, detour, and counterpoetics. Given that, as we established above, classical allusions in postcolonial literature can be read as both a counterculture of modernity as well as a counterculture of antiquity, Glissant’s treatise on cultural resistance is doubtless germane to the project at hand. What is more, Glissant, another important literary voice from the Francophone Caribbean, interestingly refers to classical antiquity frequently throughout *Poétique de la Relation*, underlining the relevance of his thoughts to classical reception studies. For the purpose of studying classical references in Caribbean literature and with regard to resemblances between Glissant’s postcolonial theory and the transformation theory, the notion of Relation is particularly relevant and worth exploring.

One of the central commonalities Glissant’s and Bhabha’s postcolonial theory and the theory of transformation share is that they all presuppose that identity is only established through relation to the “Other” (Glissant 29ff.; Bhabha 51 & 67; Böhme et al. 9ff. & 41) and that cultures are constantly influencing one another and, as a result, changing (Glissant 192; Bhabha 37ff. & 66ff.; Böhme et al. 13). This dynamism is reflected

21 E. g. to the *Aeneid, Iliad* and *Odyssey* 12–16 and 47ff., the Latin language 45f. and 59, or the “age of classicisms [which is] past, no doubt, for all cultures” and the convergences of which network it remains to untangle to make them work, 91 (all page numbers refer to the English translation by Betsy Wing, 1997).
in the Glissantian concept of *chaos-monde* (108ff.). Similarly, all three approaches presuppose that new cultural forms emerge as the product of differences ("discriminant" Glissant 175; "boundaries" Bhabha 5; Böhme et al. 43) and interaction between cultures (cf. Bhabha 16ff., 160ff.).

However, what sets Glissant’s notion of Relation crucially apart from Bhabha’s, Fanon’s and the transformation theory approaches to cultural exchange is that the Martinican philosopher places significantly stronger emphasis on the original absence of hierarchy between cultures and highlights the ideal of an even intercultural exchange. For Glissant, a key value of Relation is diversity, which he deems a prerequisite for Relation (Britton 12). According to Glissant, Relation depends on the presence of all its different elements and is necessarily based on a totality that is held together by diversity, which recognises the Other as equal, rather than unity. Thus, diversity and, in consequence, Relation deflect the trajectory of arrowlike nomadism and counteract generalisation and the hierarchical disparity between centre and periphery (Glissant 29ff.). Therefore, Relation and diversity are decidedly anti-imperialist. With regard to the particular relevance of these two concepts in a West Indian context, Glissant emphasises: “The Caribbean, as far as I’m concerned, may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly, one of the explosive regions where it seems to be gathering strength” (33).

The Caribbean is very much a product of Relation, principally between the *Présence Africaine, Présence Européenne* and *Présence Americain*, to borrow Aimée

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22 Note also the metaphor of cultural exchange as resembling osmosis, employed by both Glissant (202) and Böhme et al. (13).

23 Unsurprisingly, since they were socialised under very similar circumstances and are both influenced by their countryman Césaire, Glissant’s work also shows a number of parallels to Fanon’s *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* and makes direct reference to his fellow Martinican, e.g. 31. Firstly, like Glissant, Fanon himself draws on classical antiquity remarkably often (94–102), albeit the latter does so with a focus on black figures in ancient history. Secondly, Glissant’s notion of *pulsion mimétique* (which features more prominently in *Le Discours Antillais* 30ff. than in *Poétique de la Relation* 35ff.), the drive to imitate and identify with the coloniser, is undeniably based on Fanon’s idea of the ‘inferiority complex’. Interestingly, Fanon and Glissant’s remarks on the Caribbean in the (post-)colonial world diverge at two crucial points. On the one hand, Fanon perceives of the Caribbean as cut off from the rest of the world, of its maritime sensibilities as causing isolation and of its people as feeling trapped and longing for the prospect of travelling to Europe (14); Glissant, in contrast, regards the sea as a channel for exchange and connection between the Caribbean islands and the rest of the world, deeming the Antilles and its inhabitants as not at all secluded but *in Relation* with Europe, Africa and other parts of the world. On the other hand, the two Martinicans have opposing views on the creation of history. While both assert that history is not objective but subject to interpretation and presentation, Fanon, unlike Glissant, repeatedly stresses that history is dominated by White European discourse and more restricted when it comes to its use by the black man for identification purposes (103–4; 181).
Césaire, Léon Damas and Leopold Senghor's terminology (although Stuart Hall rightly points out that there are “many other cultural ‘presences’ which constitute the complexity of Caribbean identity”, 230). The unique West Indian cultures are the result of Western, indigenous and African influences coming into contact to produce new cultural formations in a process of creolisation, as I touched on at the beginning of this introduction.

Glissant's approach to cultural resistance and his assumption of the absence of cultural hierarchies are particularly exciting and relevant with regard to classical references in Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century. As I hope to show, modern postcolonial Caribbean dealings with Greece and Rome are oftentimes reflective of Glissant's presupposed balance of cultures. In the twenty-first century, Caribbean Classics radiate a confidence which claims ownership of Mediterranean ancient cultures and pivots between a notion of ‘beating the former colonisers at their own game’, in this case the classical tradition, and an appropriation of the Classics that leaves no doubt that they are equally part of Caribbean culture, without any debts to the colonisers (cf. chapter three).

Moreover, considering Glissant's concept of Relation, it is important to stress that it is not my intention to compare references to classical antiquity in Caribbean or other postcolonial literature to European classical receptions but to appreciate them for their unique, independent artistic value. Lastly, upon reading Glissant, it once again becomes obvious that it is desirable that classical reception studies continue to do their part in appreciating the Caribbean author's ideal of an exchange of cultures on an equal level and continue to widen their scope to non-European dealings with Rome and ancient Greece as well as to less canonical classical traditions. This study hopes to contribute to that endeavour and to shine a light on the uses of the Classics in contemporary Anglophone Caribbean literature because to conclude this section with Glissant, without postcolonial Classics, something would be missing from our discipline:

As the Other is a source of temptation of Sameness, Wholeness is the demand of Diversity. You cannot become Trinidadian or Quebecois, if you are not; but it is from now on true that if Trinidad and Quebec did not exist as accepted components of Diversity, something would be missing from the body of the world culture – that today we would feel that loss. [...] Sameness is sublimated difference; Diversity is accepted difference. (*Poetics of Relation* 98)
A Map of This Work

This work does not claim to exhaust the richness of classical references in twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean prose fiction and poetry. Rather, my aim is to spotlight dominant themes, which appeared to be the most topical not only in the realms of literature and classical reception but also beyond, in particular with regard to identity-building in these still young postcolonial nations that form the object of my research.

Caribbean Classics are thriving and there is an array of different topoi which could have been given primary attention in this study. Paul Gilroy writes in *The Black Atlantic*: “It is essential to emphasise that there is nothing definitive here. Black Atlantic culture is so massive and its history so little known that I have done scarcely more than put down some preliminary markers for more detailed future investigations” (xi). I think of this work in very much the same way. The three chapters and their themes are ontologically coordinated and highlight trends in Caribbean Classics which I perceived as central during my investigation and which therefore developed organically out of my study of postcolonial theory and reading of primary literature. Each theme offers an abundance of material and I hope to pave the way for future research in each area (and beyond) by showing trends yet also desiderata. The first chapter is dedicated to the study of the reception of the epic genre in contemporary Anglophone Caribbean literature, the second chapter to classical references in contemporary Caribbean women’s writing and the third chapter is primarily interested in the notion of exile as a central concept in Caribbean Classics of the twenty-first century.

Structuring this work by dedicating all three chapters to either different genres, groups of writers and matters of intersectionality or themes seemed unnatural and inappropriate. As alluded to previously, it would be impossible to give a comprehensive overview of the uses and associations of Greece and Rome in recent fiction and poetry from the English-speaking Caribbean. Therefore, it seems more fruitful to provide access to some of the most important examples from within each of these three categories. In this manner, I hope to provide a representative outline of the status and principal uses of these ancient cultures of the Mediterranean archipelago in the literature of the islands that make up the West Indian archipelago.

Overall, it will become evident in this work that classical allusions in recent West Indian writing vary in strength: there are imitations and direct references on the one hand and mere echoes on the other, there are appropriations, negations and subversions of classical artefacts. Often, classical reception in twenty-first century Anglophone
Caribbean literature is of a fragmented nature. Perhaps it is therefore hardly surprising that taxonomic aspects and (ancient) questions of genre do not appear to be of central interest to West Indian writers who draw on the Classics. One genre however, which contemporary Antillean authors engage with frequently (as did postcolonial theorists, for example Glissant, in whose discourse on cultural exchange epic and myth reoccur as central cultural forms), is the epic genre.

The first chapter of this work therefore explores Caribbean receptions of the most celebrated, grandest genre in classical antiquity, which continues to be a highly productive format in Caribbean literature: epic. By means of a discussion of epic poetry between Martinican Édouard Glissant and St. Lucian Derek Walcott, two of the most authoritative voices of the Caribbean literary landscape, I identify characteristics of modern Caribbean epic poetry. This contemporary Caribbean taxonomic definition of the epic genre, which also draws on postcolonial theoretical works such as Glissant’s Poétique de la Relation, is assessed in relation to the genre’s ancient definition in order to establish the degree of preservation and innovation of contemporary Caribbean epic. Moreover, it is explored in the context of the genre’s European and African reception history, features of which survive in modern Caribbean dealings with epic. Finally, the reception of epic poetry in contemporary Caribbean literature is established by means of an analysis of two twenty-first century explorations of the epic genre from the Anglophone Caribbean: Anthony Kellman’s Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados (2008) and Kwame Dawes’ Tangling with the Epic (2019). In the context of previously outlined definitions of epic, these works will be explored as the most recent link in this chain of transformation of epic poetry from antiquity to present times. Special attention will be paid to deviations from the ancient and younger role models as well as to features that have been retained from classical, later European and African as well as colonial Caribbean epic conceptions in contemporary Caribbean epic. Thus, these readings will allow for an assessment of the role of epic in twenty-first century, postcolonial Caribbean literature.

During colonial times, the Classics were exclusively taught at prestigious schools that were predominantly attended by boys. Women did not have the same access to classical civilisations and literatures as their male peers in the West Indian colonies. As a result, female explorations of classical antiquity were rare in twentieth-century Caribbean literature. Therefore, women’s voices are almost completely absent from previous academic treatises on classical reception in the Caribbean. However, the traditionally
male dominated Caribbean literary world has seen a dramatic rise in writing produced by women during the last half century. Consequently, it is important and exciting to study recent pieces of literature by female Caribbean writers that engage with classical concepts – which there are a plethora of in the twenty-first century Antillean literary landscape – in the second chapter of this work. Drawing on theoretical discourses on gender in the context of Caribbean culture by M. NourbeSe Philip and Sylvia Wynter – two pre-eminent female Caribbean intellectuals and ‘matriarchs’ of Caribbean feminism (Haynes 54) –, I examine the qualities of classical references by postcolonial female authors, who were not subjected to colonial Classics teaching. I investigate what makes their approach to Graeco-Roman culture unique and sets them apart from classical dealings by their male predecessors and contemporaries. More generally, due to the lack of female representatives in the realm of classical reception during the twentieth century, investigating the impacts and effects aspects of gender have on dealings with classical antiquity in recent Caribbean literature will add valuable scope to the field of literary criticism in postcolonial contexts. Primary works that provide the basis for my analysis of female Caribbean Classics in this chapter are Curdella Forbes’ novel *A Tall History of Sugar* (2019) and Monique Roffey’s novel *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (2020).

The last chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I exploit the advantage of studying literature that has been produced by living authors and present the results of a survey I conducted among contemporary West Indian authors who draw on Graeco-Roman culture in their writing. This survey very much supports my aim in this thesis to spotlight central trends in twenty-first century West Indian dealings with the Classics. It captures a snapshot of views on the legacy, current role and chances of these ancient Mediterranean cultures in the Caribbean literary context. Out of the results of this inquiry, the discussion of one particular theme – which is central to Caribbean Classics, as reflected in authors’ responses and recent pieces of literature – evolves: the notion of exile in Caribbean classical reception. Pertinent to this discussion are an exploration of the significance of Greece and Rome to personal and poetic dealings with exile as well as an examination of the role of the mermaid as a literary figure which is inspired by Graeco-Roman culture and often symbolic of (transnational) travelling in West Indian writing. Given the prominence of classical allusions that revolve around issues of exile and journeys in Caribbean poetry of the twenty-first century and considering the prevalence of works of prose fiction in the previous chapters (as in previous works on Caribbean classical reception that are not primarily interested in drama, with the exception of Jenkins 126–174), this last chapter exclusively calls on Anglophone Antillean poetry of the
twenty-first century for textual evidence. The examined poets include Jamaicans Jacqueline Bishop, Lorna Goodison, Ishion Hutchinson and Shara McCallum and Trinidadian Vahni Capildeo.
Chapter 1: The Quest for a Narrative of Identity: The Reception of Graeco-Roman Epic Poetry in Anglophone Postcolonial Caribbean Literature of the Twenty-First Century

Epic poetry is one of the oldest and most esteemed literary genres around the globe: it has had a lively tradition in Europe, Africa and Asia for nearly three millennia. In the Caribbean, the genre has been adopted very favourably and remained in plentiful use during the twentieth century by authors such as Kamau Brathwaite, David Dabydeen, Édouard Glissant, Andrew Salkey\(^1\) and Derek Walcott\(^2\). In the twenty-first century, epic continues to be an important literary form in the Anglophone Caribbean that offers a narrative format as well as inspiration with regard to subject matter for contemporary writers, as works such as Kellman’s *Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados* (2008), Kwame Dawes’ and John Kinsella’s *Tangling with the Epic*\(^3\) (2019) or M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!*\(^4\) (2008) exemplify. Ishion Hutchinson (in reference to his poem ‘Station’ from *The House of Lords and Commons*, 2017) highlights the continuing significance of the epic genre in the Caribbean literary landscape:

‘Station’ gestures at the underworld that is part of every hero’s journey in the epics. Being someone from the Caribbean, from Jamaica, who never grew up with subways, the ‘underground’ was never part of my particular reality. So when I came to the States – to New York City – and used the subway, I associated it with a kind of underworld adventure, which was, for me, surprising, but, it turned out, is a huge cliché. There is a geographical reality to the journey across borders, but all journeys are also psychic journeys. The physical and the psychological correlate in every move. One can’t travel without one’s mind. Or, one’s mind can wander when one is still, and so on. Literature preempted my physical journey to New York, and even though I didn’t locate New York in reading Virgil or Homer, the sense of that specific underworld descent was immediate to me when I came to the city. But it felt I was there already, in the texts I had read. (Hutchinson in Charette/Cato; my italics).

Beyond stressing the importance of Virgil and Homer, the pioneers of European epic poetry, for this young Jamaican writer growing up on an independent, postcolonial

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\(^2\) On the lengthy scholarly discussion whether Walcott’s *Omeros* can be considered an epic poem see e. g. Farrell and Hamner passim.

\(^3\) Or indeed the entire poem cycle including *Speak from Here to There* (2016), *A New Beginning* (2018), *Tangling with the Epic* (2019) and *In the Name of Our Families* (2020).

\(^4\) Regarding the classification of *Zong!* as an epic poem cf. NourbeSe *Epic Voices: The Caribbean (Un)Epic.*
Caribbean island, Hutchinson interestingly places emphasis on notions of travelling and journeys as defining themes of epic poetry. Notably, Édouard Glissant, in an attempt to capture the gist of epic poetry in a discussion with Derek Walcott, touched on the topoi of travel and wandering too, as will be shown shortly.

My aim in this chapter is to identify characteristics of contemporary Caribbean epic poetry by drawing on, among other scholarly literature, a theoretical discussion of the genre between some of the region’s most influential writers and literary critics, Édouard Glissant and Derek Walcott. Moreover, I will analyse two primary works of contemporary Anglophone West Indian poetry to discern which types of transformation of antiquity – appropriation, neglect, hybridisation, reinterpretation et cetera – are at work in these pieces of literature. I will trace the chains of transformations of antiquity that resulted in (in-)visible features of modern West Indian epics back to their origins, be they classical or instances of intermediate receptions in Europe, Africa and the Caribbean itself.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this study and since I am taking a contrastive approach to defining attributes of epic that are considered central in the West Indies in current times, I am going to provide brief overviews of definitions of epic in ancient Greece and Rome as well as intermediate stations of reception of the genre in Europe and Africa in order to detect other, non-classical influences on modern Caribbean epic. These considerations will form an important basis for my developing a distinguished conception of Caribbean epic poetry in relation to its Graeco-Roman models and for comprehending the role of classical reception in the modern Caribbean. However, the below remarks – given that they revolve around only two primary texts – are not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of epic poetry in classical antiquity, succeeding European cultures or on the African continent. Moreover, it is not my intention to present any of these definitions as normative or reinforce Eurocentric perspectives on epic poetry. Rather, the overviews I provide serve the purpose of anticipating and providing a frame of reference for the assessment of prominent features of modern-day Caribbean epic by summarising key characteristics of the genre in various epic traditions.

Furthermore, while I am writing this chapter with other ancient epics such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata or Gilgamesh in mind and am aware of their influences on Graeco-Roman and later epic as well as the importance of this cultural exchange – it is not my intention to reiterate Eurocentric scholarly views of the genre –, these works are

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5 Hutchinson was born in Port Antonio, Jamaica in 1983. Jamaica gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1962.
not of primary interest to this examination of transformations of classical antiquity in twenty-first century Caribbean epic. Therefore, I will only refer to these works in passing where it appears to be of primary relevance to my argument.

The two twenty-first century West Indian dealings with the epic genre I will concentrate my analysis on are Anthony Kellman’s *Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados* and Kwame Dawes and John Kinsella’s *Tangling with the Epic* since both works are prime examples of established Caribbean New Generation writers’ engagement with classical antiquity and the ‘heroic’ genre.

**Epic Poetry in Graeco-Roman Antiquity: Contact Points for Transformations of Classical Antiquity in Twenty-First Century Caribbean Literature**

Due to its preliterate beginnings dating back to as early as the ninth century BC, the strongly oral and performance-based genre of epic is one of the oldest literary forms in Western history. Both in ancient Greece and Rome, the genre represented the pinnacle of literary production and epic style was considered the most sublime and exalted. Nonetheless, the concept of epic is vague and difficult to define both within the confines of classical European as well as world literature.

Etymologically, the term ‘epic’ is derived from εἰπεῖν (‘to say’) and ἔπος, meaning both ‘the word’ and ‘hexametric verse’, which highlights that hexametric form has been one of the principal features associated with epic poems since the eighth century BC (*New Pauly*, s. v. ‘epic’). The three most canonical ancient epic poems – Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as well as Virgil’s *Aeneid* – were composed in dactylic hexameter. However, epic was used as an umbrella term for both spoken narrative forms, which the genre arose from, and forms marked by hexametric metre (both narrative and non-narrative) in

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6 I use the term ‘contact points’ following Pratt, who coined the term ‘contact zone’ in 1991 in the context of colonial discourse theory to describe the (metaphorical) spaces – for example literary texts such as classical epics like the *Odyssey* or *Aeneid* that different generations of post-classical writers from different geographical, cultural, social backgrounds have drawn and continue to draw on – where different cultures and traditions of interpretation can meet. Pratt outlines the concept of contact zones in her 1991 paper “Arts of the Contact Zone” as well as in her 1992 book *Imperial Eyes*. She defines the contact zone as “the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. […] [It] shifts the center of gravity and the point of view away from a Eurocentric perspective. It invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect” (*Imperial Eyes* 8).

7 Liddell/Scott/Jones 1951, s. v. εἶπον and ἔπος.
classical antiquity. It is due to its broad ancient conception of epic that the genre is nowadays sometimes perceived as vague, fluid and featuring blurred limitations (von Albrecht 65).

Nonetheless, Homeric and Virgilian epics offer a set of mutual characteristics beyond their shared use of hexameter, which delimit the genre’s boundaries:

I) form: acatalectic dactylic hexameter, no strophic structure; comprising typical formal elements such as epithets, formulaic expressions, similes, catalogues, ekphrasis and (in narrative epic) plenty of direct speech; aesthetic sublimity with regard to form, language and clarity

II) content and structure: grandeur of subject (therefore restricted to upper classes; in narrative epic preferably heroic subjects; principle of causality ensuring factual coherence) and aspiration to totality in depiction of humans and the world; organic unity of narrative structure and representation of objective reality. (New Pauly, s. v. ‘epic’)

This catalogue of characteristics – evidently equally based on aspects of style as well as content – and the broad usage of the term epic in classical antiquity illustrate that a definition of the genre purely based on formal aspects was considered nonsensical by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Since the sixth century BC at the latest, the concept comprised not only a plethora of poetic forms but also a variety of subject matters, such as descriptive, argumentative, philosophical, religious and didactic epic. Nonetheless, tales of heroic deeds on the one hand and dutiful behaviour in the interest of the

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8 As Latacz points out, epic begins and ends with Homer since the works attributed to him represent the climax of a historical development that can only be reconstructed with these texts and, at the same time, form a reference point for the entire subsequent epic production through the early modern period (265). Classical and modern definitions of epic are therefore commonly, and justifiably, based on Homeric as well as Virgilian (as the most celebrated Roman representative of the genre) epic poetry.

9 Post-homeric epic does, however, comprise a number of other poetic forms, such as the Saturnian verse in early Roman epic.

10 Epic’s focus on heroes represents its main difference to ancient myth, which inhabits the realm of gods and goddesses.

11 πλὴν οἱ ἄνθρωποι γε συνάπτοντες τῷ μέτρῳ τὸ ποιεῖν ἔλεγχοποιούσι τοὺς δὲ ἔποιοις ὀνομάζουσιν, όπως κατὰ τὴν μίμησιν ποιητάς ἀλλὰ κοινή κατὰ τὸ μέτρον προσαγορεύοντες· καὶ γὰρ ἀν ἰατρικὸν ἢ φυσικὸν τι διὰ τῶν μέτρων ἐκφέρωσιν, οὕτω καὶ εἰώθασιν· οὐδὲν δὲ κοινόν ἐστιν Ὁμήρῳ καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ πλὴν τὸ μέτρον, διὸ τὸν μὲν ποιητὴν δικαίωσιν καὶ καὶ τὸν δὲ φυσιολόγον μᾶλλον ἢ ποιητήν. – “Of course, people attach the verbal idea of ‘poetry’ [poiein] to the name of the metre, and call some ‘elegiac poets’, others ‘epic poets’. But this is not to classify them as poets because of mimesis, but because of the metre they share; hence, if writers express something medical or scientific in metre, people still usually apply these terms. But Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except their metre; so one should call the former a poet, the other a natural scientist.” (Arist. Poet. 1447b13–20; translation: Halliwell)
community (especially virtues such as *pietas*) on the other hand remained at the heart of Greek and Roman epic respectively.

In Rome, especially during Republican times, epic poems were more pervaded by patriotism than their Greek predecessors. They often told stories of the historic and mythical destiny of the Roman nation in an aetiological and solemn manner and were full of archaisms. Virgil's *Aeneid*, the most authoritative Latin epic poem, follows the Greek models by combining two narratives typical of epic poetry, a story of war and one of voyaging, albeit in one, much shorter, work. Nonetheless, compared to the epic poems ascribed to Homer, the *Aeneid* displays a much stronger focus on its heroic protagonist’s commitment to his community and is distinctly panegyric as Virgil’s agenda in writing the piece was arguably to support the transition from Republic to Principate under Augustus (Bowra 15, 23; Maier 12f., 83ff.). The *Aeneid* is of course a tremendously complex work which offers various different interpretations, including such which comprehend the work as a eulogy to the emperor or others which read questioning, critical voices in Virgil’s epic (cf. *Virgil Encyclopedia* s.v. ‘Harvard school’; Kallendorf *The Other Virgil*; Thomas). However, for the purpose of my analysis, which is based in a postcolonial context, it is crucial to make two observations. Firstly, that the *Aeneid* is more politically charged and concerned with the national than previous epics, which I will elaborate on shortly. Secondly, as will become clear in my analysis of the discussion of epic between Glissant and Walcott, to Caribbean writers, the *Aeneid* is primarily not a polyphonic piece of poetry, even though there are naturally a number of contexts in which the poem could be read differently. Nonetheless, as I will show, to Walcott, Glissant, Hutchinson and their peers, the *Aeneid* carries a strong imperialist connotation that they are responding to. It hails from the poem being taught in British schools in the West Indies, using translations by intellectuals such as Dryden, as part of the agenda of the colonial education system to justify British imperialism. Remarkably, the epic politicisation of mythical material established by Virgil has survived as a common feature in African (oral) epics, which is another chain of transformation through which it found its way into contemporary Caribbean epic (Okpewho *Epic in Africa* 66ff. and esp. 73).

Overall, while there continued to be variety with regard to poetic form and content, the concept of epic was more clearly defined in Roman literature than it had previously been among the Greeks. Michael von Albrecht summarises that Roman epic was concerned with dignity and momentous events, characterised by literary *oikovojia* yet
ornate in style (64ff.). In addition, he describes the language and style of Roman epic poetry as “feierlicher als in anderen Gattungen”, characterised by “Verhaltenheit, Würde und Kargheit römischer Triumphalinschriften” as well as “zum Eleganten – und Glatten – hin fortentwickelt” (70). Therefore, while the epic genre was attached to a highly varied range of poetic forms as well as subject matters in classical antiquity, at the height of Roman literary production, it was primarily perceived as grand, elegant, concerned with the noble and heroic and as the most sublime literary genre despite (or, with regard to the ritual significance of its performative dimension, because of) being rooted in oral beginnings.

Finally, it is worth noting another major commonality of ancient epic poems beyond the characteristics derived from Virgilian and Homeric epic listed in scholarly works: their focus on travelling. Both narratives of journeys across the Mediterranean but also into the divine realms of Mount Olympus or descents into the underworld form central parts of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* as well as ancient *Argonautica* epics. Due to the geography and history of the Caribbean as well as its modern-day close links to Western Europe and North America, this topos of travelling continues to be central to Caribbean literature and Caribbean epic in particular, as the quote by Hutchinson illustrated. One aspect of the travel topos in ancient epic particularly echoes with the Caribbean experience: the quest for a place where one belongs and can settle, be that Odysseus’ return to Ithaca, Aeneas’ search for the new homeland, Achille’s dream journey to Africa and back to St. Lucia across the ocean in *Omeros* or M. NourbeSe Philip exploring whether it is possible to belong, in any real sense, as a Black person in the wake of the Middle Passage in *Zong*! To an extent, the patriotic tone of epic hails from the urge expressed in these poems to travel in order to “inscribe a people’s rightful name and place within their own narrative” (Hamner 1 and 29f.). Moreover, particularly pre-Homeric epics often contain underground journeys (West 152 ff.). Awareness of such near-Eastern epics and their influences on Homeric and succeeding epic poetry decentres the epic tradition from its oftentimes perceived European anchorage.


13 See also Walcott on the particular movement of Caribbean writers, who (used to have to) go into exile in order to become novelists, Rowell 131ff. Cf. chapter three.

14 On the theme of displacement in epic literature see also NourbeSe A *Genealogy of Resistance* 57–73 and Roy 23ff.
Epic and its Reception in the Post-Ancient World: Further Contact Points for Transformations of Classical Antiquity in Twenty-First Century Caribbean Literature

In spite of the loose, fluid ancient conception of epic, a clear, rigid definition of the genre that is based on ancient genre ideas while also being shaped by European classical reception manifested over the centuries. Modern European definitions of epic usually comprise the following key characteristics of ancient epic that have survived to modern day: oral elements yet an overall solemn literary style, stronger emphasis on subject matter than formal elements as well as a grand scope with noble deeds of heroes, battles, wanderings, the supernatural and patriotism as central themes.\(^{15}\) It is, however, crucial to note that dominant modern (Western) definitions of epic are usually not reflective or inclusive of the genre’s extra-European traditions, such as in Africa (cf. The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, which lists only one Indian epic poem among numerous European ones).

On the basis of these observations, the contemporary conception and role of epic in the Caribbean will be assessed in relation to ancient but also later Western and African understandings of the genre in order to define classical as well as non-classical influences on twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean epic poetry. Firstly, a Caribbean definition of epic will be established drawing on a theoretical discussion of epic poetry between two of the best-known West Indian writers of epic poems: Derek Walcott, who published Omeros in 1990, and Édouard Glissant, author of Les Indes (1965). Subsequently, two selected pieces of Caribbean literature that engage with the epic genre will be analysed in order to create a detailed, multi-faceted understanding of Caribbean receptions of epic in the twenty-first century: Kellman’s Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados (2008) and Dawes and Kinsella’s Tangling with the Epic (2019).

\(^{15}\) “A long narrative poem celebrating the great deeds of one or more legendary heroes, in a grand ceremonious style. The hero, usually protected by or even descended from gods, performs superhuman exploits in battle or in marvellous voyages, often saving or founding a nation – as in Virgil’s Aeneid (30 - 20 bce) – or the human race itself, in Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667). Virgil and Milton wrote what are called ‘secondary’ or literary epics in imitation of the earlier ‘primary’ or traditional epics of Homer, whose Iliad and Odyssey (c.8th century bce) are derived from an oral tradition of recitation. They adopted many of the conventions of Homer’s work, including the invocation of a muse, the use of epithets, the listing of heroes and combatants, and the beginning in medias res […] The action of epics takes place on a grand scale […]” (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, s. v. ‘epic’).
The aim of this sub-chapter is not to explore well-trodden territory and examine the frequently studied *Omeros* (1990) and *Les Indes* (1985), famous Antillean epic poems by Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant respectively that continue to be literary models for successive generations of Caribbean writers.\(^{16}\) It is beyond dispute that twentieth-century Caribbean epics, particularly influential works such as *Omeros* and *Les Indes*, have been formative for the emergence of the contemporary West Indian literary landscape as we know it and, therefore, contemporary dealings with epic poetry. My intention is to derive characteristics of epic regarded as essential in present Caribbean literary circles from a theoretical discussion of the genre between Walcott and Glissant. I will identify remains of and deviations from ancient genre conventions within the postcolonial Caribbean context. Therefore, while I will refer to both *Omeros* and *Les Indes* in my analysis of contemporary Antillean epic poems since they doubtless proved inspiring, impactful works for Caribbean New Generation writers such as Kellman or Dawes, the basis for this study on Caribbean epic is a conversation on the nature and status of the genre between Glissant and Walcott recorded at Poets House, New York in 1991.\(^ {17}\) There is, of course, no one Caribbean conception of epic, just as there is no single Caribbean colonial experience, no single Caribbean literature (cf. Benítez-Rojo 85). However, as some of the most important literary voices from the Caribbean of the last century and authors of the best-known Caribbean epic poems, Glissant’s and Walcott’s remarks on epic theory can without a doubt be regarded as both formative for and representative of Caribbean conceptions of epic.

The conversation between Glissant and Walcott was recorded at an event which formed part of the *Epic Voices* series held at Poets House. Other well-known Caribbean authors such as M. NourbeSe Philip or Kwame Dawes also spoke at this event series – further proof of the epic genre’s centrality in the literary sphere of the West Indies. Since the discussion took place after the publication of previously mentioned epics by Walcott and Glissant, it is worth taking into consideration that both authors are of course responding to and, at times, challenging the idea of being indebted to classical epic, in Walcott’s case particularly to Homer.

\(^{16}\) For discussions of *Omeros* and its references to classical antiquity, see Greenwood’s *Afro-Greeks*; Farrell; Makris; Hamner.

\(^{17}\) A transcript of the recording can be found in the appendix.
Firstly, formal features of Caribbean epic will be taken into account. Listening to Walcott’s and Glissant’s discussion of the genre, Caribbean reception appears to focus predominantly on aspects relating to subject matter rather than formal criteria. As shown above, this is in line with ancient genre definitions, which tended to give priority to content over form. It is interesting to observe that Derek Walcott principally bases his definition of epic on aspects of content and pays little attention to style conventions in Greek and Roman literature. Remarkably, his sole direct reference to the form of epic is to its containing elements of prose.18

Nonetheless, transformations of ancient epic form do play an important role in Glissant’s and Walcott’s Caribbean epic poetry. Rather than stylistic characteristics of Graeco-Roman epic, the form of English translations of Homer and Virgil’s epics from the Renaissance and Enlightenment seem to have influenced the appearance of Anglophone Antillean dealings with the genre greatly. During the course of the conversation at Poets House, Derek Walcott – asked about the form of his grand oeuvre Omeros – explains his decision in favour of the hexameter and against the usage of the pentameter by stating that the latter is “very threatening” and “too martial”:

Also the difficult thing I think was or the more relaxed thing was to do it in these three-line stanzas but also not to do it in pentameter because that is also very threatening. I mean, it is too martial. And so I thought the hexameter and the three-line…thing would be better. Gives you more space to do ordinary things like somebody going to the john as well as a big battle. The hexameter I think gives you more room to do very ordinary things as well as larger things. (Walcott in Epic Voices)

Walcott’s comment is remarkable with regard to the reception of classical antiquity, and of classical metres in particular, in the Anglophone Caribbean. In some respects, Walcott’s conception of the hexameter is in accord with the characteristics ascribed to the metre in antiquity. While the dactylic hexameter was also referred to as versus herous (cf. Quint. 9,4,88; Arist. Poet. 1459b31–1460a4; Platon leg. 2.669c–e; Hor. ars 73–74) due to its dominant usage in heroic epics, nonetheless, “the epic concept in tandem with the evolving use of the hexameter post-Homer was attached to a highly varied range of poetic forms” as well as subject matters (New Pauly, s. v. ‘epic’). Therefore, in opposing

18 “[T]he first time I read it [sc. Omeros], somebody said, ‘I thought you were going to read poetry’. I felt good about that because it sounded like prose, you know, better…I think it is better than to hear, you know, ‘I am listening to poetry’, than uhm…somebody to be disappointed if it is not poetry, it was verse, which is good. But the fact it was not poetry felt good.” (Walcott Epic Voices)
the *communis opinio*, which commonly links epic and hexameter to topics of war and wandering, Walcott shows a high level of familiarity with classical literatures and detailed knowledge of their formal peculiarities.

The St. Lucian writer’s remarks about pentameter, on the other hand, require closer analysis. It is noteworthy that Walcott considered choosing pentameter for his poem inspired by Homeric epic. From a classicist’s point of view, Walcott’s characterisation of the five-footed metre as “too martial” is peculiar. In ancient Greece and Rome, the dactylic pentameter primarily occurred in connection with the hexameter in so-called elegiac distichs and was thus associated with epigrams or elegy. In archaic Greece, the metre appeared in historical epics, albeit in very few cases. Therefore, the pentameter primarily carried connotations of mourning, lament and, especially in Rome, of love. As Spoth points out with regard to Roman elegiac writers of the imperial period, their “choice in lifestyle of love and love poetry is a protest against politics, war, fame, *negotium*, wealth, the primacy of men etc.” (*New Pauly*, s. v. ‘Latin elegy’). In sum, the pentameter was by and large considered anything but relating to fighting or war in classical antiquity. In its history of reception, the (iambic) pentameter did not principally display connotations of battle either. On the contrary, especially in post-Miltonian England, the metre was – in its function as the second line of the elegiac distich – widely associated with themes such as melancholy, lament and reflection on the world. Thus, Walcott’s assessment is at first glance diametrically opposed to conceptions of the pentameter both among the Greeks and Romans as well as in the European classical tradition.

Consequently, Walcott’s stylisation of the pentameter as evoking notions of fighting at first sight suggests limited acquaintance with Greek and Roman literature, which is in conflict with the author’s otherwise demonstrated conversance with the Classics. It is important to note that Walcott’s decision in favour of the hexameter when composing *Omeros* is doubtless owed to the dominance of the (iambic) pentameter in English poetry. Walcott chose the hexameter as he realised that the pentameter was not suitable to express the Caribbean experience, whereas he seems to have perceived the hexameter as carrying fewer colonial connotations. As Brathwaite also recognised in *History of the Voice*:

> What English has given us as a model for poetry, and to a lesser extent prose (but poetry is the basic tool here), is the pentameter […] and it carries

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19 Even though writers such as the pioneering Ovid of course opened up elegiac forms by writing elegiac epistles, erotic didactic poems and aetiological elegies.
with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameters. (9–10)

Nonetheless, an analysis of the usage of pentameter by English literati of the Renaissance and early-modern period sheds further light on how Walcott’s understanding of the metre, and thus his decision against its usage in Omeros, may have come about. There are two milestones in the reception of pentameter in Britain, which shaped modern conceptions of the metre significantly: firstly, the blank verse, an unrhymed iambic pentameter which was introduced into English by the Earl of Surrey around 1540 in his translation of the Aeneid (New Handbook of Literary Terms, s. v. ‘blank verse’). Numerous English translations of the Aeneid and Iliad, some of the best-known ancient accounts of wars, written in blank verse were to follow. Secondly, English versions of classical texts by Augustan poets of the English Enlightenment and translations of Virgil and Homer by Alexander Pope and John Dryden commonly made use of heroic couplets, rhyming pairs of lines in iambic pentameter. In fact, the Augustans established heroic couplets as the most suitable metre for high epic poetry – until 1667, when Milton published Paradise Lost in blank verse, in defiance of epic tradition in English.

It must be assumed that English translations of Virgil and Homer written in blank verse or heroic couplets, particularly by Dryden and Pope, were relied upon heavily in the teaching of Latin and ancient Greek in the British colonies around the globe and, consequently, in the Caribbean. Goff (25f., 49f., 76f., 93f.), Vasunia (240) and Winterer (29) establish the validity of this assumption for the West African, Indian and North American context. Furthermore, Goff stresses that since the cultural politics surrounding the teaching of English as the language of empire were a source of tension in the British colonies, ancient Greek and particularly Latin – which shares the paternal, imperial character of English, as has been shown before – were regarded as useful tools to support the learning of English, particularly in the twentieth century (25f.; 49f.). Therefore, it is highly probable that, apart from the original ancient works, English translations of classical texts were used for teaching Greek and Latin in the West Indian colonies.

Moreover, examining the 1935 annual report of the Barbadian Education Department and the materials used for the teaching of Latin, this hypothesis is further

20 Goff makes these observations in the context of the British colonies in West Africa. They do, however, hold true for the Caribbean colonies, as I will show.
confirmed. Certain works in the report are specifically marked as used for Latin translation practice and their titles are stated in Latin, such as Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*, Book I (page 34 of the report). This suggests that in these cases, the original Latin works were used in class for practising translation skills. Furthermore, this assumption is supported by the fact that some of the titles stated in Latin are accompanied by recommended commentaries or annotated editions to facilitate reading the Latin original texts (for example A. C. Liddell’s critical edition of Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*; page 37 of the report).

In other instances, the titles of the Roman works are stated without any annotation such as “Translation”, “Grammar” or “Composition”. In these cases, the titles of the works are given in English rather than Latin (e. g. Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Livy, Book V; page 34 of the report). Thus, it seems highly probable that these works, the titles of which are stated in English, were read in translation (instead of translating them from Latin) in class.

Consequently, the annual report of the Education Department of Barbados offers an explanation as to why Walcott associated the pentameter with war and battle: his generation was frequently exposed to English pentametric translations of classical texts giving accounts of wars in Latin lessons, such as Pope’s and Dryden’s versions of Virgil and Homer composed in heroic couplets, as part of the colonial education they received. This is also suggested by the direct reference Walcott makes to Pope during the discussion with Glissant:

Couplets were not alright [when choosing the form for *Omeros*] because to me the couplet is too epigrammatical, especially if you are rhyming. It implies completion that is not possible I think in a narrative. It implies a completion of knowledge on the part of the narrator that cannot be presumed I think. I mean Pope does it in song but Pope came up from a really assured society and people were reading it at a certain kind of pace. *(Epic Voices)*

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21 The 1935 annual report was kindly made available to me by the Shilstone Memorial Library, Barbados Museum and Historical Society, St. Ann’s Garrison, and can be found in the appendix.

22 Walcott’s mentioning of epigrams is also noteworthy due to the close links between epic and epigrams in classical antiquity because of the shared metre of the two genres as well as the quality of epigrams as featuring prominently in epic poetry (Dinter 153ff.; Rossi 3ff.).
Accordingly, it can be asserted that Walcott’s perception of the pentameter as “martial” is inspired by the British classical tradition. To Walcott, an engagement with the form of classical epic does not appear to be direct but mediated by English translations (his engagement with classical civilisations and particularly ancient Greece in *Omeros* is, however, more direct with regard to aspects other than form, as I will show shortly). The Caribbean author does not seem to place ancient source texts and subsidiary British translations hierarchically; if anything, with regard to form, British translations of Greek and Roman epics are presented as more relevant literary models for the production of Caribbean epic poetry than the originals. These observations evidence that the reception of classical literature in the Caribbean during the twentieth century was predetermined and tremendously affected by British dealings with the Classics. Latin and Greek formed one of the British colonial school system’s central pillars alongside public school sports and English literature. Walcott’s remark illustrates that not only did pupils in the Caribbean first encounter classical antiquity in a colonial setting but that their engagement with the Classics was viewed through a British colonial prism from the very beginning.

As several reports on colonial education in the Anglophone Caribbean, e.g. by James (*Beyond a Boundary*, esp. Preface and 28–32) or Walcott (Rowell 122–126) show, it was not by coincidence that emphasis was placed on the Classics in the British educational system and that Greece and Rome were portrayed as inseparably intertwined with the British Empire. As Makris observes with regard to the notion of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, the British colonial curriculum was “both an exhortation to colonial students to identify with the goals and aspirations of the imperial elite and a challenge to leap for the brass ring of Western cultural superiority”.

Consequently, the Classics became pivotal parts of British colonial curricula for two principal reasons. Firstly, many classical texts (take for example Caesar’s *Bellum Gallicum* or Tacitus’ *Agricola* and *Germania* to name but a few) represent colonised people as inferior, barbaric, uneducated. Even though the ethnographic digressions in these ancient

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23 Of course, a differentiation needs to be made between the ancient pentameter, a quantitative metre which only occurred as part of elegiac couplets, and the modern English pentameter, a primary, stress-based metre. However, it has been shown that this distinction is blurred in Walcott’s conception of the pentameter. Moreover, Walcott’s understanding of the pentameter is also influenced by other European classical receptions. Especially Italian medieval and Renaissance literature with authors such as Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio and their preferred forms of *terza rima* (commonly adopted in English using pentameters) or *endecasillabi* (the principal metre in Italian poetry and derived from ancient pentameter) play an important role, as Walcott’s mentioning of these authors suggests. It needs to be noted, however, that these writers in turn had an impact on the development of British literature and the British classical tradition.
texts are complex and do acknowledge the discussed peoples’ own culture\textsuperscript{24}, for the British, the study of such texts in formerly British colonies helped mask the colonialists’ actions under the pretence of following the ‘civilising mission’, which the Romans had previously claimed for themselves. Thus, it served as a means of justifying British global expansion and imperialism at the expense of local cultures and in all their cruel, inhuman facets. Secondly, it was in the interest of the British to not only teach the Classics but to teach them in a way which would reinforce the myth, prevailing since the Middle Ages, of the English as descendants of the Romans (and, therefore, Trojans) and as the “inhabitants of the culture and imperial ambition of both ancient Greece and Rome” (Makris). This self-stylisation was used by the British in order to champion their alleged global superiority (as the pinnacle of Western culture, British culture must be unsurpassable worldwide) and, consequently, to rationalise their conquest and submission of the ‘uncivilised’ world. In that respect, teaching the Classics in the colonies was a means of exercising colonialist control.

Therefore, despite the abolition of colonial curricula following independence, it must be supposed that the conception of epic held by modern writers from formerly British Caribbean islands continues to be shaped significantly by British classical receptions, as I am also going to demonstrate in my discussion of \textit{Limestone} and \textit{Tangling with the Epic}. As a result, the Classics are often still closely linked to notions of imperialism in the twenty-first century.

Writings by highly reputable postcolonial theorists support these assertions. As mentioned previously, Frantz Fanon asserts in his work \textit{Peau Noire, Masques Blancs} that Graeco-Roman antiquity as well as classical education is inevitably associated with colonialism and in particular the oppressors in formerly colonised nations (especially 94–102). He suggests that the Classics cannot be cleared of their imperialist colouring in postcolonial contexts such as the Caribbean. Édouard Glissant too perceives the Classics as inseparably linked to notions of imperialism and cultural dominion (\textit{Poétique de la Relation} 24ff.; 45ff.; 59ff.; 71ff.; 105ff.). Greenwood corroborates this hypothesis for the Anglophone Caribbean in the twenty-first century:

From the standpoint of the twenty-first century, Caribbean literature has successfully thrown off many of the extraneous cultural plots and narratives that were put upon the region during its colonial past, but the literatures of Greece and Rome still await decolonization. […] In the eighteenth and

\textsuperscript{24} While Tacitus and Caesar other the Gauls and Germans, both authors state that \textit{on the basis of their own civilisation}, they would respond well to re-acculturation and are worthy of Romanisation.
nineteenth centuries European colonizers appropriated the civilizational authority of Greece and Rome, and aligned these civilizations with modern European colonialism. The discipline of Classics may have been complicit with imperialism, but this is properly a phenomenon of reception—how Greece and Rome have been assimilated to narratives of empire. The ways in which Greece and Rome are featured in Caribbean literature demonstrate the after-effects of colonial classicism, while at the same time revealing that its assimilations of Greece and Rome are reversible. [...] the role that Classics has played historically in symbolizing education and culture as elite, remote possessions that come from the outside. (Afro-Greeks 3–4)

However, there is another intermediary literary tradition in the chain of transformation of the form of classical epic, which shaped the appearance of Caribbean epic. It is interesting to observe that when asked about the structure and metre of his long poem Omeros, Derek Walcott – in addition to referring to British receptions of classical epic – speaks about Italian post-medieval poetry, rather than ancient genre and style conventions. He mentions suites and collages as literary models but also Dante and his terza rima, the rhyming verse stanza invented by the Italian poet and first used in his Divina Commedia.

Walcott’s reference to Dante is highly interesting from a linguistic point of view since Dante wrote not only in Italian but also in Latin, yet was one of the greatest advocates of the use of vernacular in literature. The parallels to the usage of Creole, the most common type of vernacular languages in the West Indies, as opposed to Standard English in Caribbean literature are striking. The role of the Latin language for classical reception in contemporary Caribbean literature will be explored in more detail in chapter two. However, it is important to note the significance of Dante as a literary model for Caribbean epic poems due to his establishing the use of vernacular in ‘high literature’ since it cannot be dismissed as a coincidence that Walcott’s magnum opus Omeros was composed in terza rima (even though Walcott uses his very own variation of the form). This observation highlights the importance of the European classical tradition and reception history in the chain of transformation of epic spanning from antiquity to the modern Caribbean.

*Books of Errantry: West Indian Transformations of the Subject Matter of Ancient Epic*

Similar to Walcott, Édouard Glissant gives prime concern to topics, as opposed to metre and structure, of Greek and Roman epic poems in his reflection on redeployments of the literary form in postcolonial, Caribbean settings. Remarkably, he does not mention established formal characteristics of classical epic at all when asked about the genre’s
importance for his writing. In contrast, he states that when working on *Les Indes*, the poem's content – a tale of wandering and discovery – was in the foreground and in turn determined the form of the piece.²⁵

Discussing the typical content of epic poetry, Glissant interestingly names tales of defeat as the genre's distinctive subject matter – in contrast to established definitions. The Martinican author-critic distinguishes between postcolonial and ancient epic; nonetheless, ancient epic is ubiquitous as a literary model against which postcolonial epic is defined.²⁶ Glissant asserts with regard to both ancient and modern times that epic style “is not [...] realist” and adds:

> I cannot understand why we think of epic in terms of heroic or noble. For me, the epic voice is not heroic or noble [...] You can have...uhm, for example: if you are saying, speaking of Western cultures, the greatest epics are based not on victory but on defeat, or on [...] trickery. The Greek epic drew on trickery, not on victory. [...] *La Chanson de Roland* is a defeat. They were defeated by the Arabs and they made an epic poem of it. The sagas, the Icelandic sagas, are always recounting death and destruction and defeat and abandonment etc. That is why I said that epic is fundamentally errantry and not dogmatism. I cannot imagine epic as noble or as victory. (*Epic Voices*)

This statement by postcolonial author Glissant is remarkable in that it conflicts with generally accepted conceptions of classical and contemporary epic as revolving around heroic characters who display a strong sense of duty for their community.²⁷ Makris asserts in her essay on the legacies of colonial education in Caribbean literature that Caribbean authors are, due to their colonial experience, perceptive of facets of classical antiquity which are overlooked by Europeans (and the British in particular, who

²⁵ “The poem starts with the dream of Columbus and he tries to find a new world, what he calls a new world. But this one was there. It was nothing new for him, so that the poem came with two parts: one is the man of the discovery and one is the man who was there before the discovery. And then the third part. And this third part is the man from Africa, who was brought to this new world, the so-called new world. So that this poem has as many parts as there were conceptions of this world, that means three, and as many parts as there were ways to travel to this world, that means by dream, by imagination, that means really and that means by the Middle Passage. That means three, so the poem has six parts.” (Glissant *Epic Voices*)

²⁶ Moreover, Glissant’s poem *Les Indes* is certainly inspired by Greek and Roman epic in that it is a tale of wandering, discovery, conquest and violence (Morrison passim).

²⁷ Cf. Suetonius’ definition of epos, offered in Diomedes’ *Ars grammatica*, as the Greek term for a poem written in hexameter which combines the divine, the heroic and the human: *epos dicitur Graece carmine hexametro divinarum rerum et heroicarum humanarumque conprehensio* (Diom. Ill,483,27–484,1). See also *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s. v. ‘epic’ (as quoted above) and *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, s. v. ‘epic’: “From a literary perspective, a Greek or Latin epic is a hexameter narrative poem on the grand scale concerning the exploits of a hero engaged in some serious endeavour. [...] The hero, who belongs to the world of mythology [...] is distinguished by his strength and courage, and is restrained only by a sense of honour”.
considered themselves descendants of the Romans and inheritors of their imperial ambition) since the latter tend to be fixated on the pro-imperialist, glorified aspects of Graeco-Roman antiquity. The previous quote by Glissant and indeed his argument in *Poétique de la Relation* are illustrative of this.

In his work on postcolonial theory published in 1990, the Martinican author presents the *Iliad, Odyssey* and *Aeneid* as pioneering examples of “books of errantry going beyond the pursuits and triumphs of rootedness required by the evolution of history” (27f.). Thus, he asserts that epic poetry encourages nonhierarchical, non-reductive, equitable *Relation* between cultures and suggests that epic is an anti-imperialist genre which counteracts oppression. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Francophone Caribbean writer perceives epic style as suitable for “Black and Negroes’ affairs” (*Epic Voices*). Moreover, it is striking that Glissant refers to various kinds of epic including Nordic poems in this quote. His inclusion of epics beyond the canonical Western works further reflects his understanding of the genre as promoting *Relation* between different cultures. Nonetheless, it must not be neglected that Glissant speaks of ancient epic and myth as representative of filiation and symbolic of oppressive, exploitative relations between cultures in *Poétique de la Relation* too (59f.).

In addition, like Hutchinson, Glissant also emphasises the prominence of the notion of travelling in Caribbean epic poetry – in the case of *Les Indes* transatlantic crossings to the Caribbean by European ‘explorers’ by mind and physically, as well as by slaves during the Middle Passage.

*The Caribbean (Un)Epic: The Region’s Conflicted Relationship with the Epic Genre*

Like Glissant’s concept of epic, Walcott’s understanding of the genre, particularly as a literary form of expression of the (postcolonial) Caribbean experience, is double-

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28 “In Western cultures there is no myth, no great myth, that includes the other. All the myths are ‘out for myself’. Yes, there are myths [that include the other] but not at the roots of Western culture. I think what we need today is not an epic for ‘my identity’ or ‘your identity’ or ‘his identity’. We need an epic for the fragile and dying identity of earth and mankind. This is the identity we have to look at. And I can realise this identity through my identity. I do not have to abandon, to renounce my identity to realise this ‘mankind’s identity’, […] We have to fight for this…women’s and men’s identity which is agonising but not abstractly, not universally, through *my* identity. So that I think that we need an epic voice – but not an epic voice with the opaqueness opposing to the other – with a new kind of opaqueness or *opacité*; because I think that one of the great, great, great menace…threats of this time is that everybody has to understand the other, to live with him, or to accept him or to permit him, to be with him.” (Glissant *Epic Voices*)
edged too, even though both writers produced epic poems themselves. Therefore, their ambiguous relationship with the genre deserves closer attention.

On the one hand, the St. Lucian writer Walcott acknowledges that epic is an appropriate medium of narrating Caribbean history and building Caribbean identity insofar as the Caribbean people have experienced plenty of devastation, genocide, slavery – all of which are principal subjects of epic according to Walcott:

All epics are really juvenile basically because they are really adventure stories and adventure is a juvenile experience really. So that…uhm, they are also, they are full of an enthusiasm, right, which is… Édouard calls ‘errantry’ and ‘the quest’ and stuff like that. So it is really like boys’ stories, no matter what they are. And they are told in the way that boys’ stories are told, they began around an evening fire to the excitement of mainly man, okay? The other thing is that – I am not putting it on the form – I am simply saying that adventure is an aspect of epic. And adventure in a very physical sense. By that definition we call something ‘epic’. Genocide is epic, in scale. Starvation is epic. Alright? Being hungry is lyric. [laughter] But the subjects of epic have to do with huge tracts of subject like devastation, war, stuff like that, right? In the Caribbean, simply on the required scale of measurement, we have had enough to earn the idea of epic, we have had enough genocide and we have had enough, you know, war and stuff like that. Now if this is the stuff of epic, then it is the stuff of adventure and so on, fine, okay? So we have an epic. You had a massacre? You can write about a massacre, right? Somebody fought this, you had…whatever. You had slavery? Epic subject. Okay? So many million over the bottom of the ocean? Epic subject, okay? All the Indians gone? Epic subject, fine. (Epic Voices)²⁹

Particular attention needs to be paid to Walcott’s stylisation of epic as a masculine genre that is “juvenile” since it is made up of “adventure stories” “like boys’ stories”. This categorisation of epic as a ‘male literary form’ certainly goes back to the epic tradition from ancient through modern times, which comprises few works by female writers, let alone features female heroes (Keith passim). Especially in the patriarchal world of Graeco-Roman antiquity, the highest, most noble form of literature was unsurprisingly almost exclusively produced by and revolved around the fates and heroism of men.³⁰ Moreover, Walcott’s comment is certainly inspired by the common perception of Latin and English,

²⁹ Cf. Bowra 28–32 on the idea of epic being concerned with subjects of devastation, struggle, melancholy.

³⁰ The implications of the aspect of gender for classical receptions in the Caribbean will be explored further in chapter two.
the languages of some of the most canonical epic poems of all times, as father tongues. In addition, Walcott’s conception of epic poetry once again appears to be based on observations through a British colonial lens: the St. Lucian likely ascribes epic poems a “juvenile” character and regards them as adventure stories for boys since his first encounters with the genre would have been in a colonial school setting, in which ancient epic poems were – perhaps in a manner that was “full of enthusiasm” as these works allegedly perfectly supported the British ‘civilising mission’ – used to educate boys in how to become men with a modern professional westernised identity.

It is crucial to note that in Omeros, Walcott constructs close associations between ancient civilisations, particularly Greece, and the Caribbean by drawing parallels between figures from ancient epic such as Hector, Achille and Helen to Caribbean characters and places in his work (‘Helen’ famously both refers to the housemaid Helen as well as the ‘Helen of the West Indies’, St. Lucia, in Omeros). Therefore, while Walcott’s perception of the form of ancient epic appears to be very much mediated by European, especially the Italian and British, classical traditions, with regard to subject matter, Walcott highlights similarities and a resulting affinity between the ancient Greeks and the Caribbean people, which exclude the mediating authority of the British Empire. In emphasising these bonds between Mediterranean and West Indian cultures, Walcott cancels out any debts to the British and the colonial education imposed upon the Antilles by them. Thus, the reception of the content of classical epic poetry in Caribbean literature is more direct and in many instances deliberately avoids intermediate European links in the chain of transformation.

Furthermore, as Makris observes, the similarities Walcott reveals between ancient Greece and the Caribbean are a means of subverting postcolonial power structures and anti-imperialist critique since they “work to bypass, ignore, or even ridicule British claims to the inheritance of the Greek classical tradition” and imply that Walcott and his peers.

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31 In Roger Dragonetti’s La vie de la lettre au Moyen Age (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1980) I picked up an interesting observation concerning the feminine character of the (maternal) languages that appeared in the Middle Ages, as opposed to the normative, paternal authority of Latin: “The privilege accorded to the femininity of language (the reverse image of the theology of the Father) arises with the birth of romance languages. The result of this is that in preference to Latin the mystery of the poetry of languages is conclusively joined with the mystery of mother tongues, languages of the desire whose distant essence, the indeterminate and indeterminable object of every quest, is symbolized in turns by the fin’amor, the sister, the lady, the queen or virgin-mother.” (Poetics of Relation 45–46). On the patriarchal character of Latin and English see also Greenwood, “Middle Passages” 45ff.
understand and identify with the Greeks, and their epics, better than Europeans, despite their long classical traditions, ever have or could.\(^\text{32}\)

On the other hand, just like Édouard Glissant, Walcott expresses his reservations about the suitability of epic as a Caribbean form of expression. Firstly, the author of *Omeros* stresses that the idea of a single hero is not compatible with Caribbean culture:

So the one idea, the destiny of the hero, is not something the Caribbean is interested in, that is the point. It is not because it is powerless that it is not interested in it. It is because what has evolved in the Caribbean is a society that does not need an epic. It does not need an epic in the same way that it does not need the heroes. It has been through all of that, right? And has not been through it and defeated since. The triumph of the Caribbean is a very physical triumph because of people who came – everybody knows this – the specimens that survive, whether they were Indians or whether they were Africans particularly, the physical specimens that survived the Middle Passage and the long trips from wherever, are, you know, physically superb specimens, otherwise they would have collapsed, okay? So there we have already physically, if you want, something approaching a master race, easily. (Walcott *Epic Voices*)

As shown previously, the Caribbean comprises a number of different cultural presences, which make it one of the most multiethnic, multilingual and culturally diverse places in the world. As Glissant highlights in *Poétique de la Relation*, the Caribbean – as opposed to the ancient Mediterranean and contemporary Western societies – is not a community that places emphasis on the individual but rather on the exchange, the Relation, between individuals.\(^\text{33}\) Therefore, unlike Greek epic and its British reception, the destiny of a single hero “is not something the Caribbean is interested in” (Walcott, *Epic Voices*). With regard to the relation of individual and society, i. e. private and public, in

\(^{32}\) Cf. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 32–33: “When I left school I was an educated person, but I had educated myself into a member of the British middle class with literary gifts and I had done it in defiance of all authority. […] In the course of duty and for my own information I have read the classics of educational theory and taken an interest in systems of education. Each suited its time, but I have a permanent affinity with only one, the ancient Greek. When I read that the Greeks educated their young people on poetry, gymnastics and music I feel that I know what that means, and I constantly read (and profit by) the writings of most learned professors of Greek culture, who I am sure don’t know what they are talking about. Let the reader judge for himself.”

\(^{33}\) Cf. Glissant in *Poetics of Relation*: “This [sc. the Caribbean] has always been a place of encounter and connivance and, at the same time, a passageway toward the American continent. Compared to the Mediterranean, which is an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates (in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin antiquity and later in the emergence of Islam, imposing the thought of the One), the Caribbean is, in contrast, a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts. Without necessarily inferring any advantage whatsoever to their situation, the reality of archipelagos in the Caribbean or the Pacific provides a natural illustration of the thought of Relation” (33–34).
postcolonial cultures and literature it is important to take Jameson’s concept of national allegory into consideration, which supports Walcott’s observation.34

Jameson contends that “third-world texts” need to be read as national allegories since the personal is always representative of the national and political in them.35 While Jameson’s essay is certainly problematic due to his reductionist three-world theory, he is correct in stressing that there tends to be a stronger focus on community rather than the individual in “third-world texts” and, thus, in Caribbean literature. This focus on the public rather than the private is further reflected in West Indian literature and its performance through orature stylistic devices adopted from Caribbean music such as contrapuntal patterning of verbal interaction (the listeners punctuate the narration by comments such as “Okay”, “That’s right” etc.), which “balance ‘the complementary values of communal participation and individual virtuosity’” (Warner-Lewis 117 ff.; see also Brathwaite “African Presence” 89 ff.). It is because of this tension of private and public between classical epic and its British reception on the one hand and Caribbean culture on the other hand that Walcott expresses his reservations about the suitability of the genre for West Indian narratives and argues that the epic genre’s focus on individual stories of heroes is at odds with the postcolonial Caribbean condition.

Unlike Walcott, Russian philosopher and literary critic Bakhtin – whose influence on modern readings of epic has been decisive – asserts that in contrast to genres such as the novel, epic does deal with national rather than personal experience (Bakhtin 16f.).36 It could therefore be argued that epic is indeed entirely suited as a postcolonial genre due to the emphasis on community in third-world literatures (to borrow Jameson’s term). Nonetheless, Bakhtin’s conception of epic, which follows the tradition of Schiller, Hegel,

34 Even though Jameson has rightly been criticised for the oversimplifying nature of his argument, which constructs colonial people as objects of knowledge and, thus, jeopardises their opacity, their liberating right not to be understood. On the concept of opacity, see my chapter on Glissant’s Poétique de la Relation.

35 “[...] let me now try to say what all third-world cultural productions seem to have in common and what distinguishes them radically from analogous cultural forms in the first world. All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, [...] particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. [...] I will argue that, although we may retain for convenience and for analysis such categories as the subjective and the public or political, the relations between them are wholly different in third-world culture. Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.” (Jameson 69) [italics in original].

36 On the comparison of the novel and the epic, cf. Wynter “Plot and Plantation.”.
Lukács and Auerbach, and suggests that there is only one reading of epic, is one-dimensional and reductive since it has been shown that epic is a multifaceted, complex concept, both in classical antiquity and succeeding societies (Farrell 273 and 279).

Moreover, Bakhtin himself concedes that epic can be considered the “monologic” genre par excellence and epitome of a discourse model that reinforces political authority, in particular the authority of European colonialism (Roy 6ff.). Scholars such as Roy have argued that Bakhtin’s conception of epic as a “monologic” genre is echoed by postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Fanon, Glissant and Said (9–13). While this is true, Roy’s consideration is very narrow. It has been shown that Glissant’s idea of epic as well as Fanon’s and Bhabha’s evaluation of the imperialist, authoritative nature of classical antiquity and literatures is complex and ambivalent and does also admit the liberating, anti-authoritarian effects of engagement with epic – and classical literatures and concepts more broadly – in postcolonial contexts. Nonetheless, with regard to the political implications of epic, it can – under this caveat – be conceded that postcolonial theory endorses Bakhtin’s observation that epic is the perfect example of a “monologic” genre to some extent. It is needless to say that this quality of the epic genre diminishes its compatibility with the postcolonial agenda of critically reviewing imperialism and its repercussions and makes it particularly challenging to pursue such an endeavour in the shape of an epic.

Secondly, Walcott interestingly makes reference to the patriotic character typical of Roman epic poetry. He argues that the Caribbean does not need to recount the tales of its heroes as due to its history, the Caribbean does not need or want to prove its power or superiority over other nations (as opposed to European colonial powers who used both epic poetry as well as Graeco-Roman literature, concepts and artefacts more broadly to establish their cultural superiority over other peoples; cf. Makris). On the one hand, the region’s “triumph” after encountered hardship, is according to Walcott graspable in the Caribbean’s unglorified past and very existence itself. Therefore, it does not require to be written about in a form whose defining features are its obsession with history and patriotism (even though Walcott’s very own epic poem undeniably displays a certain devotion to and nostalgia for a St. Lucia of the past). On the other hand, Walcott draws attention to the fact that it would be paradoxical for Caribbean writers to celebrate their heroes by means of a ‘juvenile adventure story’ since engagement with these heroes’

37 Cf. Benítez-Rojo, who speaks of “the grand epic of the Arawaks” and “the no less grand epic of the Caribs” (95).
stories would ultimately have to entail discussing the region’s cruel past of devastation, oppression and enslavement. The grand, heroic, noble genre of epic simply does not offer the right framework for such accounts to Caribbean writers:

Because who wants to do that, who wants to say that? Who wants to say, you know, that the African who was put in a hold and was how many months, you know, in the ship and the chains and the, you know, whatever and landed on the shores here were the physical specimen of astounding – uhm, what you call this – survivors. But who wants to claim that? Who wants to glorify that? Or be Aryan or be African, you know? The Caribbean has gone beyond that kind of juvenilia, I think. [...] We are talking about what is given to us as a coda, the terms of reference of what an epic poem contains, alright? And I am saying that if you use those, all the requirements for the supply of calling a thing an epic, all of these things are there. I am saying that the idea of one emblematic hero for the Caribbean, not taken out of history and certainly with no idea of an imperial conquest, is not part of the Caribbean experience nor is it the wish of the Caribbean experience, as it was the wish of the British or Roman Empire to have such a figure. (Walcott *Epic Voices*)

As has been shown, Walcott is certainly right in pointing out the heroic, patriotic character of Roman epic in particular and his reasoning that the genre is therefore not fully compatible with the Caribbean experience is logical. Nonetheless, his remark somewhat disregards the shift from Homeric individualism to a focus on the social and the hero’s duties to his community in Roman and especially Virgilian epic (Bowra 35ff.). While it has been demonstrated that Bakhtin’s definition of epic is problematic, his observation that the genre entails an important engagement with a national, social ideal that replaces a personal ideal, at least from the first century BC onwards, is valid and important. Roman epic represented a profound departure from Greek models in that its ‘heroic outlook’ had become too narrow. Its scope was extended to the national, thus addressing issues “much larger than the destinies of individual heroes” (Bowra 9–15).

In this respect, Roman epic is well suited to expressing the Caribbean past and present since this shift from the personal to the national is a parallel to the stronger focus on the community than the individual in postcolonial cultures, as described by Jameson.\(^{38}\) In both Roman and Caribbean epic, the personal is representative of the national and political. Consequently, a differentiation needs to be made between the patriotic, pro-imperialist, panegyric agenda of epic – which Virgil certainly followed in writing the *Aeneid*

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38 Scholars such as von Albrecht have pointed out nuances in the relationship between individual and society in Roman epic, which set the Roman concept of man and hero apart from that of the Greeks: “Ürsprünglich ist im römischen Epos allein das Schicksal der Gemeinschaft darstellenswert […]. Während bei Homer die Heldentaten des Einzelnen ihn selbst und sein Geschlecht ehren, wird die Leistung des Individuums in Rom exemplarisch auf das ganze römische Volk bezogen” (73).
to some extent – and the genre’s social character, addressing communal issues, and
aiming to be of service to one’s fatherland and countrymen – a trait that is also visible
throughout Virgil’s work in the emphasis that is laid on the hero’s social duties rather than
his individual ambitions (Bowra 58f.).39 It can therefore be assumed that it was exactly
due to this social character of epic which resonates with West Indian culture that
postcolonial Caribbean texts such as Walcott’s Omeros or Kellman’s Limestone, which
celebrate their country’s past, unique character and resistance to colonial influences
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It is important to note that this political, social quality of Roman epic, which links it
to Caribbean literature, has often been neglected in the British and European reception of
ancient epic poetry throughout the centuries, particularly during the Middle Ages and
Renaissance, as Roy rightly points out (14). As demonstrated earlier, British reception of
epic has been shaped by Greek individualism and heroism. Therefore, this adoption of the
social, national scope of Roman epic into Caribbean poetry represents a chain of
transformation that is not mediated by the British Empire and its classical tradition. Thus,
it is an example of Caribbean transformations of antiquity that bypasses colonial
influences.

Moreover, it has been shown that the notion of an arduous search for a place
where one belongs has been central to epic poetry since its ancient beginnings and
continues to be a pivotal element of the genre in the Caribbean in the twentieth and
twenty-first centuries. This kind of patriotic demeanour in epic poems, that can be
ascribed to the expression of devotion to a place where one finds that sense of affinity, is
therefore certainly compatible with the Caribbean postcolonial condition and is, in
contrast to what Walcott may suggest, perceptible in contemporary Caribbean epics
including Omeros itself.

Lastly, Walcott interestingly adds that he does not consider ‘epic’ a suitable label
for West Indian pieces of writing due to the genre’s imperialist, Eurocentric character.
Referring to West Indian works of literature as ‘epic poems’ poses the risk of not
acknowledging them for their full literary value and artistic quality. To label Caribbean
texts as ‘epic’, a genre that western cultures have claimed for themselves, implies an

39 African epic shares a similar social character, its heroes being commonly of noble origin, yet
“ordinary human beings engaged in ordinary human activities” who are “frequently formidable,
self-centered, and disruptive” but at the same time represented as featuring “certain elements
without which the society in which the hero lives will cease to exist” (Okpewho Epic in Africa 17f.
and 77–79).
inequitable comparison of West Indian and European literature based on a patronising dismissal of the former as mere emulations of European poetry. Farrell discusses the problematic nature of labelling Caribbean pieces of literature as ‘epics’ in order to dignify them in his essay on *Omeros*. He states:

> Eurocentric critics have been quick to identify the poem's [sc. *Omeros*'] ‘debt’ to Homer as its essential distinguishing characteristic [...]. Burris, in contrast, predicts that ‘commentators on *Omeros* . . . will understandably busy themselves in tracking down the Homeric parallels in Walcott’s poem,’ but argues that this will be ‘a particularly ill-fated approach because part of the poem’s task, its attempt to recreate the original authenticity of Walcott’s Caribbean culture, lies in its deliberate deflation of analogy’. [...] There has thus been considerable anxiety among critics and on the part of the poet himself about the generic affinities of *Omeros*. One may conjecture that many of those who hail the poem as an epic do so without much interest in genre theory, but rather out of a desire to honor Walcott for what is indeed a remarkable achievement (273; see also *Black Skin, White Masks* 72ff. on the inferiority complex and Bhabha 85ff. on mimicry).

Therefore, such taxonomic debates can reinforce outdated colonial power structures between Europe and the Caribbean, be reflective of cultural imperialism and as such problematic. As Walcott puts it, categorising Antillean poetry as epic in order to “make these people [...] something heroic” is imperious and condescending:

> And the final thing I have to say is that any Caribbean writer simply from the scale of history and the width of the experience of the past, of history, and also the immensity of the real ocean that that writer is on, is immediately undertaking every morning—no matter how small the poem—is making and undertaking in a geographical space that is the equivalent of a quest in terms of the space of the sea. And therefore when I dismiss or do not entertain the idea of the poem being called an epic it is because I do not want it referred to in terms of comparing as if I was trying to ennoble anything Caribbean. It is not…it would be presumptuous and insulting of me to try to ennoble the Caribbean people. And therefore to say you have written a poem that makes these people, finally, something heroic is insulting to them. (Walcott *Epic Voices*)

In summary, as is typical for their generation, Walcott and Glissant display a high degree of familiarity with Graeco-Roman literature that is, however, at times blurred due to overpowering colonial influences on the Caribbean and to Caribbean authors accepting and using the epic genre, yet being critical of and rejecting it due to its imperial connotations. Both authors agree that epic is in many respects a highly suitable genre for narrating the West Indian past and present, foremost due to its established subject matter. Just like the postcolonial experience, epic is shaped and dominated by themes of history, territory and identity as well as war, suppression and devastation. Nonetheless, both writers maintain that Caribbean people do not believe in individualistic, patriotic
accounts of their history and refuse heroism as a category in Caribbean culture, thus limiting the appropriateness of epic as a West Indian genre. This dilemma and indeed the conflicted relationship of Caribbean authors with the epic genre is also captured (and confirmed for the twenty-first century) in M. NourbeSe Philip's term the Caribbean (un)epic:

[When choosing a title for Zong!], I had been thinking about the epic and the Caribbean and given what has happened in the Caribbean, the adjective that best describes it is ‘epic’, really. You think of the millions of people brought there, of the events there... But then it was beginning to discomfort me because you need heroes, you need men [...] and I thought, maybe the ‘(un)epic’ is better. Let me just break down this idea of epic. I have described the area as a place of massive interruptions where the aboriginal discourse would be brought to a fatal end. [...] When we think of the transatlantic trade, we think in terms of millions of people transplanted or displanted or dead. Surely these events – not to mention the wars being fought by European powers over these micro-islands that generated so much wealth and whose location was crucial to the safe carriage of the booty being taken out of South America and the Caribbean – surely these events would qualify as epic. Talking about the long poem, which is not necessarily epic but fits under that category, seemed appropriate in the context of these historical facts although I ask: Who would the heroes be? Can’t have an epic without a hero or two or three, can you? Male of course. The only heroes we heard about were the buccaneers, the privateers, Hawkins, Drake etc. But the true heroes would be the legion of the denamed, unnamed, those who died in so many small ways. So the idea of the natural form [sc. epic] was beginning to seem not so good a fit, it began to discomfort. [...] The ‘un-' is not about opposing but rather about undoing, our undoing so to speak. (The Caribbean (Un)Epic)

Thus, the hesitation of Caribbean authors to accept epic as a label for Caribbean literature and acknowledge Caribbean epic’s classical influences principally originates from discrepancies with regard to the role of the individual and the community on the one hand and the reductiveness comparisons to classical or European models can imply on the other hand. Nonetheless, Glissant, Walcott and NourbeSe, like numerous other West Indian writers, engage with the Classics and epic ideas frequently in their fictional as well as theoretical works, have written Caribbean reconfigurations of epics and thus contributed to a distinctly West Indian contemporary definition of epic poetry. Perhaps, as Walcott elucidates, “in order to establish their [young Caribbean writers’] voices it is first necessary to evolve through the acquisition of other voices”, such as classical ones (Walcott in Hamner 11). It has been shown that this classical epic voice offers numerous parallels to and contact points with the Caribbean past and present. Therefore, despite Caribbean authors’ ambivalence towards the epic genre and Classics in general because of their imperial connotations, it is probably for precisely these commonalities between
Graeco-Roman epic and Caribbean realities that the epic genre continues to be a productive form in Antillean cultural creation in the twenty-first century, as will shortly become evident through the analysis of works by Anthony Kellman (*Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados*, 2008) and Kwame Dawes and John Kinsella (*Tangling with the Epic*, 2019).

Peoples of the Sea: Transformations of Antiquity and African influences in Contemporary Caribbean Epic

During the discussion of epic and the Caribbean experience, Walcott points out another important parallel between the two, which make the former an adequate literary form for conveying the latter: the central position the sea occupies in both. The sea features prominently in canonical ancient epic poems such as the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, which recount – inter alia – the heroes’ travels across the Mediterranean Sea. Many comparisons have been made and parallels drawn between the Caribbean and Mediterranean archipelagos including by West Indian authors such as Walcott in his long poem *Omeros* (Ramsaran passim). Glissant, too, draws on the Mediterranean and compares the two regions throughout *Poétique de la Relation*. Former vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Rex Nettleford, compared the cultural diversity of the Caribbean to that of the “Mediterranean crossroads civilization” in a number of his essays. In “The Caribbean Artist’s Presence and Education for the Third Millennium” (2000), he wrote:

It [i.e. his travels] further exposed him [sc. Walcott], as it did all of his generation who received an education, to antiquity and that meeting point of cultures in the Mediterranean which gave to humanity not only Greece and Rome (to be hijacked by those who were to feel they had a monopoly on civilization) but also Egypt and the great monotheistic religions, thought systems and value-configurations of the Orient. *Omeros*, a Walcottian masterpiece, may well be speaking to the inheritance from that cross-roads civilization tenanted by kindred spirits of old. For aren’t we the creatures of that special creolising process of becoming? An understanding of such civilizations is not possible without knowing the cultural context in which they flourished. (91)

Moreover, in his keynote address on the transatlantic slave trade, which he gave at the United Nations headquarters in 2007, he not only stressed the African Presence that

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40 “Part of what I’m saying in the book is that the Greeks were the niggers of the Mediterranean. If we looked at them now, we would say that the Greeks had Puerto Rican tastes. […] Because the stones were painted brightly. […] All the purple and gold – that’s what I’m saying is very Caribbean, that same vigor and elation of an earlier Greece, not a later Greece, not the sort of Romanesque Greece, the Greece of Greece.” (Walcott in Brown/Johnson, 183)
shaped Graeco-Roman culture but once again compared the Caribbean as a dynamic place of encounter between different cultures to the ancient Graeco-Roman civilisations:

In the Americas, the historic encounters between diverse cultures from both sides of the Atlantic have forged tolerance out of hate and suspicion, unity within diversity, and peace out of conflict and hostility. The African Presence on the Route is a celebratory incantation of a philosophy of life and of the hope-in-despair, which has sustained survival and beyond in defiance of the trans-atlantic slave trade and slavery. The process of cross-fertilization of Africa-in-the-Americas, which is the great art of humankind’s ‘becoming’ out of the dynamism of the synthesizing of contradictions, has taken place despite the stubborn persistence of the rules of representation which decree the denigration of things African, as well as a debilitating racism against all who are of African descent.

Lest we forget, that African Presence informed the ancestral pedigree of ancient Greece and Rome, which Western civilization has hijacked into its history with monopolistic fervour. In that Mediterranean crossroads civilization, the treasures of cross-fertilization gave to humanity the creative energy which guaranteed humankind’s capacity to live, die and live again. We later again see that catalytic presence on the Iberian Peninsula, which gave rise to an expansiveness of thought that resulted in the so-called ‘discovery’ of the Americas and our own flowering into the vital source of ‘crossroads’ energy that this Hemisphere has been for modern humanity.

The African Presence continues to make the impact where it most matters in the enduring areas of language, religion, artistic manifestations and even kinship patterns, as well as in areas of ontology and cosmology rooted in the creative diversity that is now the global reality of our third millennium. That creative diversity has been the lived reality of the Caribbean and the wider Americas, of which the Caribbean is an iconic integral part. (“The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery”)

British travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor muses in his experience report of his journeys through the Caribbean in the 1940s that “if the island sea is to be compared with the Mediterranean, these occidental Pillars of Hercules are multiplied into a colonnade through the many pillars of which the Atlantic everlastingly propels its trillions of tons of water” (The Traveller’s Tree 226), even though, as Greenwood rightly observes (Afro-Greeks 24), he never delves deeper into the analysis of the two archipelagoes’ geographical or cultural similarities. Lastly, to add just one more example, Jamaican writer Walter Adolphe Roberts dedicates significant parts of his study of the region, The Caribbean: The Story of our Sea of Destiny (1940), to the exploration of this trope. Not only does he refer to the Caribbean as the “Mediterranean of the West”, he also includes a map that presents the Caribbean as an imaginative Atlantic counterpart to the Mediterranean: “America north of the Isthmus of Panama becomes an aggregate of Europe and the islands of the Mediterranean”, “tilt the map slightly upside down” and “Puerto Rico is Crete, and Hispaniola a Greece torn from the mainland […] The
multitudinous Cuban cays and the Isle of Pines are Sardinia and Corsica smashed to fragments” (18). However, despite numerous reflections on the regions’ geographical similarities, it is important not to forget the significant historical differences, brought about by imperialism and transatlantic slave trade, which naturally impact the Caribbean’s culture and sensibilities tremendously.

In the conversation on epic poetry with Glissant, Walcott describes the Caribbean as “an arena of naval battle” since “the real land mass of the Caribbean is not the land but the sea. That is the Caribbean; the Caribbean is not the land, the Caribbean is the water” (*Epic Voices*). The St. Lucian author suggests that due to the prominence of the sea in Caribbean life and culture – in contrast to other formerly British colonies such as Ireland –, the epic genre with its very own special relationship with water lends itself as a fitting format for Caribbean narrations.

Benítez-Rojo elaborates on the influence of the sea and the Caribbean's unique island geography on the region’s literature. Due to the “fluvial and marine” (93) character of Caribbean culture that make the inhabitants of the islands “Peoples of the Sea” (98), he asserts that the West Indies are culturally permanently linked to “Hellas”. He states:

> The culture of archipelagoes is not terrestrial, as are almost all cultures: it is fluvial and marine. We are dealing here with a culture of bearings, not of routes; of approximations, not of exactitudes. Here the world of straight lines and angles [...] does not dominate; here rules the fluid world of the curving line. The culture of meta-archipelagoes is a [...] roundabout that leads nowhere but back home [...]. It will be said that in that case Hellas does not meet our canon for meta-archipelagoes. But yes, it meets it and defines it. (93)

Moreover, Benítez-Rojo contends that as “Peoples of the Sea”, West Indians do not only share inseparable cultural ties with Graeco-Roman civilisations but also with another important group of Peoples of the Sea, the African people (104). As shown before, Caribbean receptions of epic are to a significant degree a result of European classical receptions. Nonetheless, Caribbean epic poetry frequently features characteristics typical of African epic, as will be illustrated in my analysis of Kellman’s *Limestone* and Dawes’ and Kinsella’s *Tangling with the Epic*. For this reason, it is

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41 On Roberts, see also Hulme. For further investigation into the parallels between the two areas, see Gillman.

42 Cf. the discussion of parallels and dissimilarities between the Caribbean and Mediterranean by contemporary Caribbean authors in the third chapter.

43 “And however that relationship is between the presence of the huge body of water and the land, that is a presence. I do not think the sea has that width in terms of Ireland, which is an island still, sure, but all the wars that happened in Ireland happened on the land.” (Walcott, *Epic Voices*)
astounding that neither of the West Indian literati Glissant or Walcott explicitly touches on African influences on Caribbean epic poetry. One essential characteristic of ancient epic that prevailed in African long poems in particular and, at the same time, poses a major parallel to Caribbean culture that may form part of the appeal of the genre to Caribbean writers are the genre's oral, pre-literary beginnings.

Epic started as a spoken narrative form in pre-Homeric Greece. Likewise, Caribbean culture has been shaped by a strong emphasis on orality. Warner-Lewis observes:

Given the traditionally limited use of literacy in most African societies [...] orature genres, themes, styles, and performance techniques have historically been primary vehicles of communication, enculturation, entertainment, and societal acclamation. As cognitive and performative skills, these verbal traditions were among the few but highly significant possessions brought to the Americas by the enslaved survivors of transatlantic crossings. (117)

Epic as a strongly orature-, performance-based genre has had a vibrant tradition as a means of passing on folk narratives to succeeding generations and preserving indigenous culture on the African continent (one of the best-known examples being epic performances of the story of the thirteenth-century Mande king Sundiata; see Gunner 13f.; Okpewho “African Oral Epic” 99–104; Warner-Lewis 124; Niane passim). Besides drawing heavily on indigenous traditions, African epic poetry, like its European counterpart, is to a great extent inspired by classical, and especially Homeric, epic narratives (Okpewho ibid. 111). Similarly, Graeco-Roman epic was significantly influenced by other epic traditions, including the African one. As Okpewho's important monograph on African epic – a comparative study drawing on Homeric, Slavic, Babylonian and other world epics (Epic in Africa 30f.) – shows, there appears to have been significant contact and exchange between Graeco-Roman epic, African epic and other ancient epics, which resulted in numerous parallels and shared characteristics between the various forms. Just like classical (and later European) epic poems for instance, African epics are “tale[s] of considerable scope”, characterised by the extraordinariness of the events and characters engaged in them (which oftentimes hail from privileged or royal families) that carry significant cultural, historical and political importance for the nation that generated them (Okpewho “African Oral Epic” 100ff.).

44 Cf. van Binsbergen “Black Athena: Ten Years After” 31f. and especially footnote 53.
Certain features of Mediterranean and African epic poetry are no longer prominent in modern European epic from the Renaissance onwards: for instance, the focus on the act of performance that African heroic narratives share with Graeco-Roman epic. These features continue to be important aspects of twenty-first century Caribbean epic poems, as M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* illustrates. Not only does the work have a very distinct rhythm created through a play with recursivity and repetition, NourbeSe also states:

I have noticed, however, since performing *Zong!* for the last couple of years, that I have become more interested in performativity. The culture I come from—Caribbean, and more specifically that of Trinidad and Tobago—is a performative one, perhaps because it still has many aspects of an oral culture. There is a sense in which people from that culture are always performing. (NourbeSe in Hubbard)47

This set of features of ancient epic poetry that, at the same time, represent dominant characteristics in African, yet not European epic offer valuable perspectives on aspects of the ancient genre but have often been neglected in European scholarship.

Benítez-Rojo points towards a set of other important components of African literature that were transported to the Caribbean. Due to the Caribbean people being “Peoples of the Sea”, Benítez-Rojo argues that the texts produced by Caribbean writers are “‘fugitive’ by nature”, “nondiscursive” and “circular” (104). He explains:

I think that this literary system’s tendency to flight comes from the working of African components in the cultural interplay. African cultures can be taken, as belonging to Peoples of the Sea, to be nondiscursive systems. (ibid.)

This circular character of Caribbean literature, which links the Caribbean to Hellas and Africa, is in turn highly relevant with regard to Caribbean reception of classical epic. The Graeco-Roman epics commonly displayed a proneness to circular literary structures (*Ringkomposition*) and circular forms of motion, such as in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Similarly, Caribbean epic poems of the twenty-first century often exhibit circular structures, for example *Zong!* with its circular arrangement and repetitive structure that makes the...

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46 “[…] despite obvious cultural differences, there were epics in Africa existing on essentially the same principles as the well-known Indo-European classics, and […] indeed certain performance qualities discernible in the African epics would help us better understand tendencies in some texts like Homer’s that have been subject to some misapprehension” (Okpewho “African Oral Epic” 111).

47 See also Benítez-Rojo, who endorses the significance of the act of performance in Caribbean culture: “Then, how can we describe the culture of the Caribbean in any way other than by calling it a feedback machine? […] If I were to have to put it in one word, I would say performance. But performance not only in terms of scenic interpretation and the execution of a ritual, but also as a style, something like a combination of what the Americans call performance and the English call a ‘good show’” (94). See also p. 101 and 106.
poem’s flow akin to that of water. However, Eurocentric, racist scholarship failed to recognise and acknowledge the existence of African epic until the second half of the twentieth century (Johnson passim; Okpewho “African Oral Epic” 98ff.; Brathwaite “African Presence” passim). Consequently, African elements in contemporary Caribbean epic have commonly been overlooked or not appreciated for the artistic and literary value they add, both in European literary criticism and, as a result, also in the Caribbean, as becomes evident from Walcott and Glissant’s lack of mentioning African epic and how it influenced Caribbean literature in their discussion of epic.

Thus, when Glissant and Walcott refer to historical models for their creation of epic poems, they both discuss characteristics of Graeco-Roman as well as succeeding European epic but do not mention African epic as an influencing factor on Caribbean writings. It has been shown that this is surprising since the chain of transformation

ANCIENT INDO-EUROPEAN EPIC ↔️ AFRICAN EPIC AND AFRICAN RECEPTION OF CLASSICAL EPIC ↔️ CARIBBEAN EPIC

is equally important and as valid as the chain of transformation

ANCIENT INDO-EUROPEAN EPIC ↔️ EUROPEAN EPIC AND EUROPEAN RECEPTION OF CLASSICAL EPIC ↔️ CARIBBEAN EPIC

48 M. NourbeSe Philip organised a performance of her long poem Zong! at the Royal Ontario Museum in April 2018, where attendees sat in a circular formation. They were encouraged to do “circular breathing” or “circle breathing”, exhalations reminiscent of the “contrary winds and currents” (Zong! 210) during the slave ship Zong’s passage across the Atlantic Ocean that “emphasize bodily presence aboard the slaver […] as real exchanges of breath facilitated by Black women that reinforce collective assembly” (Panaram).

49 Cf. Warner-Lewis, who – despite the evidence provided of the significance of African epic in the Caribbean literary tradition – states: “Yet because of the cultural disruptions characterizing the transatlantic migration, no epics have evolved [from the numerous folk narratives inherited from Africa]. While slave entertainment defied the plantation regime, confining itself to after-work night spaces and holidays, slave life was insufficiently leisurely to accommodate the sustained, sometimes daily, performance needed for epic re-enactments; at the same time, epics contain culture-specific genealogical, migration and military histories unsuitable for multi-ethnic audience appeal and translinguistic participation […]” (128–129). While the Middle Passage and the reality of slave life complicated the preservation of African traditions and literature in the Caribbean, the evidence of the existence of a Caribbean epic tradition that is inspired by African epic elements provided in this chapter speaks for itself.

50 Cf. Rowell’s interview with Walcott 133f. As Benítez-Rojo admonishes, however, Caribbean epic poems (as well as other literary works) must not be reduced to being a mixture of European and African elements. To define them as such would be to make a “positivist and logocentric argument that […] ‘whiten[s]’ the Caribbean black” (105). Ultimately, it would be to legitimise the region’s imperial past of conquest, submission, slavery, dependence. Nonetheless, it is a legitimate observation that Caribbean literature owes its special character to different cultural presences, the conflicts between which it is the expression of (104–105).
as epic has had a rich, lively tradition on the African continent, many features of which were transported to the Caribbean through the Middle Passage, where they continue to be productive components in contemporary literary creation.

The centrality classical antiquity and the European epic tradition – compared to the African one – occupy in the West Indies is doubtless primarily a result of British colonialism and its education system, which imparted knowledge of allegedly superior European culture and history to pupils in the colonies at the expense of local, inherited history and culture. Thus, the reception and status of the epic genre in the modern Caribbean and its lack of recognition of African influences serve to highlight the continuous influence of British colonialism on the region and, not least, the colonial tint of the Classics in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Overall, it has been shown that epic continues to be a highly productive literary form in twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean literature as a plethora of contemporary dealings with epic and not least the *Epic Voices* discussion series with its numerous significant speakers from the Caribbean illustrate. It has been demonstrated that, to some degree, the epic genre owes its persisting popularity in the West Indies to its content that was established in antiquity – war, devastation, imperialism as well as notions of travel and the sea – which resonates with the Caribbean history and experience. Nonetheless, Caribbean authors display a very ambiguous, conflicted relationship with the epic genre due to its ‘Europeanised’ character (epic being a central part of Western literary canons) and due to their refusal of the epic idea of a patriotic narrative centred around a single hero. Furthermore, it can be observed that modern Caribbean definitions of epic place greater emphasis on content than form, even though a play with stylistic elements of ancient as well as later European epic, for example with regard to metre, can be detected. Lastly, contemporary Caribbean definitions of epic exhibit little recognition of African elements present. Rather, they are greatly influenced by the British classical tradition as well as colonial Classics curricula. For this reason and due to the ancient genre’s common topos of the justification of imperialism, epic continues to carry strong colonial connotations in the West Indies in the twenty-first century.

These theoretical observations shall now be applied to two primary works of recent Anglophone Caribbean literature and, thus, assessed for their validity in a twenty-first century context.

**Anthony Kellman: *Limestone – An Epic Poem of Barbados* (2008)**

Upon his return from London in the early 1980s, where he had worked as a musician and become affiliated with the London literary scene, Barbados-born poet Anthony Kellman published his first two volumes of poetry, which instantly attracted praise from a plethora of established Caribbean voices such as Kamau Brathwaite. A decade later, in 1993, Kellman became the first Anglophone Caribbean writer to win a U.S. National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship.

As one of the best-known Caribbean New Generation writers, Kellman’s writings are original and innovative, particularly with regard to their structure and rhythm. Kellman is considered the originator of the West Indian poetic form Tuk, which is inspired by Barbados’ indigenous music. Yet, as the term ‘New Generation writer’ alludes to, Kellman’s works are at the same time deeply rooted in the Caribbean literary tradition and the Barbadian author names the big figures among the previous generation of West Indian authors – Brathwaite, Harris, Lamming, Naipaul and Walcott – as his literary models (“Revisionary Interior Image” 101ff.). Consequently, Kellman’s poetry and prose fiction is also anchored in the distinctive regional tradition of engaging with the Classics, established in the West Indies during the twentieth century by these authors. Kellman’s portrayal of the history of Barbados, *Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados*, evokes associations with classical antiquity but also with Walcott’s *Omeros* at the mention of ‘epic’ in its subtitle – and rightly so, as I will illustrate shortly. However, Kellman’s other works of poetry (*The Broken Sun*, 1984; *Wings of a Stranger*, 2000) and fiction (*The Houses of Alphonso*, 2004; *Tracing Jaja*, 2016 – to name but a few of each) also regularly feature references to Graeco-Roman culture and literature, as well as to dealings with the Classics in twentieth-century Caribbean literature, both in form as well as content.  

Discussing the artistic reality for Caribbean writers of his era and sources of inspiration for his first novel *The Coral Rooms* (1992), Kellman hints at two principal difficulties that impose artistic chains on contemporary Caribbean authors in his article “The Revisionary Interior Image: A Caribbean Author Explores His Work” (1993). On the

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51 *The Houses of Alphonso*, Kellman’s best-known novel, for instance, is highly reminiscent of ancient epic in that it is dominated by notions of travelling, the search for a homeland and personal ‘odyssey’ as well as comprising direct references to Greece and Rome.
one hand, given the strong legacy West Indian writers of the twentieth century have left behind, their successors wonder how they can create new images, for instance from the natural beauty they are surrounded by, that have not been used before. The second impediment encountered by Caribbean writers, a lack of graspable local ancient history, is expressed through Kamau Brathwaite's words:

[M]ost of us, coming from islands where there was no evident lost civilization – where, in fact, there was an ‘absence of ruins’, faced a real artistic difficulty in our search for origins [because] the seed and root of our concern had little material soil to nourish it. (Brathwaite in Kellman, “Revisionary Interior Image” 102)

It was of course not Kellman's intention in writing the essay to simply lament this artistic reality Antillean New Generation writers find themselves confronted with. The Barbadian author describes how he overcame said obstacles when researching The Coral Rooms, thus offering ways to come to terms with this actuality to fellow Caribbean poets and novelists. He stresses:

In the midst of neo-colonialism in the Caribbean and socio-racial injustices widespread in both the U.S.A. and Europe, the capacity for revision and the opportunities for such revision still abound. The notion of a transforming interior image, a transforming revisionary image, can be a vehicle for such liberation and is, indeed, one of the positives that Caribbean literature has to offer. (“Revisionary Interior Image” 110)

In the article, Kellman names “two events, two coincidences” which unlocked his personal “imagistic canvas”, inspired him to create “a transforming interior image” and, thus, enabled him as a New Generation writer to produce original island literature that would set him and his peers apart from the previous crop of West Indian authors.

The first event he mentions is a visit to Harrison’s Cave, an outstandingly beautiful limestone cave in the heart of Barbados:

Much of the dramatic imagery I intuitively sought was contained within the belly of the island, the throat and the intestines of the island, the veins of the island, the vagina of the island: underground rivers and waterfalls, rain-forests of stalactites and stalagmites continuously drenched in cave showers, streamy echoes of prehistory…all there. (“Revisionary Interior Image” 101)

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52 "I grew up on an island that glides and undulates in fairly even meter, a landscape regularly blocked with stanzaic cane-fields except on the tourist-laden southern and western coasts where hotels, concrete exclamation points, shout: Paradise! Paradise! In my teens, writing songs and verse, I wandered over the land and along the ribboning coasts, wondering what images I could garner from this hearth that had not been used before or how to present the old images in a fresh and original way" (“Revisionary Interior Image” 101). Kellman adds that this is a particularly Barbadian dilemma since Barbados’ landscape does, according to him, not offer as many external features “laden with dramatic possibilities” as the other Antilles do (ibid.).
The second one – “less of a coincidence and more perhaps of an intuitive and inevitable development emerging from an imagistic field in which I was already immersed”, as Kellman describes it – is the Caribbean Sea (and particularly the busy, diverse natural life made up of reefs and fish below its glittering surface; ibid. 101f.). It is an important observation, which will be given more attention in due course, that the Barbadian author confirms the central role the sea occupies in his writings and contemporary Caribbean literature more generally, just as it does in classical epic, as I have shown above. However, my point here is that having read Kellman’s article as well as poetry and fiction, I would argue that there is another detectable means of generating “a transforming revisionary image [that] can be a vehicle for […] liberation” employed by Kellman and fellow contemporary Caribbean authors beyond exploring and drawing inspiration from the Caribbean landscape, both above and below sea level: engagement with and transformations of classical antiquity.

Cultural theorists such as Frantz Fanon directed attention to classical civilisations’ and literature’s potential to serve as inspiration and, more importantly, as vehicles for liberation in postcolonial contexts in the middle of the twentieth century (cf. Introduction 16f.). Furthermore, Sharon Meredith, ethnomusicologist with a research interest in the Caribbean and especially Tuk, asserts with regard to Kellman’s native island Barbados that due to British cultural imperialism, the Black population of Barbados had few clearly defined cultural traditions other than British ones – the culture that had been presented to them as the culture to aspire to. Consequently, in both colonial and postcolonial times and particularly in the years after emancipation, there was a tendency among locals to consider Barbadian culture and traditions of little value and to cherish anything from outside of Barbados. Moreover, in the post-independence era, not only were exterior cultural influences regarded more highly than local culture but, in addition, “a conscious choice of anything not connected with Britain may have been desirable” for many Barbadians (84; 95). The Classics were (and continue to be) one such external influence and canvas for identification that can bypass British culture, as classical references in

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53 Cf. Brathwaite “African Presence” 74–78. He asserts with regard to African cultural influences in the West Indies: “This African culture [which survived in the Caribbean] came under very severe attack at emancipation […] from a number of quarters”, namely missionaries, who were naturally against African religious practices and whose activity was subject to fewer legal restrictions after emancipation, colonial education and social legislation designed to secure the wealth and (cultural) authority of the plantocracy and to inhibit upward mobility of former slaves.
twentieth-century Caribbean literature have highlighted. Lastly, the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome of course offer material for compensation for the lack of “evident lost civilization” bemoaned by Brathwaite, especially due to their geographical and cultural parallels to the Caribbean, which represent opportunities for identification.

Even though in his 1993 article Kellman does not mention transformations of classical antiquity explicitly as a means of generating a revisionary interior image in his writing, he discusses the centrality of notions of transformation and metamorphosis for his debut novel *The Coral Rooms* at length, deliberately evoking associations with classical myth and Ovid’s magnum opus, *The Metamorphoses*. Moreover, the novel itself bristles with references to Graeco-Roman antiquity, the most striking one being protagonist Percival Veer’s descent into the depths of a limestone cave, a magical and mythical underworld, to escape his daily rut as well as guilt over past actions creeping up on him – allowing for parallels to ancient myth and to descents into the underworld in Graeco-Roman literature and particularly epic to be drawn. It is Kellman’s long poem *Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados*, however, which arguably displays the closest engagement with the Classics and particularly Graeco-Roman epic out of Kellman’s literary works – perhaps to the disappointment of Guyanese writer and literary critic Sasenarine Persaud, who in his review of *Limestone* remarked with an air of relief: “At least, there is no mimicry of Greek fiction passed off in poetry as Barbados”.

Kellman’s 2008 work *Limestone*, the result of a fourteen-year creative process which showcases the power of Kellman’s imaginative craft more than any of his previous works, continues the West Indian tradition of engagement with Graeco-Roman antiquity as its subtitle, *An Epic Poem of Barbados*, suggests. However, Kellman did not only choose the most sublime classical literary form for his work, but the long poem abounds with elements borrowed from Graeco-Roman culture in order to generate “a transforming interior image” and, thus, “a vehicle for liberation”.

The work is an ambitious attempt to tell the entire history of Barbados starting from the genocide of the Amerindians following the arrival of the Europeans in Barbados. Kellman’s poem covers five centuries of his island’s past and culminates in the modern-day struggle of two young Barbadians, Livingston and Levinia, and their diasporic movement to and from the UK and US respectively due to the dilemma of a lack of

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54 See Afro-Greeks for a full exploration of classical references in twentieth-century Caribbean literature that serve the purpose of bypassing British cultural influences. I am also thinking of works such as Édouard Glissant’s poem *Le sel noir* (1960), which explores the ‘lost’ civilisations of ancient Carthage and Rome.
opportunities at home yet a longing for their island that repeatedly drives them back.\textsuperscript{55} In three parts and with the aid of historical and invented characters, Kellman delves into the hardship and pains of the African slaves brought to the island by European settlers, the 1816 slave revolt (told from the point of view of two of its leaders, Bussa and Nanny Grigg), issues of race and class in the post-emancipation period (fuelled by a visit from the exiled African king Jaja) and the campaigns for equality and freedom by the leaders of the constitutional struggle against colonialism in the twentieth century, Grantley Adams and Errol Barrow. Reading the stories of contemporary Barbadians Livingston and Levinia, which conclude the long poem, one cannot fail to note the question that arises in the work: who has benefited from the people’s struggles of the past? Similarly, the reader cannot help but notice how much time, research and dedication went into the composition of \textit{Limestone}: Kellman not only set himself to follow the classical tradition in choosing the genre for his work but also the ancient epic ideal of an aspiration to totality in the depiction of the history of his island.\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{Transformations of Classical Antiquity: Form}

\textit{Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados} is written in three parts, held together by the work’s most characteristic formal feature, Tuk rhythms, running through the entire work as a common thread. Tuk (sometimes referred to as ruk-a-tuk) is a traditional Barbadian fife and drum music genre influenced by British military music as well as African musical traditions.

Besides the typically African rhythmic drum improvisation which forms their central component, tuk songs are commonly accompanied by African folklore characters.\textsuperscript{57} Tuk’s popularity among the slave population of Barbados was owed to the fact that colonists considered African musical practices a threat to peace on the plantations. Tuk allowed the

\textsuperscript{55} “She’d [Levinia] leave this Southern gothic place [Augusta, Georgia, where Levinia lives and works and where Kellman is a Professor Emeritus of English and Creative Writing] before year end. She’d best resign/before ol’ Bradford screwed her mind;/back to a city too busy for race./ The mild witness of Atlanta’s [where Levinia had lived previously and Kellman’s place of residence besides Barbados]/racial face could not compare/to this. Ability was all it cared/for. Atlanta would be better./But there were other voices in/her head, the sound of coral stones/all hissing, ‘Lost.’ Deep in her bones/she felt her limestone island calling.” (\textit{Limestone} 179)

\textsuperscript{56} Kellman confirms that he is guided by an aspiration to totality in the depiction of humans and the world in the context of \textit{The Coral Rooms}: “[In the novel,] I endeavor to depict a potential gateway to wholeness, a dream/cave myth that revises the foundations of history and, thus, offers a viable route back to an authentic self” (“Revisionary Interior Image” 103).

\textsuperscript{57} For superb explorations of Tuk music see the works of Sharon Meredtih, such as \textit{Tuk Music Tradition in Barbados} (2015).
slaves to preserve their own musical practices while concealing them under the disguise of British army music that they had encountered and adopted elements of due to their involvement in the military (Meredith “Barbadian Tuk Music” 85). Because of its European and African influences, tuk illustrates that the fusion of such musical elements was a key part of the creolisation process taking place in the Caribbean. Since tuk was in the post-emancipation era commonly associated with (then undesirable) Barbadian working-class culture and rum shops, it suffered a lack of attention until the second half of the twentieth century in the aftermath of British cultural imperialism outlined above (Brathwaite “African Presence” 74ff.). After Barbadian independence however, tuk bands and rhythms enjoyed a revival and played an important role in shaping a new postcolonial national identity on the island at the initiative of the Barbadian government as well as tourist agencies (ibid. 82). This new nationalism also represented a fresh acceptance of Creole culture and recognition of the region’s Afro-Caribbean heritage by the upper strata of society, which Kellman certainly pays tribute to in his long poem.

Kellman did not only fuse musical and literary elements in the creation of *Limestone* by composing the epic poem in tuk rhythms. In truly epic fashion, the author – who like one of the poem’s central figures Livingston is a talented musician – released a companion CD containing musical renditions of most of the poem’s chapters by the author himself along with the poem. These recordings underline Kellman’s celebration of the African presence and particularly African oral elements in Caribbean culture and literature throughout his poem *Limestone*. However, the inspirations from African culture and epic literature in *Limestone* are in many cases not clearly distinguishable from the classical and Caribbean epic tradition, which influenced the work, due to their being intertwined as a result of chains of transformation.

In his 1974 essay “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature” Edward Kamau Brathwaite wrote:

I cannot maintain that African continuities are as easily traced in our [sc. Caribbean] literature as in the social/ideological world [...]. This does not mean there is no African presence in Caribbean/New World writing. It simply means that, because of its almost inevitable involvement with the establishment through education, communication and sales processing...

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58 Brathwaite names colonial, Eurocentric education (at the expense of teaching local Creole cultural heritage) as a central reason for the negligence of African culture in the Caribbean, especially in the post-emancipation period. He states: “It is conceivable that this [sc. colonial] education could have been truly bi-cultural, so that, who knows, we might have struggled *through Asante Twi and Zulu epics as well as French, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon*. However, under the dictates of mercantilism, education had a more monolithic and materialistic aim: control of the ex-slaves for the profit of their labour.” (“African Presence” 75; my italics).
(mercantilism), much of what we have come to accept as ‘literature’ is work which ignores, or is ignorant of, its African connection and aesthetic. Until, therefore, our definition of ‘culture’ is re-examined in terms of its totality, not simply its Europeanity, we will fail to discover a literature of negritude and with it, a literature of local authenticity. Likewise, the African presence in Caribbean literature cannot be fully or easily perceived until we redefine the term ‘literature’ to include nonscribal material of the folk/oral tradition, which, on examination, turns out to have a much longer history than our scribal tradition, to have been more relevant to the majority of our people, and to have had unquestionably wider provenance. (78)

Nonetheless, despite the attitudes observed by Brathwaite, African continuities are certainly traceable, even ubiquitous in Limestone. Kellman’s recorded epic songs are a homage to the oral tradition of epic recitation in classical and African cultures and only the tip of the iceberg of African-inspired elements in the Barbadian long poem.

African influences in Limestone can also be detected in the narrator’s position in relation to the stories being told. The narrative point of view in the poem alternates between an omniscient third-person and a first-person narrator, used for the account of slave revolt leader Bussa, African king Jaja, the founder of the Barbados Labour Party Grantley Adams and Barbados’ first Prime Minister Errol Barrow. Despite it being a delicate affair to apply omniscience to the thoughts and motives of real people who were known to many still living, Kellman weaves together Homeric and African epic narrative perspective (predominantly omniscient third-person) and the first-person narration in Walcott’s Omeros. The story of Anna Fortuna, for instance – domestic slave, who overheard slave rebel Cuffee’s plans to a revolt and informed her slave master of the uprising – is reported from a third-person omniscient point of view:

Anna wasn’t sure she’d
heard the first part right,
but ‘Blood for blood’, she repeats twice.
Hurrying to Mistress

59 In a 2016 interview, Kellman stated: “Writing historical fiction is very tricky business. By necessity, the process of fiction (and especially historical fiction) is, simultaneously, an inner and outer experience, an inchoate and realistic experience, an inventive and factual experience. But one isn’t writing a history book; one is writing a dramatic work of the imagination. It can be challenging to seamlessly blend these polarities without (from the historical side) the risk of irritating factual purists. [...] My 2008 book, Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados, took some fourteen years to write and covers some five centuries of Barbadian historical, political, social, and cultural life. Here I also worked with both invented and actual historical personages (including a section on King Jaja). So, with historical fiction, a central question is how does a work set in a particular time and featuring real historical figures, shed light on the condition of humanity? And a creative writer has the artistic license to alter historical detail, if necessary, in order to properly answer that question. The alternative would be to blindly cling to factual detail and risk ruining the work’s imaginative and emotional integrity.” (Peepal Tree Press “An Interview with Anthony Kellman”)
who’s sipping Sunday tea,
she spills all she heard. […]
Six were burnt alive and
eleven had heads
chopped off. Seventeen razed with lead.
Three hung. They stand, these last,
noosed stiffly on a cart,
The horse, once nudged, then walks away. […]
Anna Fortuna was
the toast of Barbados,
freed as model obedient servant. *(Limestone 26–27)*

In contrast, the reader delves into the thoughts, emotions and multiple “selves” of controversial but influential figure Grantley Adams from a close-up, first-person perspective:

> Rawle, Clennell and Charles comprised
my first self. I, Grantley, the second. […]
I knew there were other selves:
two, yet nameless, lurked in the shadows,
selves to be controlled like the wild
worker hot-heads full of envious bile. *(Limestone 91)*

In addition, Kellman pays further tribute to African influences on Caribbean culture in his epic poem by frequently employing Creole *(30, 35f., 44f., 72–79, 89, 93, 128, 152–162)*, for example in his account of the fates of the leaders of the 1816 slave revolt Bussa and Nanny Grigg, as this exchange illustrates:

> He couldn’t say. He knew
what he must do.
Skill was needed, the skill to read.
‘You teach me read o’ how
we mekking out?
How we fare on the udder isles?
Dey accept Massa slav’ry
same way dat we do?’
‘Fight them, shite them wid black arm fight,’
she said. ‘But slow, but slow…
You massa black cloud?’
Eyeing Bussa frame north and south,
she smiles: ‘I teach yuh try
to read and write.

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60 Note parallels of this scene to the killing of the serving maids in book 22 of the Odyssey (433–501).
Teach yuh Toussaint L'Overture. (Limestone 45–46)

It is important to note Kellman’s emphasis on African cultural influences on Caribbean literature through his usage of Creole in *Limestone*. Moreover, this is an important observation since Kellman’s use of Creole upholds the Caribbean epic tradition: the usage of Creole in *Limestone* prompts parallels to works such as *Omeros*, where Walcott frequently employs Creole dialects too and is one of many ways in which the work embraces the legacy of Caribbean epic poetry of the twentieth century.

Activations of the African presence in Kellman’s literature are also reflected in the circular composition of *Limestone*. As Benítez-Rojo highlighted, the Caribbean people – Peoples of the Sea like the ancient Greeks and African peoples – inherited the circular character of their literature from African influences. At the same time, circular structures – both with regard to form as well as to content – are a feature Caribbean literature shares with classical epic. Consequently, the ring composition of *Limestone* can be interpreted as both an imitation of classical antiquity and a nod to the Caribbean’s African heritage. The long poem begins and ends at Brandon’s beach and, in circular motions, the story takes the reader back to the beach again and again (cf. 167 to give only one example):

Gravely weighing present
time, Ichirouga
eyes the burial mound on Brandon’s
beach where, grave and few,
his braves slowly
circle the fires of death; wood of
sorrow wrenching dreams and
pushing darkness
from out its shell; hatred burning

quickly as a roof; faces
kilned with ancient grief.
Spanish invaders had struck last
night with muskets, slaughter. […] (1)

It is Brandon’s beach where the reader first encounters Livingston (127) and where Livingston meets Levinia again in Barbados at the very end of the poem:

So, next summer, trailing the migrant
voice, she touched the curdling surf
at bright Brandon, drunk with rising mirth,
until, laughing she held its fragrance
raw. Something as urgent as waves

61 Leader of Haiti’s successful slave rebellion in 1804.
had swept her to these dear shores,
something strangely erogenous.
Her senses clung tight to the staves
of surf music, the throb of phallic
guitar on Brandon’s long brown sand,
something speaking through the sound
that words can’t trap, that, foaming, licks
at what’s felt but can’t be expressed.
But something crucial is being
revisioned here, something is healing
the deep pain so long repressed. […]

You ask, ‘Did they exchange their names?
Did she say Levinia?
Did he whisper on that sand,
‘Call me Tamer of the Seas’?’

No, they made exits tittering,
‘O I’m sorry.’
‘O please excuse me.’
The moment had been an eternity, a deep ancient song of possessing
glimpsed certainties, the chance
of pure congruence, yet, for all
they had common, both saw the wall
of self falling like a dying dance
or sandboxes’ leaves falling on sand.
These hard symbols mirrored their ruins,
their grim histories, a truth that hymns
every living woman, living man. 62 (185; 191)

Kellman’s activation and celebration of these elements from African oral and folklore
traditions in Limestone signify the importance of African culture for contemporary
Caribbean epic literature and are to be understood as responses to White cultural
imperialism in the Caribbean (Brathwaite “African Presence” 80). 63 However, other cultural
influences are at work in Kellman’s epic poem on a formal level.

The first part of Limestone is composed in mostly unrhymed three-line verses of
non-uniform metre, while the second part consists of lines and stanzas of different
lengths in rhyming couplets which often feature slant rhymes. The second part of
Limestone is dominated by iambic tetrameter. The poem’s third part, finally, is written in
envelope-rhyme quatrains mostly organised in tetrameter. While the structure of
Limestone is greatly influenced by Tuk rhythms, it needs to be noted that Tuk rhythms are

62 Note also the allusions to ancient song and hymns.

63 Note also metaphors such as “Bussa watches the broughams,/buggies, gigs rolling/gently over
the countryside,[…] past a mock English church/built of new-sawn limestone” (Limestone 48–49),
symbolic of the criticism of British cultural imperialism in Barbados that is a dominant undertone
in the work, which I will elaborate on.
comparatively free since a Tuk band may play any piece of music and its identifying element, the accompanying pattern played on a kittle drum, can comprise a relatively broad array of standard time signatures of 2/4, 3/4 as well as 4/4 (ibid. 85f.). Therefore, while 4/4 Tuk rhythms are ubiquitous in *Limestone*, Kellman’s mixing of three-line, four-line and longer verses as well as different types of rhymes must be traced back to other musical or literary models.

At closer inspection, the three-line stanzas in the first part of Kellman’s epic poem are highly reminiscent of Walcott’s *Omeros*, which follows Dante’s poetic form *terza rima*. Kellman’s verses do not feature the interlocking rhyme scheme typical of *terza rima*, yet Walcott does not adhere to the rhyming pattern in his epic poem closely either and breaks it frequently. Considering that Kellman states Walcott as one of his principal literary models and that the St. Lucian’s epic poem *Omeros* greatly influenced the Antillean literary landscape like no other Caribbean engagement with epic poetry before, it is beyond dispute that Kellman must have been tremendously inspired by Walcott in writing his epic poem *Limestone*. Perhaps it is therefore not a coincidence that Kellman begins *Limestone* with a stanza pattern that takes up Walcott’s canonical work of the Caribbean epic tradition of the twentieth century. The New Generation writer embarks on his own epic journey equipped with a form borrowed from his St Lucian predecessor, which he crafts into his very own, twenty-first century epic form in the course of his long poem. Kellman’s being inspired by *Omeros* and the Caribbean epic tradition is not only reflected in the form of *Limestone* but also in the poem’s themes and characters, as will be shown shortly.

The long stanzas in iambic tetrameter in the second part of *Limestone*, on the other hand, appear to have been inspired by the long blank verse stanzas in Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost*, particularly since Milton frequently alternates the pentameter with lines that vary in the number of stresses between three and eight, thus accommodating the tetrameter used by Kellman (Flannagan 37). More importantly however, the rhyming couplets in mostly iambic tetrameter employed by Kellman in the second part of his national epic of Barbados sharply remind the reader of heroic couplets used by Dryden and Pope in their translations of Virgil and Homer. As demonstrated above, Derek Walcott’s conceptualisation of epic poetry was so influenced by Dryden’s and Pope’s versions of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* – which he probably encountered in the colonial classroom during Latin and ancient Greek lessons – that he considered the pentameter, rather than hexameter, a martial, epic metre. This legacy of British colonial education
curricula and their significant impact on Caribbean poetry seem to be perpetuated in Kellman’s *Limestone*. However, Kellman translated the dominant form of epic in the British classical tradition, heroic couplets, into a distinctly Barbadian form by stripping the pentameter off and dressing them in Tuk 4/4 rhythms, thus giving them an unmistakably Caribbean guise.

Four-line stanzas with envelope rhymes written in (mostly) tetrameter in the third part of *Limestone* do not evoke parallels to other epic poems but strike the reader as a reference to the *In Memoriam* stanza employed by authoritative British writers such as Alfred Lord Tennyson (note also Kellman’s direct reference to Tennyson, *Limestone* 145), who authored poems such as *Ulysses* and whose oeuvre is steeped in Greek and Latin literary references, and Ben Jonson. The *In Memoriam* stanza, named after Tennyson’s eponymous poem, is another British literary form that is inspired by classical ancient literature. It is associated with elegy since it is typically used for expressing elegiac sentiments such as a longing for bygone love and happiness (Gigante passim). In that respect, the *In Memoriam* stanza is a fitting, cunning choice for the third part of *Limestone*, which tells the autobiographically inspired stories of Livingston and Levinia, a young musician and teacher respectively. Kellman explores these characters’ complex relationship to their homeland Barbados that is representative of an entire generation of young Barbadians’ predicament and characterised by elegiac yearning – on the one hand, for better economic prospects and career outlooks in Barbados, on the other hand, when driven into exile by an absence of opportunities, for a return to the island that they are so deeply attached to.

To conclude, Kellman’s stylistic choices throughout *Limestone* are influenced by material borrowed from African culture as well as twentieth-century Anglophone Antillean epic poetry, a pivotal link in the chain of transformation of epic from Graeco-Roman through present Caribbean times. It has been shown that Kellman makes use of African-inspired stylistic devices in his epic poem in order to celebrate the African presence in Caribbean literature, retain a degree of cultural autonomy and protect his work and Caribbean literature in general from being reduced to being a product of colonial influences and cultural traffic in the history of Barbados. Nonetheless, the form of *Limestone* is evidently – consciously or subconsciously – also strongly affected by British receptions of classical literary genres and particularly the British epic tradition. The legacy of British colonial education curricula, which above all imparted knowledge of English

64 “Plucking notes in a ruk-a-tuk/stylee” (*Limestone* 141), just like the author Kellman.
literature as well as Graeco-Roman civilisations – through the study of British verse translations of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*, among other readings – to pupils in the Caribbean colonies, interestingly appears to live on in Kellman’s poems, as parallels to Milton’s epic poetry, Tennyson’s elegiac form and Pope’s and Dryden’s heroic couplets suggest.

Since Kellman's generation of Anglophone Caribbean writers did not undergo a colonial education like leading Caribbean literary figures of the twentieth century did, this observation is indeed remarkable. Kellman and his peers were born around or after the time their islands achieved sovereignty from the United Kingdom and it must therefore be assumed that they were not subject to colonial education curricula. In addition, they did not encounter heroic couplets or Miltonic long stanzas in the epic poetry of Glissant or Walcott either, which could have posed an intermediate station in the chain of transformation of epic poetry spanning from Greece and Rome to the modern-day Caribbean.

Kellman was born in 1955 and exposed to British colonial education curricula during his first years at school; however, only until Barbados gained independence in 1966 (having become a self-governing colony in 1961). Nonetheless, Kellman was educated at Combermere School, a prestigious Barbadian secondary school, where talented students such as Austin Clarke or George Lamming – who had both won scholarships to attend the school – had been taught Latin, “a gateway to the higher professional careers and to a better livelihood [in the Caribbean colonies], as it was in Britain” (Greenwood *Afro-Greeks* 76; cf. 75–105).

Such tradition-bound schools, which had been established during the British presence in the Caribbean (other well-known examples being St. Mary’s College in St. Lucia, alma mater of Walcott, and Harrison College in Barbados, where Clarke went on to do his sixth-form studies) and whose prestige largely rested on their close ties to the British education system, unsurprisingly did not change their curricula overnight after independence from the UK had been achieved. To change education curricula and syllabi immediately after three centuries under foreign administration would be a Herculean task in any education system or for any school, let alone for schools in a country like Barbados, where it had been indoctrinated in the population that British culture, including the British education system, was the pinnacle of human civilisation and ultimate culture to strive for, whereas any (working-class) Barbadian cultural practices were to be looked down upon. Thus, colonial education curricula in the Anglophone Caribbean continued to
influence generations of children even after independence had been gained, including New Generation writers such as Kellman and his peers. It is therefore likely that poetic forms reminiscent of British epic (Milton’s long blank verse stanzas in *Paradise Lost* and Pope’s and Dryden’s heroic couplets) as well as the *In Memoriam* stanza found their way into Kellman’s epic poem since he encountered Dryden, Milton, Pope and Tennyson at school, where he received a similar education – with the Classics, English literature and public school sports being its central components – as Derek Walcott and the previous crop of Caribbean writers had in colonial times.

Nevertheless, just as the Tuk rhythms Anthony Kellman employs in *Limestone* are a fusion of British and African elements, so the overall form of the poem represents a fusion of classically inspired elements from British and Caribbean culture, studded with African elements. Kellman translates British and Caribbean epic forms into a distinctly contemporary West Indian context by clothing them in tuk rhythms and by playing with rhyme schemes. Kellman’s formal assimilation – an integration of elements of British and twentieth-century Caribbean epic into and combination with elements of contemporary Caribbean literature (cf. types of transformation in Bergemann et al. 47ff.) – as an instance of transformation of antiquity is highly interesting. The Barbadian writer does not appropriate poetic forms from the culture of reference, Graeco-Roman culture, directly in this transformation of antiquity. Instead, crafting a chain of transformation of classical epic, – spanning from Homer and Virgil via British engagement with epic to twentieth-century Caribbean explorations of the genre – further, he resorts to mediating stations in this process of transformation for material for his own epic poetry.

This poses the question whether, as can be the case with processes of assimilation (ibid. 48), elements of the culture of reference in question – classical antiquity – become undetectable and disappear in *Limestone* since they merge with later cultural influences – in this case British and Caribbean literary forms. I would argue that despite the form of *Limestone*, which does not exhibit any direct references to classical epic, this is not the case in Kellman’s long poem. As mentioned previously, the work’s subtitle *An Epic Poem of Barbados* introduces the Classics as a central theme before one has even started reading the long poem. Throughout the work, the Classics remain ubiquitous thanks to a plethora of references to Greece and Rome and parallels to the subject matter of classical epic – as I am going to show next. By aligning himself with the British and Caribbean epic tradition, Kellman does not neglect or omit but perpetuate the Graeco-Roman epic tradition that inspired both of the former. After all, Kellman’s *Limestone* certainly meets
the ancient epic ideal of aesthetic sublimity with regard to form and language. In
displaying a high degree of knowledge of poetic forms and their reception and by
investing a great deal of effort in the form of his epic poem *Limestone*, Kellman conforms
to the ancient definition of epic, which placed emphasis on formal genre characteristics.

Thus, even though not immediately noticeable on the level of form, the Classics do
have a stake in the creation of *Limestone*. Graeco-Roman culture and literature serve the
purpose of making up for a “lack of ancient history” in Kellman’s epic poem and, thus, are
a crucial means (out of many) of generating a “revisionary interior image”. The resulting
inspiration drawn from the Classics, detectable as elements borrowed from the British
and Caribbean epic tradition, give the poem and consequently Caribbean epic poetry of
the twenty-first century their unique characteristics. Through his free, creative
engagement with classical antiquity in *Limestone*, Kellman contributes to distinctly
Caribbean Classics, which are an important symbol of cultural liberation and
independence – as I will further evidence in the following subchapter.

*Transformations of Classical Antiquity: Content*

Kellman’s fusing of elements from the African and Caribbean epic tradition is
maintained on the level of subject matter in his magnum opus *Limestone*. However, more
direct references to classical civilisations and classical epic can be detected.

As I have alluded to previously, Kellman was perceptibly guided by one of the most
central features of classical epic, aspiration to totality, in narrating the history of Barbados
in epic form. Furthermore, the national epic poem *Limestone* – which sings over 500 years
of Barbados’ past including all hardship caused by genocide of the indigenous
population, the Middle Passage, slavery and its sociopolitical and economic
consequences for the island’s population – doubtless meets the ancient epic requirement
of displaying grandeur of subject. Moreover, the work lives up to the classical epic
criterion of featuring heroes: on the one hand, *Limestone* encompasses the continued
communal heroic struggle of an island population – personified as Ichirouga, the
Amerindian name for Barbados – despite a number of historical setbacks (“Masked by/
the screams, Ichirouga advances” 7). On the other hand, Kellman recounts the heroic
endeavours for equity and achievements and services to their country of a few individuals
the story centres around: Bussa, leader of the largest slave revolt in Barbadian history
(34ff.), Samuel Jackman Prescod, first person of African descent to be elected to
Barbados’ parliament in 1843 (72ff.), exiled African King Jaja of Opobo, whose landing in
Barbados was of great symbolic significance to the island’s Black population\(^6\) (74ff.), Clement Payne (92ff.), Grantley Adams (91ff.) and Errol Barrow (103ff.) – pivotal figures in twentieth-century Barbadian politics, the struggle for racial equity and three of the island’s ten national heroes – and, lastly, present-day characters Livingston (127ff.) and Levinia (165ff.) – representatives of an entire generation of young Barbadians – who are facing their own heroic struggles, caused by the aftermath of colonialism and the resulting absence of opportunities on their mother island.\(^6\)

At the same time, in meeting these classical definitions of epic, Kellman is aligning himself with the Caribbean epic legacy established by figures such as Édouard Glissant and Derek Walcott. Kellman follows the example of \textit{Les Indes}, Glissant’s canonical epic poem, which gives a comprehensive account of the history of another Antillean island, Martinique, and is visibly motivated by an aspiration to totality. Furthermore, Kellman addresses dark chapters in Barbadian history in a very critical, admonitory manner and deals with matters of defeat, devastation, genocide, slavery – all of which Glissant and Walcott name as (Caribbean) epic’s distinctive subject matters, in contrast to classical definitions of the genre.

\textit{Limestone} comprises references to Walcott’s \textit{Omeros}, most notably “Fisherman Sea Crane”, a marginal character in \textit{Limestone} but major parallel to the fishermen Achille and Hector in Walcott’s epic poem (\textit{Limestone} 160ff.). In addition, \textit{Limestone} does not only show parallels to the \textit{terza rima} verse scheme of Walcott’s epic poem on a formal level (as pointed out previously) but features direct references to Dante and his \textit{Divina Commedia}, which in turn inspired \textit{Omeros}:

\begin{quote}
For five weeks, he kept angelus. \\
Each day Sea Crane would tell him something new – ancient truths that made to sing in him all things native, and enough to firm-up his stumbling limbo
\end{quote}

\(^6\) “For some it was enough to bring/the grand thought that, if not/in their time, in their children’s, the blot/of servile pasts would be erased,/and a new lineage would be raised/to soaring heights, like a hawk set free./King Jaja landed. A day of jubilee.” (\textit{Limestone} 74–75)

\(^6\) Note the parallel of Livingston’s name (living stone) to limestone, the sedimentary rock which his mother island is primarily made up of, cf. \textit{Limestone} 161: “Livvy stand for Living Stone,/also Tamer of the Seas.” and 138: “Grief’s smell still clung to Livingston:/the burden of being an only son,/the burden of supporting a widow,/the burden of feeling forced to bow/to commerce. The dead weight of living stone!”. The name does, however, also evoke associations with Dr. David Livingstone, a Scottish physician and Christian missionary celebrated by the West as a ‘discoverer’ of Africa. He is frequently referenced in Caribbean literature, particularly with regard to the relation between colonisers and indigenous people, cf. NourbeSe’s \textit{Looking for Livingstone – An Odyssey of Silence} (1991).
dance. Now Time says no more delay,
time to make steps to seize the day;
time to risk grimnest inferno
of humiliating fall, to free
stiff back, bend backwards in the dance
of freedom's complex balance
towards Divinest comedy. (162)

Therefore, while Kellman adopts certain ancient characteristics of epic in
Limestone, there are transformation processes of creative destruction (Bergemann et al.
51) of elements of the ancient cultures of reference at work: Kellman deliberately plucks
the canonical classical characteristics of epic to pieces by appropriating some of them
and neglecting or inverting others. For instance, while his epic poem comprises heroic
subjects, these heroic subjects do not satisfy the Homeric ideal of a single hero but are
representative of a community united in their struggle for equity, very much in accordance
to NourbeSe’s remarks on heroism as a category in Caribbean culture and literature
quoted above.67 While the subject of Limestone is grand, the poem does not recount
noble tales of victory over other peoples but delivers a portrayal of an island whose past
was marked by conquest, submission and political and economic dependency.

The resulting gaps of these transformative processes of creative destruction are
premise for the emergence of new, innovative cultural forms. By embracing Caribbean
definitions of epic and combining destructive processes with appropriations of these,
Kellman generates transformation processes of hybridisation (ibid. 50). He combines
elements of the culture of reference, classical antiquity, with characteristics of epic
borrowed from later receiving cultures, such as the Caribbean in the twentieth century. In
this manner, he fabricates new cultural configurations, distinctly contemporary and
Caribbean features of epic poetry. Thus, it is worth noting that once again, intermediate
Caribbean stations of the reception of classical epic are granted central importance and
are on a par with, if not given precedence over, classical definitions of epic. Nonetheless,
it is important to observe that on the level of content – if not on the level of form–,
Kellman does draw directly on classical antiquity in his epic poem Limestone.

In fact, it is striking that with regard to the subject matter of Limestone as opposed
to its form, Kellman avoids references to British receptions of epic almost entirely. On the
contrary, voices that are highly critical of Europe:

Firearms cracked the air and

67 Neither do Kellman’s heroic subjects meet the religious criterion of British, e.g. Miltonian, epic
of a hero that is ethically good before god.
swords hissed, mingling steel with
the flesh of those who would not be slaves.
But our machetes and knives
were slicing at the chains:
Europe’s ‘gift’ to our freeborn race. (58)

and particularly the British pervade the work:

Where the pride? Where the self-respect?
Let the British, who’d broken every ethic
every law, who’d murdered, raped,
suppressed the language and customs
of our ancestors, feel inferior, not us. (106)

Unlike the form of Limestone, its content is characterised by a stronger identification with
the Classics which coincides with an outright rejection of the European colonists and
cultural traces they left in the West Indies (cf. Toepfer 165ff.):

Sugar’s sticky web trapped
all on the island,
yet Massa clung to his English
ways: profit, class and skin.
But for all their wealth,
trips to England, and strutting pomp,

Bajan whites, to English-borns, were but mimicking
parrots stuck in a cage of trash,
dressed in finest English
wool in the sun-struck
tropics; fat with arrogance,
uncultured, blank and with
no spark of finer feeling,
knowing only of ledgers, talk
of threatened slave revolts
in teacups’ steam of doubt;
attic’s pile of London clothes and guns. (Limestone 39)

Kellman’s embracing of Graeco-Roman culture and epic in order to eschew British
cultural references is reflected in several facets of Limestone: from en passant references
to antiquity\(^{68}\) and allusions to the Roman civilising mission used by the British as

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\(^{68}\) “Crossing their ocean path/a Dutch slave trader comes,/bound for Brazil, full-rigged, wanton,/priapic as an arching/dolphin.” (Limestone 12–13; my italics)
justification for their colonial endeavours\textsuperscript{69} to direct references to classical literary genres and writers as well as comparisons of slavery in Graeco-Roman and European colonisation.

One such direct reference to classical literature entails allusions to one of Rome’s best-known historians. I have previously pointed out parallels of protagonist Livingston’s name to the geological nature and endurance of his island Barbados. However, the name and character of Livingston also bears resemblance to a Roman writer, as the frequently used abbreviated form of his name suggests: Liv\textit{v}y.\textsuperscript{70} Both the Roman author Titus Livius and Kellman’s character Livvy are men of the arts who were obstructed in following a career in literature or music respectively by political circumstances in their home regions. Livy was likely prevented from attending a school of rhetoric in Rome or travelling to Greece because of disruptions caused by the civil war happening during his teenage years (Levick 25ff.), while Livingston cannot pursue an artistic career in Barbados due to a lack of opportunities in consequence of British colonialism. Livy, like Kellman’s Livvy, hailed from a place known for its quiet provincial life, Patavium (modern Padua; Str. 3, 5, 3; Plin. \textit{Ep.} 1, 14, 6). His provincial home was very dear to him and he returned there having spent a number of years in the \textit{urbs Roma} as a writer (unlike most other Roman historians, Livy never held political offices and, thus, did not absorb the \textit{urbs} as a place of \textit{negotium} in this regard, upholding a pastoral, provincial ideal to some extent). Similarly, having tried to make a career for himself as a musician in the \textit{urbs} London, Livvy is drawn back to the West Indies, which he is deeply attached to – and whose authors are notorious for stylising themselves following the Roman exemplum of “writing from the province” (Greenwood \textit{Afro-Greeks} 19).

Works such as Trini-Canadian author André Alexis’ novel \textit{Pastoral} illustrate that the notion of writing from the province continues to be a defining topos in twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean literature, including in \textit{Limestone}. After the brutal torture and execution of plantation slave Simon (“By now the slave Nameless/was called Simon” 19)

\begin{verbatim}
In 1838 the last chain link snaps;/the planters scowl, then, think perhaps/it’s an advantage not
to care/for their slaves’ food or health, and where/self-serving kindness fitfully held place,/planters
now show their truest face:/a hobble thrust in freedom’s course/made without one morsel of
remorse,/fulfilling with draconian/fist, their divine right since time began.” (Limestone 67; my
italics)
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{69} “In 1838 the last chain link snaps;/the planters scowl, then, think perhaps/it’s an advantage not
to care/for their slaves’ food or health, and where/self-serving kindness fitfully held place,/planters
now show their truest face:/a hobble thrust in freedom’s course/made without one morsel of
remorse,/fulfilling with draconian/fist, their divine right since time began.” (Limestone 67; my
italics)

\textsuperscript{70} Note also the reference to Lavinia in the \textit{Aeneid} contained in protagonist Levinia’s name. Just
like Lavinia in the \textit{Aeneid}, Levinia is the ultimate destination of Livingston’s travels in \textit{Limestone}. As pointed out above, Livingston meets Levinia again on Brandon’s beach, which can be interpreted as another reference to the \textit{Aeneid}: \textit{arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris/Italicam fato profugus Lavinague uenit/litora} (book I, 1–3).
following his affair with an English planter lady (“country English voice telling him:/Such fine timbers, Simon./What manhood you have./Palm-tree Negro, my wild sweet Black” 21), the narrator reports how “Slowly, life returns to/spent, bruised frames, locked in/the rhythms of illusive pastoral” (24; my italics). Or when, upon emancipation, the plantocracy attempts to secure its wealth and impede upward mobility of the former slave population through the means of social legislation, it is sung:

City to country, brick to soil.
Commerce to cane field, counting to toil.
Flesh to flesh and bone to bone.
Blood to blood and blood alone.
A story as old as commerce,
merchant money buys *bucolic earth*. (88; my italics)

It need barely be stated that Kellman’s references to bucolic life and literature are full of irony since they stand in stark contrast to the ruthlessness of the European colonial elite in Barbados before and after emancipation (cf. also pp. 7ff., 20ff., 26ff., 60ff., 69, 89f. for critical depictions of the European colonial elite). Thus, Kellman makes use of the Classics to underline and draw critical attention to the Europeans’ merciless demeanour in the British Caribbean colonies (cf. especially Part One and Two of *Limestone* for depictions of conquest, rape, genocide, submission 7ff. and displacement caused by the Europeans 18ff.). The Barbadian New Generation writer refers to and identifies with Graeco-Roman civilisations in a process of transformation of antiquity that distances himself and Caribbean culture from an intermediate point in the very same chain of transformation: the British and their culture, who played an important role in introducing the Classics to the Caribbean.

This theme of making direct reference to classical civilisations in order to condemn the nature of the European presence in the Antilles is perpetuated in *Limestone* through a depiction of slavery in British-ruled Barbados. The conditions the African slaves were kept under are compared to “back at home” in Africa. However, the portrayal of this more ‘humane’ form of slavery that is employed as object of comparison is also reminiscent of Graeco-Roman civilisations, at least of those *servi privati* or *publici* that served in positions such as teachers, doctors, bailiffs or scribes, commonly belonged to their master’s *familia* and had the opportunity to move up in society:

A fort was built, a flag
run up. They carved
their names deep on a fustic tree.
Banyans\textsuperscript{71}, mythic giants, bearded, kept watch, gateway gods, each air root a latch.

Nameless first thought this capture would be as back at home: 
\textit{slaves treated as one of household, where skill could lift like royal palms, crown with success the man who loyally worked. Only one goal could never be reached.}

Slaveman couldn’t become a king. Here they saw him as less than a man. Their tone sliced him deeper than knives, though he didn’t understand their words. Cuffs and heavy hands forced down his head. Whiplash followed; speech to pale man cut short. [...]

Slaves, yet not slaves – bondage fixed for a term then ended. (Nameless saw his own bondage lengthen.)

Most slaves were Creoles now, Africa a distant story. (13–15; 51; my italics)

It can be seen that classical civilisations are, on the one hand, once again adduced in order to call out the cruel reality of British imperialism and, on the other hand, as cultures that share commonalities with Caribbean Creole cultures and therefore offer an opportunity of identification for Caribbean writers while circumventing connections to and distancing themselves from British cultural influences (cf. Toepfer 165–174).

Another such commonality classical and Caribbean culture, and Graeco-Roman and Anglophone Caribbean epic in particular, share and that bypasses British culture and epic tradition is their focus on notions of travelling, journeys and exile. As has been observed above, the notion of searching for a place where one belongs is a central aspect of the travel topos in both ancient and Caribbean epic. In \textit{Limestone}, Kellman explores both the notion of personal exile (such as the circular motions between Barbados and the United Kingdom/United States of Livingston and Levinia or the exile of

\textsuperscript{71} One theory is that Barbados got its name from the Portuguese os \textit{barbados} (‘the bearded’), used to refer to the Bearded Fig Trees, also known as wild banyan trees, that grow on the island.
King Jaja of Opobo\textsuperscript{72} as well as migration, displacement and the search for a rightful home of groups of people (such as the Middle Passage 13ff., 54–63 etc., the fight of the Barbadian Black population for equal rights on their mother island following emancipation 67ff. or emigration of Indians to Trinidad in order to escape poverty in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century). These ‘communal’ quests for a place of belonging are sometimes intertwined with the stories of personal exile, for example those of Livingston and Levinia, thus critically emphasising the central question that runs through the poem: who has profited from the people’s hardships of the past?

Upon his return from London, where he has failed to pursue a career as a musician, Livingston reflects not only on his personal search for a rightful place that he has an affinity to but also that of his forebears:

He wasn’t ready for return’s shock,
how new, sudden, the warm island air,
how strangely people spoke. Not yet a year,
he’d lost much of his coral talk.

He first heard it near the Customs point.
Ears strained and cringed below home’s tongue. To his horror, Livingston felt a stranger, out of joint. […]

He looks into the shadows of
a world he has not made but is
the only one who can influence it with his actions. He sees the cargoes of
his foreparents arrive, their terror of fixed exile; but then to see them leap like shoals of fish in gaiety,
nuances the absolutes of horror. (156; 162)

Similarly, Levinia, back in Barbados after an unsuccessful attempt to build a career and find happiness in the US – a plan foiled not least due to the racism she encounters in Augusta and Atlanta –, contemplates her own fate and that of her ancestors:

She thinks of what has lead her here –
the years of learning at Cave Hill\textsuperscript{73};
despair, flight to the States; the treadmill of work; love lost in Georgia;

\textsuperscript{72} “In a mirror/I saw a creature/in a European suit who/ wasn’t me, saw a face of pallid hue,/ ashen like a man who is dead./ Patience and my boy Sunday paid/a visit next day. For a long while/I hugged my boy. My fate was exile/to a place called the West Indies/ far over cold isolating seas.” (Limestone 82; my italics) and “Free at last to return, Jaja/ never made it back to Africa,/ reaching only the Canary isles/ the final soil of his exile.” (ibid. 87; my italics).

\textsuperscript{73} The Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies.
the pain when a heart turned to stone
rebels and wants to live again. […]
She’d held close the tales from motherland
of great-grands who fled from poverty’s
sour karmic vines to the West Indies
on a salt-glazed passage of illusion;
shipped from Calcutta or Madras,
to feel the bitterness of ex-slaves
swelling, hating this new wave
who took labour from their hands;
who slaved on the plains of Caroni,
saved every cent (or rum-sucked them
in despair); then fade the dreams of return […]. (165–166)

Woven into Kellman’s exploration of this ancient topos of exile are direct references
to classical antiquity: Livvy, arriving in London for the first time, takes in his new
environment with all senses. Perhaps his struggles in the metropolis far from home are
foreshadowed by references to Homer’s epic and Tennyson’s elegy, containing
associations to a quest for a place that is home as well as to mourning. This reference to
Tennyson is one of very few references to British culture in Limestone on the level of
subject matter and is counterbalanced by the mentioning of Homer, another reference to
the Classics, in the same breath:

Wrapped in this new-place happiness,
Young Livvy sniffed its strange aromas,
like the moth-eaten books at home,
lofty Tennyson’s ballads pressed
next to the epic song of Homer –
remedy for the traveller’s
self-doubt […]. (145)

Likewise, in yet another direct reference to Graeco-Roman epic, the reader follows the
stream of consciousness of Barrow, Barbados’ ‘Father of Independence’, reflecting upon
his personal “odyssey” after Barbadian independence has been achieved (113).

Linked to these explorations of personal and communal strivings to find a rightful
place of belonging in Limestone is another characteristic adopted from Roman epic.

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74 Cf. Limestone pp. 165–186, esp. 168 and 179–184: “But while desire to remain stayed strong –/
she didn’t want to leave, to fly/this landscape so lucid in her eye –/frustration grew the louder
song. […] If Bim wouldn’t get her a job,/misplaced loyalty shouldn’t hem her,/ and trap her in
frustration’s gutter. […] The heart’s turning. Cry of the homesick./Regret, guilt, a desire to go
home./Few, though, ever did return/for good. Seething sadly in the grip/of exile was better than
the maw of lack: Kingston, Georgetown – all over. […] What would she lose if she stayed here?/
Could she find home in this country [sc. the US]? […] [h]er mind [was lurched to] palm-fringed
shores,/to hear the conch shell’s song, surf’s roar,/coral’s hiss. How deny this poem?”
Kellman’s Barbadian epic poem follows the national, social ideal of Roman and African epic and is politically charged. Like Roman epic, *Limestone* is dominated by a patriotism that is concerned with issues of much greater scope than destinies of individual heroes. This central theme of patriotism in *Limestone* represents a transformation process of direct appropriation (Bergemann et al. 48) of elements borrowed from classical antiquity, especially since twentieth-century Anglophone Caribbean authors such as Walcott and Glissant rejected patriotism as a concept in Caribbean epic, as I highlighted above.

At the same time, the patriotic character of *Limestone* forms a transformation process of hybridisation (ibid. 50) since Kellman’s patriotism imitates the Roman epic ideal of engagement with the social and heroes’ duties to their community – be they groups like the plantation slaves, individuals like Levinia or Livingston or actual national heroes like Bussa, Prescod, Grantley and Barrow – but combines the notion with distinctly Caribbean literary elements. For instance, in contrast to Roman epic, patriotism in this Barbadian epic is in addition to socio-political dealings also expressed through a celebration of Barbadian and Caribbean geography, archipelagic structure, fauna, flora that is typical of Caribbean literature. Lyrical evocations of place, especially the Caribbean landscape and wildlife, predominate in Kellman’s poem, as its title *Limestone* already suggests. To give only one illustrative example from the very end of the work that is representative of many:

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Seeing him about to fall, she grabs
his hand, and laughing they tumble
to the bed of Brandon’s soft sand,
bathed in light streaming on the shore. […]
So, she was he and he was she,
eyes now filled with mutual longing,
they swim with white and yellow markings
atop Coral Crab’s smooth bright belly;
atop long-spined arrowed Black Urchin
and his partner in terror, known as
Fireworm, poised to release rows
of white bristles into any skin;
atop parasitic surly red-
and-white striped banded Coral Shrimp;
atop Spiny Lobster who is limp
with rage at the strangers in his bed;
atop receptacle of basket sponge,
avoiding Touch-Me-Not; Fire Coral’s red
glare; tube, brush sponges; Loggerhead,
fixed, mulish… (It’s not his lounge!);
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atop small-mouthed Grunts sharpening
their teeth; Snapper jaws chomping through
the ripples; rising, butterfly swarms
of Blue Angels; rainbow Parrot fish;
yellow Goat Fish... Great Barracuda;
solo, sliding in steely grey; Moray
eel bopping in olive dreads this way.
If Queen Conch and Helmet now could
announce all the rare beauty here,
what eloquence! See that stony
dead-living tree clothed in thick algae?
A Scorpion fish revealed by its stare. (188–190)

Thus, Kellman creates an innovative and uniquely Caribbean form of epic that
distinguishes his generation's writing from that of twentieth-century Caribbean epic by
combining Roman epic's focus on the community with typically Caribbean praise of the
region's natural beauty.

Lastly, as the previous passage from Limestone illustrates superbly – both since it
is a close study of West Indian submarine life but also since it highlights Limestone's
circular and fluvial character, beginning and ending on Brandon's beach –, Kellman's epic
poem also bears striking parallels to classical as well as African culture and epic due to
the prominent role the sea plays in the poem. Throughout the poem, the sea is
ubiquitous: on the one hand, as inspiration for the poem's circular form, and on the other
hand, as primary setting and revisionary interior image that serves as stimulus for
Kellman's account of Barbados' history. This centrality of the sea in Limestone is, in turn,
a characteristic which the work shares with Caribbean epic of the twentieth century since
both Glissant and Walcott gave emphasis to the shaping force of landscape and
particularly the sea, this “subterranean imagistic field”.

In conclusion, while analysing processes of transformation of classical antiquity on
the level of subject matter in Limestone, a different picture to that of the formal analysis
emerges. Typically for a New Generation writer, Kellman displays a significant degree of
familiarity with previous generations of writers – West Indian as well as Graeco-Roman
and British – and his intertextual references or lack thereof on the level of content must be
regarded as deliberate and intended. Like on the level of form, Kellman combines
elements of classical epic and its African, British and Caribbean reception traditions in his
own epic poem. However, in contrast to the poem's form, parallels and direct references
to classical antiquity abound on the level of subject matter.
As I have illustrated, Kellman identifies with classical civilisations as well as classical epic in a number of respects, such as the centrality of the sea and the circular character of epic poetry, aspects of patriotism in epic literature or the upholding of the ideal of writing from the province. Kellman’s associations between Graeco-Roman civilisations and the Caribbean deliberately exclude the mediating authority of the British Empire and the colonial education they imposed upon the Anglophone Antilles. *Limestone* is dominated by critical voices condemning the nature of the European and particularly British colonial presence in the West Indies and to give even greater emphasis to these critical voices, Kellman steered almost entirely clear of British cultural references and influences in creating the poem’s content. Thus, it can be observed that the Barbadian author makes use of and identifies with the Classics in *Limestone* since avoiding cultural links to the British colonialists in this manner enables him to free his literature, Caribbean epic of the twenty-first century and Caribbean Classics more generally of imperial connotations.

In addition to the Classics, as on the level of form, elements inspired by African literature and epic are central components of *Limestone* and serve as a means of avoiding colonially charged cultural associations with the British. While the poem’s content is not inspired by African epic to the same degree as the work’s form, Kellman nevertheless celebrates the African presence in his epic poem through parallels to the circular character and structure, the central role of the sea and the politicisation of mythical material typical of African epic. However, it is ultimately classical antiquity as well as the pioneers of Caribbean epic of the twentieth century such as Walcott or Glissant that Kellman seems to have been primarily inspired by in creating the characters and plot of *Limestone*.

In his transformations of classical antiquity and epic, Kellman never loses sight of Caribbean epic as primary mediating instance in the chain of transformation of epic from Graeco-Roman to modern Caribbean times. *Limestone*’s parallels to Caribbean epic works of the twentieth century are certainly founded in the compatibility of the ancient genre with the Caribbean experience, which Glissant and Walcott emphasised in connection to their own epic poems. At the same time, they are to be read as celebrations of Caribbean literature and culture countering tendencies that despised Caribbean and Barbadian cultural properties perceivable since the post-emancipation period.
Nonetheless, it needs to be taken into consideration that, in certain respects, the New Generation writer deliberately chooses to deviate from twentieth-century Caribbean conceptions of epic, such as with regard to the notion of patriotism. Through processes of hybridisation, Kellman combines properties of earlier Caribbean epic with characteristics of classical literature or Caribbean stylistic devices that are not exclusive to epic: lengthy descriptions of Barbados’ natural beauty or allusions to the *writing from the province* topos common in both Roman and West Indian literature. Therefore, Kellman not only positions himself as rooted in the Caribbean epic tradition, but in the Caribbean literary tradition with his epic poem of Barbados.

In addition, the fusion of elements appropriated from classical antiquity and from Caribbean epic of the twentieth century through processes of creative destruction and hybridisation is a central characteristic of *Limestone*. Kellman appropriates, neglects, inverts, reconfigures and recombines elements from classical literature and epic freely in his long poem. At first sight, the Barbadian’s liberal dealing with ancient genre conventions may be interpreted as a sign of poor education or insufficient knowledge of the Classics. However, I would argue that Kellman’s creative, at times abstract usage of classical elements needs to be read as an act of cultural resistance that is perhaps reminiscent of Trimalchio’s distorting accounts of classical mythology in Petronius’ *Satyricon*. These were habitually considered symptomatic of the former slave’s deficient education but have recently been shown to purposely modify and deviate from traditional, established versions of myth since Trimalchio (and/or the author Petronius) wants to engage with classical antiquity on his own terms (cf. Grossardt and Rimell passim). Similarly, Kellman’s free, non-restrictive dealing with the Classics should not be misattributed to an inadequate classical education; on the contrary, Kellman wants to be disruptive and engage with classical antiquity as he pleases and deems appropriate. Transferring the Classics into distinctly Caribbean twenty-first century contexts, combining them with other cultural influences and making use of them in an ‘unorthodox’, distorting manner is a principal means of contributing to decidedly decolonised Caribbean Classics that are liberated from any imperial connotations or cultural debts in *Limestone*, be they to the British or even Greece and Rome themselves.

All in all, Kellman was doubtless immensely inspired by the Classics in writing *Limestone*, particularly since Graeco-Roman civilisations and the epic genre offer a number of cultural and geographic points of contact to Caribbean culture while also providing compensating material for the lack of “evident lost civilization” in the Caribbean.
On the one hand, engaging with the Classics in *Limestone* is an attempt to generate new cultural configurations and bring new original insights to bear on the literature of his island – an otherwise difficult task for Caribbean New Generation writers, as demonstrated at the beginning of this analysis (“Revisionary Interior Image” 101). On the other hand, Kellman’s free dealing with and transfer of the Classics into a Caribbean literary context is a manner of rejecting mediating cultural influences on the Caribbean and his own literature. Consequently, Kellman’s engagement with classical antiquity is anti-imperialist and a “vehicle for liberation” in a double sense.
Kwame Dawes and John Kinsella: *Tangling with the Epic* (2019)

The Ghanaian-born, Jamaican-raised author Kwame Dawes is one of the most published and most award-decorated contemporary Caribbean writers. He is well-known in the West Indies and beyond for his literary works, which comprise numerous poetry collections, works of fiction (e.g. the novel *Bivouac*) and non-fiction (e.g. *A Far Cry from Plymouth Rock*) as well as editions of a number of anthologies on postcolonial literature. Moreover, he gained international recognition for his award-winning projects reporting on and raising awareness for people living with HIV/AIDS in Jamaica and Haiti.

Kwame Dawes’ artistic oeuvre and public appearances are oftentimes marked by a focus on epic and particularly postcolonial explorations of the genre and its significance for the self-identification of formerly colonised peoples. Since the poet, who lives in the USA, is widely recognised as one of the Caribbean’s leading writers, it is therefore logical and, at the same time, essential for this project to study one of Dawes’ most recent epic volumes of poetry, *Tangling with the Epic*, in order to establish the status of epic poetry in the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean.

In their 2019 poem-dialogue *Tangling with the Epic* – the third in a quartet – Jamaican author Kwame Dawes and Australian writer John Kinsella set out to “thoroughly deconstruct and recompose ideas about the epic” and indeed, “[v]arious epics of empire, past and present are sternly demolished” in the work, as the blurb announces. The book consists of 110 short poems written in dialogue, alternating between 55 by Dawes and 55 by Kinsella. *Tangling with the Epic* explores autobiographical notions, themes such as slavery, European colonialism or modern US imperialism in the Caribbean and responds to Caribbean and US-American current-day politics, news and culture including Donald Trump’s presidency, figures such as Omarosa Manigault Newman or the murder of two children by their 22-year-old brother Malik Murphy in the US in 2017.

For the purpose of this analysis of *Tangling with the Epic*, Australian poet John Kinsella’s poems in the dialogue will be given less attention and only considered where Dawes is directly responding to them; the focus will be on the (even-numbered) poems by

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75 Dawes’ other works that are hugely inspired by epic include not only the above mentioned poem-dialogues but also *Prophets* (1995), one of the best-known long poems in the canon of Caribbean poetry, or *Jacko Jacobus* (1996). Furthermore, Dawes’ many contributions to cultural events, e.g. his discussion of epic at Poets House New York in 2019, and scholarly publications, e.g. *Bearden’s Odyssey: Poetry Responding to the Art of Romare Bearden* (2017; with Matthew Shenoda) underline the centrality of epic for Dawes’ artistic, theoretical and educational work.

Kwame Dawes. Given the scope of my research project, this distinction seems justified. Moreover, I will adhere to the by now established structure of this chapter by treating the work’s form and content separately in order to be able to effectively relate my analysis of *Tangling with the Epic* to previous findings.

*Transformations of Classical Antiquity: Form*

*Tangling with the Epic* consists of 110 poems, each comprising a single or double Spenserian stanza and all written from a first-person point of view. The Spenserian stanza was introduced by the eponymous British poet Edmund Spenser in his epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, published at the end of the sixteenth century and itself hugely inspired by the *Aeneid* and its Renaissance reception. In nineteenth-century Britain, the Spenserian stanza entered a period of great popularity with poets such as Burns, Wordsworth or Tennyson making use of the form.

Dawes follows this British literary model closely throughout his poems in *Tangling with the Epic*, composing stanzas which count eight iambic pentameter lines and a final alexandrine. At times, he breaks the metre – particularly the alexandrine is sometimes shortened to an iambic pentameter. Moreover, Dawes does not always adhere to the ABABBCBCC rhyme scheme typical of Spenserian stanzas: most of his poems in *Tangling with the Epic* only follow it loosely and frequently feature slant rhymes, with a few exceptions such as poem 46:

> There are metaphors for this. All inept, for I make them, and I approximate truth. I can smell it but that's all. I've slept without rest these long nights. I live and wait for a thawing of this freeze. The spate of skirmishes always ends with silence and the winter is gathering. It's late, I hear you snore, a soft insouciance, and search for words, for a lyric to mend offence. (54)

Overall, the British epic model is, however, instantly recognisable and adhered to in all of Dawes’ poems. The biggest departure from the form of the Spenserian stanza consists in the four opening lines of poem 20, a reference to Bob Marley and the Wailers’ song “Crisis”: “So much has been said,/so little been done,/they killing the people,/and having their fun…” (28).

This consequently very marked and prominent divergence from the formal model of Dawes and Kinsella’s volume of poetry points to one of the central characteristics of
postcolonial epic according to Kwame Dawes: it is by design referential and intertextual (Epic Voices: Prophets). In addition to the quotation from Marley’s reggae song, the poem-dialogue’s title *Tangling with the Epic* alludes to the referential nature of the genre, which constantly tangles with other texts, themes, genres. Similarly, the mentions of cultural texts – in a broad, Derridan sense of the word – such as the 2017 crime drama *Detroit* (110) or references to the prophet Moses and the author of the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch (12) provide further evidence of the intertextual nature of *Tangling with the Epic* and postcolonial epic more generally:

Oh it’s true, the nation feeds on the words, 
child-sized as tantrums, of the old monarch.
He has decreed himself grammar’s new Lord, 
greater than Moses, more vital than Plutarch,
They’ve been chiselled as runes on the Marble Arch, 
sky-written perpetual from dawn to dusk.
And now they marshal our soldiers to march 
to war, his words humming in their pockets:
‘Remember this: Flux is culture, culture is flux.’ (poem 4, 12)

Moreover, Dawes’ poems abound with references to US or Caribbean politics and other news stories, such as Malik Murphy’s murder of his two younger siblings in 2017 (72) or the various interactions with the press and TV appearances of Omarosa Manigault Newman, former political aide to Donald Trump (92). This “journalistic temper”, as Okpewho describes it, is a characteristic which Dawes’ Caribbean epic shares with African epic (Okpewho *Epic in Africa* 71), yet also with politically charged Roman epic:

*For Omarosé Onée Manigault-Newman*
If then all our lives were summed up by joy, 
or more crudely *au courant*, happiness, 
the sojourner, abandoned by god, a toy 
even for godly diversions, a mess 
of shadows, carping and alleged madness, 
might learn to capitalize on telling 
her story to the press, to the highest 
bidder, and so, swimming in dough, she’ll sing 
for joy, then dance and hope to die before morning. (poem 84, 92)

Similarly, Dawes’ poems display a high level of generic awareness, comprising a number of acknowledgements of the literary forms of elegy and epic (86) as well as myth (68) – all of which were of great significance in Graeco-Roman antiquity. Interestingly, Kellman’s epic poem *Limestone* includes references to exactly the same genres, as I illustrated in the previous section. Dawes writes:

‘Words, they are stones in the water running away.’ Today a gift: June Jordan’s voice

88
forty years on, light and heavy, singing
about the twisted path through the bright noise
of our world that these words must take, the choice
of loving the unloved, the art of breaking
apart the grand elegy, the epic
of the ruined earth, the quiet rupturing
of daily loves. Blessed be the stones running. (poem 78, 86)

and

I have been collecting stories, my myths
of joy, well-organized to bring me peace;
a kind of nonchalance. Let’s call them truths,
but this is unimportant. The release
that a well-told tale brings, that is the ease
I desire most. And to keep this up
I keep vigil over my dreams, conceal
myself from each day’s doze of putrid slop
they call the news: the tantrums of Great Chief Messed Up. (poem 60, 68)

Nonetheless, apart from these generic allusions, there are few explicit references to Graeco-Roman epic on the level of form in *Tangling with the Epic*.

Beyond highlighting the intertextual quality of the epic genre, the above quoted reference to reggae, the most influential musical form in the Caribbean, yields further insights into Kwame Dawes’ conception of epic in a postcolonial context. Kwame Dawes frequently uses reggae lyrics as primary literary models for his (epic) writings and the Caribbean author’s oeuvre is greatly influenced by reggae, as not only his books *Natural Mysticism: Towards a New Reggae Aesthetic* and his 2002 study of the lyrics of Bob Marley, *Bob Marley: Lyrical Genius* but also multiple references to the musical genre throughout his works of fiction and poetry illustrate, and *Tangling with the Epic* is no exception (Ross passim and esp. 117f.).

Reggae has gained and preserved its central cultural status in the West Indies since it speaks directly to the islands’ history – be it cultural, political or economic – and encompasses a quest for an identity that is at the heart of Caribbean culture as one of its central themes. Mulvaney asserts that reggae has “functioned as [a] form of resistance against neocolonial oppression and […] reveal[s] much about Jamaica’s cultural and psychological history, [it] affirm[s] the African-Jamaican heritage of resistance to oppression [and is an] important illustration of the various freedom struggles occurring among African peoples around the world” (ix). Regarding the importance of reggae for Dawes and his writings, Hitchcock observes, “[f]or Dawes, reggae represents a deeply-felt cultural experience” and “provides an expressive aesthetics, in music, in poetry, in
fiction, and indeed in cultural criticism, that exists as a moving or mobile archive of the possible in Caribbean identity” (174).

The allusion to reggae in poem 20 is therefore not coincidental or arbitrary but highlights an important parallel between Graeco-Roman epic and reggae: their shared central themes of history and identity. Both categories – an exploration of history and a quest for and building of identity – not only constitute the essence of reggae but of epic in both classical antiquity and postcolonial times, as I have demonstrated above. Moreover, history and identity are themes that lie at the heart of Caribbean culture.

Both reggae and epic resonate with Kwame Dawes’ personal diasporic postcolonial history – geographically moving between Ghana (his country of birth), Jamaica (where he grew up), Canada and the USA. Likewise, reggae and epic resonate with the diasporic postcolonial past and present of the Caribbean, the culture of which is shaped by two opposing notions: on the one hand, the displacement of African people and the Middle Passage and, on the other hand and in response to the former, Rastafarian and Pan-African ideologies of a return to Africa. As a result, both the musical and the literary genre take up such pivotal spaces in Caribbean culture.

Kellman’s epic poem of Barbados Limestone is dominated by explorations of history, of the island as well as of individuals, and questions concerning Barbadians’ (postcolonial) identity. Similarly, the epic notions of history and identity run

77 Kwame Dawes’ family history illustrates the displacement, uprooting and diasporic motions of African people in the aftermath of European colonialism and Atlantic triangular trade. Kwame Dawes’ grandfather, son of a Jamaican free villager, and his grandmother had moved from Jamaica to Nigeria at the beginning of the twentieth century as part of an effort by the British colonial government to build a civil service in the West African colonies, based on the (clearly simplistic and highly problematic) rationale that Black people from the Caribbean, who (to the British) looked like West Africans and shared the same culture but had been colonised for longer and were therefore already more assimilated to English customs, culture and administration than people in West Africa, would be perfectly suited to represent the English and be missionaries there. Dawes’ grandfather’s motivation to move from Jamaica to Nigeria, however, mainly consisted in him being a Garveyite and, thus, a believer in a spiritual and physical return to Africa. In 1926, Dawes’ father Neville Dawes was born in Nigeria, before his parents moved back to Jamaica with him and his siblings in 1927/28 leaving Dawes’ father to feel Nigerian and Jamaican while having to undergo a British colonial education. After having attended Oxford University, Dawes’ father moved back from England to Jamaica, where he taught at a high school, and eventually returned to West Africa in 1956, where he would take up posts at various universities in Ghana. In 1971, Neville Dawes, his Ghanaian wife and their Ghanaian-born son Kwame, who was nine years old at the time, returned to Jamaica (Epic Voices: Prophets).

78 Note also Dawes’ reference to Addis Ababa, site of the second All-African Peoples’ conference in 1960 and seat of the African Union Commission, in poem 106: “And in time I long for ancient cities/with crumbling cathedrals, their uneven/stone courtyards festooned with bright yellow leaves/where the faithful pray in amber evenings,/the weakening light staining their white garments,/a kind of holy baptism of grace./Addis Ababa in early September,/me circling with a sinner’s slow pace/in the outer shadows, my throat frothing with praise” (114).
through Kwame Dawes’ epic work *Tangling with the Epic* like a common thread and are given emphasis thanks to reggae references such as in poem 20, or poem 72:

I’m changing landscapes as if on campaign, like shrewdly modest nineteenth century pols – ‘Going to see a son in Champagne’, ‘Hurrying to the side of Aunt Betty in Lincoln’, showing a face of flinty resolve to the mobs hungry for a bit of policy or a stone hurled at foes. In my head is all history, the slow drift of a stubborn nation so unwilling to shift away from its ancient sins. ‘Forget’ is the answer, despite Bob Marley or Spear wailing ‘Remember!’ It is more than bliss this oblivion, it is the fog we wear to keep going without collapsing in tears. But as I travel I poison my soul with the harsh truths of all those bitter wars, the copious debts that our forefathers owe to the Africans who still, deep in their blood, know. (80)

At the *Epic Voices* discussion series at Poets House New York, Dawes explicitly discussed the importance of history as well as an understanding of self and quest for personal and national identity as defining categories for his writing and particularly his engagement with the epic genre:

The epic impulse therefore is to have seen the construction of a nation’s identity written in words and expressed […]. ‘White man’ [reference to Naipaul’s *Miguel Street*] has written their history, has written their narrative of self, has created an aesthetic of identity and place through various machinations. It becomes a thing and that thing says, ‘This is who we are.’ And now I, the poor colonial, am reading that and saying, ‘Who am I in that narrative? Where do I exist in that narrative? That epic impulse is an articulation of origin, is an articulation of reach to try and define the self as coming from somewhere and being shaped by something and having to define an identity as being constructed around something that has historical veracity, historical roots, and therefore it gives it its authority. […] The point I’m making is: if you construct a narrative of identity in an epic tradition that is solidly expressed, the people who read and follow that tradition or hear it will buy it. It will become an understanding of self, an identity. It is pernicious in that sense but it sticks. […] One of the great challenges of the postcolonial was to ask the question ‘What is this nation? What is this self that is resisting the coloniser? Does it have any value? Does it have a history? Does it have any spiritual efficacy? Does it have any roots? Does it have any stories of its origin and its beginning?’ […] The only way to find this is in the narratives that are being carried forward and those narratives are epic in scope. […] The epic narrative is a collection of the stories of a people that via collecting, they then begin to present a story of a people and then allow a people to understand themselves in a certain way or value
themselves. [...] Identifying a poetics that comes out of one’s own culture [...] [and] tracing all allusions [...], all referential elements that are not easily available to people but that shape a work [...] that to me is the nature and identity of that epic impulse. (Epic Voices: Prophets)

Thus, according to Dawes, epic is a means to generate an identity of a postcolonial people that can be offered to this people in order to create a communal sense of identity and belonging and, in consequence, establish a certain new level of self-worth among its members which had previously been denied to them (cf. Fanon’s ‘inferiority complex’, which I referred to in the introduction). Dawes emphasises the exploratory nature of epic, its being rooted in the tracing back and collecting of origin, of influences, of cultural elements, of a poetics and of stories of a people which all made this people what it is. The Jamaican author understands the genre as being concerned with and the medium for the search of a postcolonial people (and/or individual) for a place of belonging, both physical and spiritual. As I pointed out previously, this notion of a quest for a rightful home that is also associated with travel is typical of and adopted from classical epic. However, more so than Graeco-Roman works, postcolonial epics need to be read as attempts to claim spaces in the global cultural and literary canons that have been dominated by White people and their tales of origin and identity, as Dawes’ quote makes very clear.

In addition, Dawes’ remarks not only highlight the referential quality of epic but also point to the fact that epic’s most distinctive feature according to the Jamaican, its intertextuality, is two-fold: it needs to be understood as both generic (texts that are ‘epic’ with regard to established genre conventions) and thematic (texts that are ‘epic’ in scope) (Genette L’Architexte 25ff.), with the latter being of superior importance for postcolonial epic. There is, of course, contact and overlap between the two. However, it is crucial for an understanding of postcolonial epic to note that just like Walcott, Glissant and Kellman, Dawes too adopts the distinction between epic form and epic content that has been made since Graeco-Roman antiquity (“It has become clear to me over the years that my writing is driven as much by thematic concerns as it is by formal preoccupations”, Dawes in Ede). In accordance with classical genre definitions as well as twentieth- and twenty-first century conceptions of epic, Dawes too gives priority to aspects of content over form. Kwame Dawes and John Kinsella’s joint poetry project is certainly epic in form since it comprises four books – Speak From Here to There (2016), A New Beginning (2018), Tangling with the Epic (2019) and In the Name of Our Families (2020) – and the Spenserian stanza. However, it is more importantly epic in scope since it addresses various socio-political themes, as I will elaborate on in the next section.
In conclusion, apart from the distinction of form and content and *Tangling with the Epic*’s intertextuality, including its references to classical genres such as epic and elegy or classical authors including Plutarch, the work does not count a great number of references to classical antiquity and epic on the level of form. Furthermore, said intertextual references to ancient literary works serve a very specific purpose in postcolonial literature, according to Dawes. Classical references offer Caribbean writers access to dominant literary canons and a means of gaining international recognition since they build bridges of understanding to Western audiences that are oftentimes ignorant of non-European forms of literature. Dawes gives the example of Western people praising Walcott for his epic poem *Omeros* since its parallels to Homeric epic make the text accessible to them (*Epic Voices: Prophets*). In short, Dawes claims that Western audiences know Homer and therefore, they get Walcott’s text. In that respect, classical references, despite being a means of liberation from imperial influences, can be problematic if they are misunderstood by Western readers as acknowledgments, rather than challenges of existing White supremacist cultural canons so that “even in the act of undermining the colonial enterprise [i.e. in the act of exploring one’s own history and identity through the genre of epic], you [the postcolonial Caribbean writer] get credit for it. The wrong kind of credit. It’s a mess” (Dawes ibid.).

For the same reason, references to British epic in Caribbean postcolonial epic works, attempting to reclaim their peoples’ history and identity and escape the aftermath of British colonialism, are controversial since they arguably make texts accessible to a greater audience, yet counteract the decolonising efforts of postcolonial epic since they appear to reinforce authorisation and canonisation of British cultural goods. Dawes and Kinsella’s choice of the Spenserian stanza for their poem-dialogue *Tangling with the Epic* is one such example. Just like in the case of Kellman’s reception of the British epic tradition in *Limestone*, however, it is likely attributable to the ‘second-hand’ colonial education Dawes received growing up in post-independence Ghana and Jamaica, which would have introduced the author to *The Faerie Queene* (or other British literary works inspired by Graeco-Roman epic such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* or Tennyson’s *Ulysses*,


two references that Dawes names in his Epic Voices talk) and shaped his conception of the epic genre.\textsuperscript{79}

Moreover, since there are no other allusions to British epic on the level of form in Tangling with the Epic, the use of the Spenserian stanza is a perfect example of the transformation process of disjunction (Bergemann et al. 49): content of the receiving culture, the Caribbean, is dressed in a form that is inherent to the culture of reference – in this case, due to chains of transformation, not classical antiquity but British culture. This transformation process results in the Spenserian stanza being largely disjoined from its cultural associations and invested with a distinctly Caribbean, postcolonial and anti-imperialist significance. Thus, while references to classical or British epic in postcolonial Caribbean epic serve the purpose of opening texts up to a wider audience, it is possible for West Indian authors like Kellman or Dawes to do so in a very selective, isolated manner and while still distancing themselves from the colonisers’ culture and challenging Western canons.

Therefore, another reason for the usage of the Spenserian stanza by Dawes and Kinsella seems plausible. In his epic poem The Faerie Queene, which was never finished, Spenser sets out to explore twelve different moral virtues, each represented by a knight. Given the political issues, both historical and contemporary, that Dawes and Kinsella examine in their epic work, the impression arises that the postcolonial authors chose the Spenserian stanza in order to starkly contrast the associations it carries, the virtues of politically influential men, with the contents discussed in Tangling with the Epic, such as Donald Trump’s presidency in the USA. Thus, the choice of the Spenserian stanza can be interpreted as amplifying the critique of the former American president’s political

\textsuperscript{79} “No historical look at Caribbean writing can be done without a look at Caribbean education and literally what I learnt in school. By that I mean, even though I was born on the cusp of independence [...] there’s a sense in which I am in that Midnight’s Children [sc. by Salman Rushdie] space where you’re sort of working through the idea of a past that has a certain kind of character and certain identity, that’s a colonial past. And then the postcolonial past and present, which is working out its identity in itself... And education is fundamental to that understanding; the schooling. Because one of the great enterprises of the colonial efforts of the British, certainly in the more heathen places, was to bring the principles of the British education to bear on those cultures [...] in a number of ways. Of course, the ‘altruistic’ vision was that they would make them better people because they would be like the English – [...] the epitome of good people, valuable people. It will not make them English but it will make them close enough for functioning purposes. [...] But it would instil in them the ascendancy of the British [...] This is more important because this is a remarkable exercise in instilling inferiority, insecurity and an aspiration towards something that is consistently and doggedly unreachable. [...] And in a sense, that aspiration is very important because it is not always manifested in pernicious and ugly ways: because if you are taught Shakespeare and, like Caliban, you kind of like it, then you have a problem. [...] You’re faced with the problem of not ever being able to be Shakespeare, not because he’s bright but because he’s English and white.” (Epic Voices: Prophets)
The truth is, John, lately I’ve been tracing the curious history of this republic, sure that deep in its DNA is lurking a carefully buried clue, a relic that just might explain the reign of this sick despot. All I have found is human folly, the canker of old hubris, the politics eating away at our bodies each day; then carnage, then death, then just maybe, brand new days! (poem 18, 26)

Before the eclipse, the morning darkens, bright red lights warn us in the soft fall rain, while Trump perfects his bigotry, sullen monstrosity that he is. His soft brain will fester wounds. The republic will strain to recover itself, nothing new there, it’s been done before, though not like this reign of buffoonery and evil. A sombre mood settles. I smell revolution in the air. (poem 24, 32)

In contrast to the small number of references to classical and British epic in *Tangling with the Epic*, the work is notably strongly influenced by African and Caribbean epic elements. Like Anthony Kellman in *Limestone*, Dawes and Kinsella fuse classical and British elements with characteristics of African epic on the level of form, thus generating processes of hybridisation (Bergemann et al. 50), of creolisation. Most remarkably, *Tangling with the Epic* is characterised by orature features reminiscent of African epic and its focus on performance. Particularly the work’s dialogue form is inspired by the interaction between the bard and his accompanist and/or the audience that is essential to African performances of epic (Okpewho *Epic in Africa* 220–226).

Another crucial feature of African performances of heroic tales that Dawes adopted for his engagement with epic is music. As Okpewho observes:

In Africa at least, then, we cannot easily accept the claim that ‘the tale’s the thing’ if we give due consideration to the role of music in an oral performance. The traditional bard is to a large extent a music man (and one should here distinguish the ‘traditional’ context from the recording studio); side by side with his responsibility to keep faith with words is his desire to deliver a good musical performance. (ibid. 59; cf. 57–66)

I have previously shown that Dawes’ epic poetry is tremendously influenced by the musical genre reggae and that *Tangling with the Epic* is no exception. Likewise, as I pointed out above, one of the most characteristic features of Kellman’s epic poem
Limestone are the tuk rhythms, which give the work its unique form. Musicality, and especially the use of native Caribbean music genres, is one of the central defining characteristics of Caribbean epic in the twenty-first century. While music and epic were already inseparably connected in Graeco-Roman antiquity (Melidis passim and esp. 201), music has come to be an essential element of contemporary Caribbean epic, not least since musicality and performance have traditionally taken centre stage in Caribbean culture.\textsuperscript{80}

To a lesser degree, twentieth-century Caribbean epic works by the big literary voices from the West Indies were influenced by music and inspired the form of later Caribbean epic poetry, as Dawes confirms: “[Brathwaite’s The Arrivants] has been a tremendous influence on me, pushing me to think comfortably about the book length poem of epic scope and work that is rooted in musicality, above everything else” (Dawes in Ross 117). In the twenty-first century however, music is fundamental to the nature of Anglophone Caribbean epic, as Limestone and Tangling with the Epic as well as Kellman’s and Dawes renditions of their epic poems illustrate. As I stated above, these processes of hybridisation – of creolisation of both Graeco-Roman and Afro-Caribbean elements as well as of different cultural forms, poetry and music, – are to a great extent owed to the fact that indigenous musical genres like reggae and tuk share the epic genre’s principal topoi of history and identity and are thus easily and perfectly incorporated into epic works of literature. Conversely, reggae and tuk references in Caribbean epic poetry of the twenty-first century give emphasis to the themes constituting the epic impulse, history and identity, on the level of form.

Transformations of Classical Antiquity: Content

“The epic impulse […] has had a fascinating history, particularly in the context of the Caribbean and in the context of postcolonial cultures, postcolonial literary cultures. In many ways you can’t speak of the epic as a form separate from its use and function in a culture”, Kwame Dawes remarked in the 2007 interview “In the Cradle of History” with Amatoritsero Ede. It is thus hardly surprising that history, politics and their implications on the intersection of African and Western poetic traditions, govern Kwame Dawes’ poems in Tangling with the Epic.

\textsuperscript{80} Cf. NourbeSe on the Caribbean as a performative culture above, 54ff. Just like Kellman, Dawes has incorporated music into or performed, alone or with other artists, many of his literary works, such as Requiem (1996), The Brimming (2006) or Wisteria: Twilight Songs from the Swamp Country (2006).
As I have shown above, history is an essential theme in postcolonial Caribbean epic, including Dawes’ and Kellman’s, since it is a vehicle for the building of a people’s myths and thus, a communal identity. Similar to Kellman, Dawes’ poetry is particularly sensitive to the struggles of African diasporic history: slavery, the Middle Passage and the modern diaspora are central notions. The epic, to Dawes, constitutes a means of articulating his transatlantic consciousness and this can be sensed throughout *Tangling with the Epic*:

Believe me, it is not anger that I feel, not anymore. The fracas of flung stones, the bleeding lips, the spin, and twirl, and wheel of our fighting, the torn shirts and sore bones, not forgotten but insignificant now. I stand alone and reflect the why. I lost. The bully is laughing. I plan quietly, our sad tomorrows. I try for something more certain, sans humanité. (poem 50, 58, italics in original)

As can be seen from this poem and several others in *Tangling with the Epic*, just like Kellman’s epic poem of Barbados *Limestone*, Dawes’ epic also revolves around the question which achievements and benefits the past struggles of African communities around the globe have yielded. The closing poem highlights this as well as Dawes’ conception of epic as a quest for identity through the tracing back of one’s history perfectly (and rounds off the work’s circular composition, similar to that of *Limestone*):

For this season we’ve worn the constraints of syllable and rhyme, testing if freedom is made from enslavement (that old refrain, the story of the sacrificial moans of black bodies), and I confess these songs have been hard won, and perhaps beauty has no other birth but through the strong contractions of art, our bliss and fury necessary labour for clamorous liberty. (poem 110, 118)

Dawes’ exploration of the African diaspora in *Tangling with the Epic* is often not locatable or specific to the Caribbean (58, 100, 118). Interestingly, if the subject matter discussed in Dawes’ poems is allocatable to a specific geographic region, it is in many cases to the African diasporic past and present actuality in the US, such as in poem 18 (above), poem 74 or the following two poems, which discuss slavery and current-day White supremacist groupings targeting African Americans in the US. The focus on US politics and history in Dawes’ poetry is certainly partly attributable to the fact that, like Kellman, Dawes divides his time between the US and the Caribbean:
If they say it enough, we will believe
all myths, like the one of old Jefferson’s
aristocracy – his noblesse oblige.
How slaves became his servants and sons,
how chattel became his road companions,
how Kwame embraced the new name ‘Big Jove’
baptized by Enlightenment’s fictions;
so let’s call a spade a spade at his grave
and this way remember the thousand he enslaved. (poem 10, 18)

and

A disquiet settles in my blood,
a slight vertigo before the nausea
that lasts despite the snow-burnished light. God
returns as do most rituals I measure
my joys with.
In truth, I find no pleasure
in history, and it is all I consume
these days: the nineteenth century, mass murder,
the ku Klux Klan, black bodies broken, gloom
doom and pernicious injustice for years to come. (poem 88, 96)

What is specifically Caribbean about Dawes’ epic poems, however, is the notion of
epic as stories of death and defeat – as identified and established by authors of
Caribbean epic of the twentieth century such as Brathwaite, Glissant or Walcott – that
looms over the entire work:

Off the coast, what is left is a rusting
ship, abandoned there, something beautiful,
though the seeping oil has long been pouring
its dark ribbons out to the rock and pull
of an ocean on which, marooned, we starve
for beauty, we who love the wild turmoil
of the burnished gold that sets off the craft’s
austere elegance. We leave dark tales
behind, the legends of how we constantly fail. (poem 2, 10)

Thus, as could already be seen with Kellman’s Limestone, contemporary postcolonial
Caribbean epic without a thorough examination of the past and present, of the hardships
of the African diaspora is inconceivable.

Since explorations of the African diasporic history – of transatlantic slave trade and
its implications to this day – inevitably involve a study of power dynamics, postcolonial
Caribbean epic of the twenty-first century is consequently also necessarily fundamentally
political, as the previously quoted poems illustrate. However, this political character of
contemporary Caribbean epic that can be traced back to Roman and African epic is not
limited to issues directly relating to the Middle Passage, colonialism and a modern
transatlantic consciousness in *Tangling with the Epic*. As I mentioned above, Trump and other US American sociopolitical issues hover over *Tangling with the Epic*, even though there is of course some overlap between the two. All in all, the chivalry and virtuous exempla of *The Faerie Queene*, the poem which lent its form to Dawes’ and Kinsella’s joint volume of poetry, are replaced with critical voices of moral and political authority in Dawes’ poems.

This impression is confirmed by Kwame Dawes himself, who describes the postcolonial epic “as a quest for a narrative of identity that is political in its articulation” (*Epic Voices: Prophets*). He states:

We [Caribbean writers] construct our postcolonial narratives by the construction of a new kind of epic sensibility. [...] There is an upside to the troubles of this imposed narrative of the colonial enterprise: the upside is the quest for a self, the quest for a language, the quest for another history that is not the history that has been passed on by the victors. [This] has generated artists who have found in that quest the need for the fundamental innovations, the fundamental imaginative leaps, the fundamental explorations with form and style and imagination to create new works that are powerful and that are valuable and that are transformative. (ibid.)

What Glissant and Walcott suggested in their theoretical discussions of epic holds true for Caribbean epic of the twenty-first century: contemporary postcolonial Caribbean epic is evidently historical, political and, ultimately, a creative way of enabling the recognition of differences of Caribbean people by Western readers – what Bhabha calls ‘negation’ (8f., 81, 228) and Glissant calls ‘opacity’ (*Poetics of Relation* 28–38, 189–208). Owing to transformation processes of creative destruction, disjunction and hybridisation at work in them, twenty-first century Caribbean epic works like *Limestone* or *Tangling with the Epic* offer resistance to the menacing universalising, stereotyping force of Western humanist reader- and scholarship that reduces everything to the same. Moreover, due to it being distinctly political and distinctly different from classical, British or African forms of epic, modern Caribbean epic generates cultural boundaries, which according to Glissant and Bhabha create that crucial separation between cultures from which postcolonial cultural forms begin their presencing. Thus, as Dawes’ remark suggests, postcolonial Caribbean epic of the twenty-first century – though inspired by dominant, colonising cultures such as the Graeco-Roman or the British – uses forms borrowed from these cultures to create unique independent literary works and to create identities which liberate postcolonial subjects from fixations of imperialism, race, cultural dominance and recalibrate canons. When Dawes speaks of the epic as not being separable from its use and function in postcolonial cultures, this is the core function of epic in the twenty-first
century Caribbean that he is referring to, as both *Limestone* and *Tangling with the Epic* illustrate.

In addition to the use of Caribbean musical forms and its fundamentally political character, the third major characteristic that defines and sets twenty-first century postcolonial Caribbean epic apart from other epic forms – thus, rendering it a means of opacity and negation – are lengthy evocations of West Indian scenery, wildlife and the sea. As I observed with *Limestone*, Kellman’s writing is inspired by as well as accurately and excitedly records the peculiarities and beauty of the Antillean archipelago, its fauna and flora. Likewise, Dawes’ engagement with the epic is influenced by this very Caribbean trait of literature that already shaped writings by Walcott, Brathwaite, Glissant, Naipaul and other West Indian writers of the twentieth century. The Jamaican author states:

> When I was writing another long poem, *Prophets* [sc. another epic poem by Dawes], I was likely influenced by Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, not so much by its metric patterns and rhyme, but for the way that the three-line stanza seemed to lend itself to stretches of narrative verse that were as much interested in the capturing of landscape as in creating the cadence of an epic tone and manner. (Dawes in Ede)

In truly postcolonial Caribbean epic fashion, Dawes embeds his political and moral criticism into the cadence of epic form and into detailed descriptions and evocations of Caribbean geography, nature and the sea in *Tangling with the Epic*, evoking pastoral notions (note parallels to *Limestone*’s references to the pastoral):

> There is then, the medication of words, the distraction of a voice’s mumbling while this body trundles through the hordes of the city. Say, good day, nod, stumbling in the choke-hold of heat, quietly plotting escape from the smug righteousness of this agrarian myth. ‘Salt of the earth!’ they sing, husbanding order and stable whiteness. Look, there’s the path to the sea, to our native bliss. (poem 14, 22)

and

> Returned to the sallow dank Pacific with its sneaker waves, improbable rainbows and winters of cold morbid music that preserves dreams. Here the things I know seem fit for mountain tops, where grey stone glows the end of history. I imagine Nordic trails where cold purifies light, where sea mutters deep blue towards the last black of beginnings. My boots fall softly down, crick, crack. (poem 90, 98)
Conclusion

It has been shown that postcolonial Caribbean epic of the twenty-first century is, due to its explorative, identity-generating nature, highly referential and assimilates and appropriates form and content of dominant epic traditions, the Graeco-Roman and the British, as well as African and earlier Caribbean epic. It does, however, also destruct, invert, neglect, recombine epic models as well as fusing them with existing Caribbean cultural forms, be they musical or literary. Thus, it gives rise to a new creolised, distinctly contemporary and Caribbean epic form that is predominantly shaped by such formal aspects as its musicality and performativity, its focus on landscape descriptions or its circular character and content-related aspects including its political and historical character, which explores stories of displacement and belonging, generating a sense of communal identities and self-esteem for the African diaspora.

This analysis has established that in the twenty-first century, classical epic continues to be detectable as a productive literary model in postcolonial Caribbean epic. Examining the three dimensions of transformation processes at work in *Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados* and *Tangling with the Epic*, there is certainly a degree of inclusion, conservation and identification with classical antiquity in the modern Caribbean: adoption of the ancient epic ideal of content over form, references to Graeco-Roman literary genres and works, the embracement of the social character of Roman epic, to give but a few examples. For the most part, these appropriations of Greece and Rome serve the purpose of cancelling out and neutralising the effects of British colonialism on the Caribbean and are facilitated by geographical parallels between the Mediterranean and Antillean archipelagoes.

At the same time, postcolonial Caribbean epic of the twenty-first century can – as stated above – principally be defined as performatively and musically rooted in the Caribbean, fundamentally political and featuring typically West Indian literary features such as evocations of local landscape and wildlife. It can be seen that compared to classical epic, there are significant levels of innovation, distancing and exclusion or, at least, hybridisation, disjunction and reconfiguration at work. Kellman’s and Dawes’ engagement with classical epic are symptomatic of the confidence of Caribbean New Generation writers, who make use of dominant cultural forms on their own terms and for their own objectives. They overturn power dynamics by appropriating presiding, authoritative forms of epic, be they classical or British, stripping them off their original, imperial associations through creative, transformative engagement and employing them.
to their advantage. References to classical (or British) epic are deliberate endeavours to make postcolonial Caribbean epic accessible to (ignorant) Western audiences and, thus, to demand international recognition, while allowing West Indian authors to do so in a very selective, controlled manner and maintaining cultural independence and authority.

In this way, postcolonial Caribbean dealings with the epic genre shake, upset and undermine formerly existing Eurocentric cultural and literary canons. Postcolonial Caribbean epic works of the twenty-first century as instances of transformation of classical antiquity contribute to a perturbation and recalibration of postcolonial cultural and political power structures.
Chapter 2: Quadruple Displacement? – Classical Reception in Anglophone Postcolonial Caribbean Women Writers of the Twenty-First Century

The postcolonial era in the Caribbean – I am referring to the period since roughly the late 1970s, when most Caribbean states had gained independence – has been marked by a remarkable flourishing of Caribbean women’s writing that ended the era of male domination in Caribbean literature, not only in the Anglophone, but also in the Hispano- and Francophone Caribbean (Cummings/Donnell 5; Alexander 183ff., Davies 59ff.). Thus, it is necessary – and a delight – to explore classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean women writers of the twenty-first century as part of this study. This area of research promises to be largely uncharted and to bring to the surface advanced and original approaches to Caribbean Classics that are, in some respects, excitingly different from those by male Caribbean writers. My exploration is centred around the analysis of two works of female Caribbean prose fiction, Curdella Forbes’ *A Tall History of Sugar* (2019) and Monique Roffey’s *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (2020), which follows some preliminary considerations and formulation of central aspects of interest with regard to classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean women’s writing.

As I have highlighted previously, it would be misleading and reductive to assume that there is a single Caribbean colonial experience or, therefore, a single Caribbean literature. The same is true and needs to be emphasised with regard to Caribbean women writers of the twenty-first century: there is no one female Caribbean literature and thus, no single female literary approach to the Classics that can be analysed (Benítez-Rojo 85; Alexander 190). The (Anglophone) Caribbean is a place of tremendous cultural, ethnic, linguistic and historical diversity that encompasses a plethora of intersecting factors throughout all spheres and strata of society. Gillespie describes these factors – which are relevant throughout the Caribbean – in *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* with the help of an analogy to Farley Hill, a hill in Barbados overlooking the Atlantic coast that was once the site of a beautiful mansion:

Farley Hill [in Barbados] [...] metaphorizes the complex multivalent identities, histories, and ideological struggles that create the fluid dynamics of Bajan (Barbadian) cultures and inform the island’s historical and contemporary interactions with the rest of the world. Farley Hill is emblematic of many of the questions, and crossroads that suffuse the porous and interactive ideological terrains of the island: the displacements and losses of colonialism and slavery; the realities of diasporic
homelessness and the search for home; the struggle for identity, agency, and autonomy; the determinative impacts of geography; the complexities of nationalism and neocolonialism, the power of naming; the desire for acquisition of voice, agency, and subjectivity; the ambiguities of postcolonialism and tourism; the crises of representation; and the gaze of the others. (37)

This reality Gillespie depicts and the resulting crisis of representation are especially drastic for Caribbean women (writers). One of the best known, most influential female writers of Caribbean origin, Marlene NourbeSe Philip, defines this actuality of Caribbean women as ‘multiple displacement’, a concept that becomes relevant with regard to classical reception in Caribbean women writers.

I will pay particular attention to NourbeSe’s essays in A Genealogy of Resistance in this chapter as they “distil” thoughts from her previous writings (Forbes This Space 107) and combine them with new ideas, providing not only a framework for her own writing but a useful framework for reading female Black Atlantic writers more generally. NourbeSe is tremendously relevant to this study as her contributions to Caribbean thought and literature are monumental, which is reflected in the great number of scholarly essays discussing her work – among others by Curdella Forbes, one of the authors studied in this chapter – but also in an abundance of references to her writing in contemporary Caribbean poetry, fiction and drama, especially by women writers. NourbeSe was among the first Caribbean women writers to address issues of postcolonialism and feminism in her writing. However, her contributions are not only important from a female (and feminist) perspective, but also resonate with male Caribbean authors, not least since she explicitly alludes to the socio-historical context of the Caribbean archipelago in her works. Nonetheless, they are especially important from a female or feminist perspective as they integrate themselves into a Caribbean literary and philosophical tradition that has been dominated by male voices: Brathwaite, Césaire, Fanon, Glissant, Harris, James, Lamming, Walcott.

In her essay “EARTH AND SOUND: The Place of Poetry” in said collection, NourbeSe reflects:

For the poet the primary and most important relationship is with the word. As important a relationship is that between poet and place, and bonding with place is as essential to the poet’s development as bonding between parent and infant is to the development of humans. That certain location in time and space where historical, social, cultural and geographical forces coalesce and/or collide to produce the individual is how I define place. [...] Without attachment to land, which encompasses more than legal ownership and entails a recognition and acceptance of belonging
first to the land and then to a land, neither identification of a place as I have defined it, nor bonding with place is possible.[…]

Where poets are displaced – lack cultural security – identification of the particular displacement or displacements is often the precursor to the identification of one's place. Displacement – from home, language, culture or race; from the means of production or the product of one's labour; from one's truths or wisdoms; from a belief in one's self and one's potential; from all to which one is truly entitled – has been, and continues to be, effectively accomplished both in ‘Third World’ countries and the Northern metropolises.

For displaced poets the struggle and search is for that place – psychic, psychological, spiritual, economic, geographical, cultural or historical – that is theirs by rightful belonging. […]

As a displaced poet, triply displaced through race, gender and language, and now quadruply through place, finding my 'place' has meant an encounter with history, with time, with memory, and with language and its loss. (57–59)

Firstly, it is worth noting that NourbeSe was born and grew up in Trinidad and Tobago but has spent most of her adult life in Canada, meaning she is an emigrant from the Caribbean. However, it seems deliberately ambiguous whether by quadruple displacement “through place”, NourbeSe is referring to the Middle Passage or modern diasporic movements of Caribbean people to the US, Canada, Europe etc. in this excerpt.

Since the majority of contemporary Caribbean writers reside outside of the Caribbean archipelago – the authors studied in this chapter (Forbes lives in the US, while Roffey resides in London) as well as the previous one (Kellman and Dawes both migrated to the US) and all of those authors who participated in a survey conducted as part of this study bar two (Bishop, Hutchinson, McCallum live in the US; Minott lives in London; only McCaulay is still residing in Jamaica and Sandiford, born and raised in Canada by Barbadian parents, now lives in Barbados) live outside the Caribbean – and are thus themselves migrants, NourbeSe’s observations hold true and are perhaps made all the more relevant due to these biographical parallels, regardless of whether “displacement through place” refers to the consequences of the transatlantic slave trade or modern-day migration.¹

However, taking a closer look at the effects of (modern) migration on Caribbean women’s writing and the Classics is particularly important and fruitful since, as Campt and Thomas argue, “the mobility of masculine subjects as the primary agents of diasporic formation” (2) has often been privileged in scholarship on the Black Atlantic of the last few

¹ Cf. chapter three for a study of the relevance of notions of migration, exile and displacement to Anglophone Caribbean Classics including the mentioned survey.
decades\(^2\), while, as Durán-Almarza points out, “the lives and experiences of women who migrate […] are often rendered silent and invisible” (2), even though statistics prove that numbers of female migrants have consistently grown since the 1960s with women having made up 49 percent of all international migrants in 2000 (Zlotnik).

Secondly, it is noteworthy that NourbeSe’s remarks in the above quoted passage highlight that displacement entails more than physical removal from one’s place or country of origin. Displacement is a lack of a sense of belonging, a lack of “cultural security”, that is partly subjective in that it differs from individual to individual and can be evoked by many different intersecting factors and express itself differently. For Anglophone Caribbean women writers of colour, as NourbeSe explains, this displacement is usually quadruple, relating to aspects of race, gender, language and place. For the study of literature by Caribbean women, and specifically classical references in it, this observation consequently calls for a multifaceted, contrastive approach that is mindful of every author’s individual background. It is therefore a fundamental premise for this chapter that it is impossible to study classical reception in Caribbean women writers – which presupposes a focus on gender – without being attentive to matters of race, colonial domination, class, nationality etc. (Smith 7 and especially footnote 7) and, thus, acknowledging that displacement of women writers may not always be quadruple but more manifold.

Nonetheless, Caribbean women writers are united in their diversity, united (at the most basic level) in their quadruple displacement, and there are certainly detectable common patterns and trends in female Caribbean dealings with classical cultures. Therefore, an examination and systematisation of classical reception in these women writers’ works is not only valid but overdue, on grounds of the above-mentioned surge in Caribbean literature produced by women in the last half century. Moreover, while the new millennium has witnessed an increase in scholarly interest and literary criticism both in the area of Caribbean women’s and feminist literature (Alexander passim) as well as of classical reception in (post-)colonial contexts, hardly any attention has been dedicated to classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean women writers of the twenty-first century.

One way, among others, in which Anglophone Caribbean women writers are united – and differ from their male counterparts – is with regard to the subject matters

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\(^2\) Notable exceptions which paid more attention to the workings of the intersectionality of race, gender and class on literature of the Black Atlantic include, in addition to NourbeSe’s writings, for example Davies’ *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994) and, more recently, Durán-Almarza and Álvarez-López’ *Diasporic Women’s Writing of the Black Atlantic* (2014).
commonly dealt with in their literature. While male Caribbean authors have traditionally principally been concerned with middle-class, bourgeois topics, female Antillean writers tend to tackle “grass roots concerns” and occupy themselves with the stories of “ordinary people”, as Alexander demonstrates (186). Hence, it appears that the hesitancy of female Caribbean writers to employ classical references in their works is to some extent attributable to the elitist, middle-class – and in the Caribbean especially the colonial – character of the Classics, topics which Caribbean women writers do not usually identify with. If this assumption is true, it is however especially exciting to scrutinise with which motives and to which effects the authors studied in this chapter make use of the Classics.

At the same time, it would be too simple to disregard the matter stating that female Caribbean dealings with the Classics are comprehensively divided from those of men on the basis of this orientation towards grass roots vs. bourgeois concerns. On the one hand, it is not at all my intention for this chapter to establish the distinct characteristics of classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean women’s writing in comparison to literature by male Caribbean authors. Rather, I will attempt to treat female Caribbean classical reception and determine its distinguishable features through an analysis of theoretical writing as well as two exemplary novels by female Anglophone Caribbean authors independently, unless of course where it is explicitly influenced by male Caribbean authors. On the other hand, this analysis will make it evident that female Caribbean engagement with the Classics is complex and goes far beyond a concern with grass roots or middle-class concerns; it is my intention to show that there are a plethora of ways in which classical references in Anglophone Caribbean women’s writing of the twenty-first century can or should be read.

One important regard in which female Caribbean writers are united and that shapes their approach to the Classics is their shared experience of having few female Caribbean literary models from colonial times (cf. Davies’ and Fido’s discussion of the concepts of voicelessness and invisibility, 1ff.), let alone female Caribbean literary models that engage with the Classics. Of course, important works from the twentieth century by Caribbean (-descent) women writers that contain classical allusions such as “The Anniad” in Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Annie Allen* (1949), June Jordan’s “Roman Poems” (*New Days: Poems of Exile and Return*, 1974), Lorna Goodison’s “The Mulatta and the Minotaur” or

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3 Of course, there are exceptions such as C. L. R. James’ *Minty Alley* (1936), Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953) or Roger Mais’ *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1953). However, I am talking about general tendencies here, and the discussion in chapter one illustrates the interest of male Caribbean writers in ‘grander’ genres such as the epic and their propensity to address middle-class topics.
“The Mulatta as Penelope” (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, 1986), NourbeSe’s *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991), Rita Dove’s *Mother Love* (1995), Pamela Mordecai’s *De Man: A Performance Poem* (1995; cf. *De Book of Mary: A Performance Poem*, 2015) or Harryette Mullen’s *Muse & Drudge* (1995) ought not to be forgotten or discredited here.\(^4\) However, the fact remains that significantly more classical references can be found in the works of male Caribbean writers from the twentieth century, who had better access to classical education at prestigious schools in the colonies than Caribbean women (McKenzie passim; Greenwood *Afro-Greeks* 11) and tend to be more widely recognised and read than their female counterparts.\(^5\) Consequently, researching for this chapter, I predictably encountered relatively few classical references in Caribbean women’s writing of the twenty-first century. The additional form of displacement NourbeSe refers to, displacement through gender, therefore appears to have a substantial impact on the shape of modern-day Caribbean classical reception.

This factor needs to be considered in a deeper time frame than just the colonial era. There is not only a lack of female literary models in colonial times, classical cultures and literature similarly offer dramatically fewer points of identification for female than male writers. We only know of a handful women writers from ancient Greece and Rome. Furthermore, it is a generally known fact that Roman society and culture were dominated by and largely concerned with men. Women were inferior to men in the Roman internal hierarchy, largely confined to the private rather than the public sphere and, in Roman literature, associated with characteristics such as weakness and madness (as opposed to characteristics such as *virtus* that were ascribed to men) in prestigious, yet traditionally misogynist genres like epic (Keith 6ff., 18–26, 34, 41ff.). Keith observes in her study on women in Roman epic:

> Epic poetry was supremely valorised as a literary form centred on the *principle of elite male identity* (*virtus*) in the ancient Roman educational system, where the masculine focus of the genre was both mirrored and magnified. The ancient commentators articulate a *traditional belief in the innate superiority of man over woman* which they inculcate in their students.

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\(^4\) As Olive Senior’s poem “Colonial Girls’ School” (*Talking of Trees*, 1985) suggests, part of the reason why classical references were absent from the writings of many of those twentieth-century Caribbean women who did receive a classical education is that colonial curricula ignored and erased their Creole, female identity: “Months, years, a childhood memorising/Latin declensions/(For our language/– ‘bad talking’ –/detentions)” (26). Nonetheless, the study of classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean women writers of the twentieth century poses a research desideratum in the field of Classics and (post-)colonialism.

\(^5\) It would, however, be far from the truth to suggest that there was an ’old boy network’ for Caribbean male writers of the twentieth century, who experienced exclusion and displacement in different ways.
Instruction in epic poetry played an early role in shaping the elite Roman male’s understanding of the world he was socially destined to govern, and it naturalised and legitimated social hierarchies of class, nationality and gender. In this way, the ancient Roman educational system helped to provide the Roman elite with a practical justification of its own privilege. (35; my italics)

She goes on to remark:

The pattern of imagery that repeatedly enacts the absorption of female characters into the mythological landscapes of Roman epic appeals to a binary opposition between a feminised nature and masculinised culture embedded in the larger social complex of attitudes about gender relations in ancient Rome. Through the inscription of specific women in the primeval landscape, epic dramatises the displacement of woman from the Roman cultural order by fixing her in nature. The absorption of women into the topography of Roman epic thus has wide-ranging implications, playing a supporting role in the work of naturalising historical women’s subordination within the Roman social order, authorising male domination of the Roman political order, and legitimating the exclusion of women from the class of subjects who govern the Roman empire. (62–63; my italics)

Of course, it needs to be admitted that the relationship between the sexes is particularly hierarchical in the ancient genre of epic and that it is less imbalanced in genres such as tragedy. Nonetheless, Keith’s comments highlight aspects of male privilege in Roman society and, thus, point to the fact that the relatively limited number of classical references in contemporary Caribbean women’s writing can in part be attributed to classical civilisations being male-dominated, paternal societies and, thus, of little appeal to modern feminist writers⁶ – which a significant number of Anglophone Caribbean women writers are.

In 1990, Davies and Fido identified feminism as the fourth and most recently seriously articulated “ideological formulation” that has been guiding Caribbean thought, along with anti- or postcolonial nationalism, Black Power and negritude as well as Marxism-and Leninism (11). Therefore, due to the mentioned characteristics of classical civilisations – their paternal, elitist connotations and their commonly being associated with the colonisers, their imposed cultural ideals and education system in the Anglophone Caribbean context – it is one of my aims in this chapter to explore whether classical civilisations necessarily intensify a sense of displacement, creating a sense of quintuple displacement among Caribbean women writers. At the same time, I consider whether the Classics are employed by female Caribbean writers as a means of turning notions of

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⁶ Apart from a few figures in classical literature such as Boudica or Boadicea, whom NourbeSe readily references in her writing (*Genealogy of Resistance* 78ff.).
displacement into literary productivity, writing their identity and, ultimately, of inverting societal structures as well as creating a new feeling of belonging.

After all, despite the paternal character of classical civilisations, women writers and scholars around the world have been responding to ancient themes for centuries. NourbeSe confirms that there lies potential in displacement:

The displacements of which I speak lead often, if not always, to a disjunction in the psyche which can be, and often is, for poets and writers, a source of intense creativity: displacement leads to marginality; marginality allows one a certain distance from, and lucidity of vision about, the mainstream society, which in turn allows the poet to explode the myths and lies by which such a society fuels itself. It is often also a source of tension, invaluable and essential to the creation of any work of art: a manifestation of that ‘paradox of literary art (which demands a relationship of both operative distance from, and intricate inwardness with its object’ (Eagleton). That ‘operative distance’ is what marginality can provide. If, however, the disjunction created by displacement becomes too wide a fissure, too much creative energy may be lost and marginality then becomes a purely negative force. There is, in fact, a precise balance that must be maintained if marginality is to be made to work for the displaced poet. (58–59)

Thus, in line with NourbeSe’s assessment, I examine whether due to their paternal characteristics, the Classics generate a feeling of marginality and a certain tension, which together create a critical distance to Caribbean mainstream society for female West Indian writers. I will attempt to determine whether the Classics function as a “source of creativity” for Anglophone Caribbean women writers in this respect.

As Keith’s assessment above has also highlighted, besides gender, various other factors of intersectionality or ‘displacement’ that are of central relevance in the Caribbean context played a pivotal role in Roman society too, especially class and nationality. In this respect, Rome does offer points of contact with the female Caribbean experience. To develop this thought further, let us return to NourbeSe. In one of the most momentous passages in the Genealogy of Resistance collection with regard to gender in the Caribbean cultural sphere, she writes:

For the many like me, Black and female, it is imperative that our writing begin to recreate our histories and our myths, as well as integrate that most

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7 See also Toivanen 167ff. on the empowerment generated by dislocation.

8 While displacement and intersectionality are different concepts, they are closely related and intersectionality is of utmost importance to NourbeSe’s concept of displacement. Displacement is grounded in factors of intersectionality such as race, gender, class and can only be overcome and the female African Caribbean writer's body and voice can only be liberated through a reacquisition and re-constitution of language, identity and memory (Moïse “Diasporic Caribbean Women” 84). None of these three processes are possible for displaced Caribbean women writers without addressing and dismantling intersectional bias of race, gender, class etc.
painful of experiences – loss of our history and our word. The reacquisition of power to create in one’s own i-mage and to create one’s own i-mage is vital to this process. It can only serve to emphasize that which we have always known, even in those darkest of times when everything conspired to prove otherwise – that we belong to the race of humans. (56)\(^9\)

Odile Cazenave echoes this idea in her piece on Francophone Caribbean women writers. She admonishes:

> Black women’s writing […] must go through an initial phase of demystification of home, of the motherland and family. It is only then that the black woman writer will be able to redefine a new geography and her own individual identity. Once that stage has been reached, the writer must explore the contours of her new environment including its new community and cultural components. (88)

Similarly, Davies and Fido stress the centrality of rewriting history and reinscribing women’s stories for female Caribbean writers (6f.).

For a demystification of home, a recreation of histories and myths, a reacquisition of power – ultimately a renegotiation of identity – the Classics are an important starting point and canvas for Caribbean authors, as we have seen in the previous chapter. In this chapter, it will therefore be examined to what extent this observation is true and relevant for Caribbean women writers: I will investigate to what degree Graeco-Roman cultures are germane to a rewriting of history by Caribbean women that is independent of the male Caribbean literary canon (beyond the given interdependences in any literary system) as well as of colonial influences.

In addition, Davies points out that for contemporary Caribbean women writers, who look back on a century of preeminence of male Caribbean writers, identification through common cultural experiences is equally important as identification through aspects of gender (“Writing Home” 59). She states that “shared exploration of gender and heritage is an inseparable aspect of a singular articulation of cultural identity” for Caribbean women writers (ibid.). Therefore, since the Classics can serve as material for the making up for a lack of and rewriting one’s history – as I showed in the previous chapter –, it will be interesting to examine whether explorations of common cultural

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\(^9\) Cf. McCallum in her interview with Bishop: “The same thing that continues to prevent women from taking a proportional place in society and in the record of the human story [prevents History from entering history] – male dominance, hegemony, ignorance, patriarchy, prejudice, religious fundamentalism of all stripes. […] In the poem you mention [sc. “History is a Room”], the thing that prevents the woman who speaks from entering the room is that History, with a capital H, is often gendered in a way that excludes women, through our obsession with glorifying most of the stories of conquest and imperialism. I think poets have a potential civic role to play if engaging with history is part of our calling (it is mine) – to restore to our History a wider and fuller perspective of the past and to offer personal dimensions” (The Gift of Music and Song 186).
artefacts and values that draw on the Classics are closely linked to observations on
gender and feminism in writings by female Caribbean authors.

Moreover, NourbeSe’s above quote emphasises the close connection between a
rewriting of one’s own history and a reacquisition of one’s word, which is central to her
argument throughout A Genealogy of Resistance. Language, Heidegger’s concept of
language as the ‘house of being’ (Heidegger Sein und Zeit) and Glissant’s concept of
forced poetics (Glissant “Cross-Cultural Poetics”) are all immensely important to her case.
Given the troubled relationship of Creole authors with the English language, for
Anglophone Caribbean women writers in particular, who commonly take a radically
different, polyphonic approach to language compared to their male colleagues, classical
languages and especially Latin may function as an important means of avoiding or
cancelling out the effect of the imperialism-connoted English language, which NourbeSe’s
own book-length poem Zong! is a prime example of. It is therefore necessary to briefly
examine the aspect of language in classical reception by Anglophone Caribbean women
writers.

For the issue of language in the Anglophone Caribbean literary landscape, Odile
Cazenave’s remarks on Francophone Caribbean literature are tremendously important, as
they hold true for the English context (cf. NourbeSe “Managing the Unmanageable”
passim). Cazenave writes that in order to avoid one of the central tools of oppression
used by the colonisers, the French or English language respectively, Caribbean women
writers of the male and female sex take different approaches to balance out the effects of
using a language that feels like it is not their own:

In contrast to Francophone Caribbean male writers, who have been
articulating their reclaiming of Caribbean identity through language mainly
by championing the concept of Creolité and making Francophone French
visible and acknowledged, women writers have not been much engaged in
that direction. [...] [T]he crafting of a Francophone Caribbean discourse
does not lie primarily, for women writers at least, in the Creole language.
Rather, it lies in the polyphonic construction of voices of men and women
through several generations.10 Thus, Francophone Caribbean women writers
are engaged in crafting regional discourses, with their narratives converging
around a number of similar points, that is, by directing their gaze at the past,
through generations of women. (98; my italics)

In light of Cazenave’s statement, it becomes clear that in order to rewrite a Black
Caribbean female history and thus renegotiate their very own identity, Anglophone

10 To provide just one illustrative example of Cazenave’s astute observation from the Francophone
Caribbean, cf. Simone Schwarz-Bart’s Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle [The Bridge of Beyond]
(1972).
Caribbean women writers are more likely to adduce examples or characters from a number of past civilisations. Greek and Roman civilisations and languages offer a perfect place – of course there are many others – to start these historical reconsiderations from.

Similarly, Caribbean women writers employ various languages and dialects in order to create their multivocal accounts, as I will demonstrate in my analyses of Forbes and Roffey below and as is evidenced by NourbeSe’s own long poem *Zong!* (2008). NourbeSe not only structured the work by giving each chapter a Latin name such as Os, Sal, Ventus, Ratio and Ferrum, she also mixes Latin (and occasionally Yoruba and Shona) with English throughout the long poem: “bone/us us os/save us os/salve & save/our souls tone/& turn the bo nes/+/salve our souls u/s souls/bo ne souls/salve the slav/e salve to/sin salve slave salve/and ave ave/the rat the rat ave” (*Zong!* 63–64, italics in original). As Greenwood observes in her in-depth analysis of the usage of Latin in *Zong!* (“Middle Passages”), this mixing of languages serves the purpose of “confus[ing] the roots of” the English father tongue. Moreover, it allows Caribbean women writers to be more “unmanageable”, as NourbeSe calls it (“Managing the Unmanageable”): using local dialects and a variety of languages – as opposed to solely using English – allows them to challenge European thought and knowledge systems and, thus, attached power dynamics. Given the status of ancient Greek and Latin as elitist and colonial, it may seem absurd that these languages can feature in Anglophone Caribbean women’s polyphonic works for anti-imperialist purposes.

However, one of the main reasons why ancient Greek and especially Latin are suited to such historical and linguistic reconsiderations is their ‘paternal’ or ‘grandfather’ character that challenges and balances out the ‘father’ character of Western nations and languages such as Great Britain and English, thus overthrowing postcolonial power dynamics (cf. Greenwood “Middle Passages” 38–48). In her own commentary on *Zong!*, NourbeSe justifies her usage of Latin throughout the epic poem as follows: “I chose Latin to emphasize the connection with the law, which is steeped in Latin expressions, and, also to reference the fact that Latin was the father tongue in Europe” (209). Of course, with regard to the twenty-first century, it needs to be taken into consideration that due to changes in curricula across Caribbean schools, ancient Greek and Latin are gradually losing their links to colonialism, thus potentially becoming even more suited to polyphonic, anti-imperialist narratives.

In her *A Genealogy of Resistance* collection, NourbeSe highlights the interlinked (power) connections between Africa, Europe and the Romans and ancient Greeks:
...a genealogy of empires/and trade routes. Across the mediterranean. Long before the european imperialist, there had been the romans. In Africa. And before them, the greeks. Africans share a common resistance to disease with the europeans. Because of the long history of contacts. Between europe and Africa. That's the way the theory goes. (12; all spelling and capitalisation sic)

This quotation further confirms the assumption that the Classics, particularly the Roman Empire and Latin, “confuse the roots” of the paternal British Empire and English language (Greenwood “Middle Passages” 45) and, thus, subvert the latter’s father character. This idea can also be sensed in NourbeSe’s somewhat ridiculing portrayal of a (generic) European ‘explorer’, who happens to like to speak Latin (“Magnam est saccharum et prevalebit! Great is sugar and it will prevail!” 3611; italicisation and spelling sic), during which NourbeSe repeatedly alludes to the Classics (“Did he that morning leap out of bed with an exclamation, a shout as of surprise or discovery – of excitement? He might, perhaps, have echoed Archimedes: ‘Eureka! I have found it!’” 32).

In another essay from the Genealogy of Resistance collection, NourbeSe asks:

How does one [female, Black poet] write from the perspective of one who has ‘mastered’ a foreign language, yet has never had a mother tongue; one whose father tongue is an English fashioned to exclude, deride and deny the essence of one’s being? How does the poet confront and resolve the profound loss and absence of language – a language which can truly be the house of one’s being? (120)

And immediately answers her own question, echoing Cazenave’s comments on the polyphony of Caribbean women’s writings:

how
does one write
poetry
from the perspective

11 NourbeSe likely adopted the line “Magnam est saccharum et prevalebit! Great is sugar and it will prevail!” from Eric Williams (153), who quotes this motto used by European mercantilists in the 18th century in his History of the Caribbean (1970). Williams was not only the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, NourbeSe’s birth country, and goes by the unofficial title ‘Father of the Nation’, having led the country from being a colony to independence, but he was also a renowned Caribbean historian, with his doctoral thesis, later published as Capitalism and Slavery (1944), being one of the most important works on the economic history of sugar, plantations and slavery in the Caribbean. It is evident throughout A Genealogy of Resistance that NourbeSe is highly familiar with Williams’ works.

12 Cf. Lorna Goodison’s remarks about Walcott’s use of Greek and Latin in my interview with her, which can be found in the appendix: “I go back to Derek Walcott. He does that [jokes about the British Empire and their use of Latin and Greek in colonial education] all the time in a lot of his poems: he will use some kind of Greek and Roman quotation and then he will sort of twist it phonetically or misspell it or he will have somebody push back or laugh at it. AS: So that would be almost like ridiculing the British colonial education as a form of resistance? LG: Yeah, absolutely.”
of “mastery” of a mother
tongue – a foreign
language
an anguish
One doesn’t. One fashions a tongue
split – two times two times two
into
poly &
multi &
semi
vocalities (121)

Works by male Caribbean authors that actively and frequently use Latin words, such as Derek Walcott’s Omeros (1990) and The Polished Hoe (2002) by Barbadian writer Austin Clarke, suggest that the classical languages can act as one of the vocalities which constitute a tongue that is an alternative to English, an alternative to one of the tools of oppression used by the colonisers. In such alternative tongues, Caribbean writers feel at home and can express themselves from a place that is (more) liberated from colonial relicts (cf. Wynter and Sartre on the ownership of ‘the Word’ below). This is especially relevant since creolisation, employed by a majority of male Caribbean writers as I established above, is not always automatically guaranteed to remove hierarchies but can enshrine power structures and notions of belonging and alienation, particularly with regard to gender and nationality (Smith 5). In that respect, the use of Latin or ancient Greek by Anglophone Caribbean women writers is also an act by Caribbean women writers of rooting themselves in a Western literary tradition and, thus, of establishing an ancestry and genealogy while maintaining a critical distance to the English language. On the one hand, the use of Latin and ancient Greek allows Caribbean writers to establish a genealogy in the sense that it makes up for the supposed lack of significant history in the Caribbean basin prior to colonisation. On the other hand, it demonstrates that Latin or ancient Greek and the ancient Mediterranean civilisations belong as much to Caribbean people as they do to anyone else and thus, that Caribbean literature pertains as much to a (Western) canon that champions Greece and Rome and responds to them as any other literature from around the globe.

It can be argued that this sense of Caribbean identification with Greece and Rome is reflected in the form of NourbeSe’s Zong!. Of course, the fragmented nature of the text is partly owed to NourbeSe’s intention of subverting the established form of Western poetry (Greenwood “Middle Passages” 38) as well as representative of the violence suffered by African people during the Middle Passage, as NourbeSe herself describes in the “Notanda” of Zong!, a diary which the author kept while writing the work: “I mutilate
the text as the fabric of African life and the lives of these men, women and children were mutilated. I murder the text, literally cut it into pieces [...]” Zong! 193–194). However, upon closer examination the form of the poem resembles star constellations – the *sidera* which NourbeSe mentions throughout the poem (e.g. 65) –, which were so central to navigation in seafaring of the European imperial period. At the same time, the arrangement of words on the page in *Zong!* is reminiscent of the scattered islands that form an archipelago – and as such ties in with previously discussed comparisons between the Caribbean and Mediterranean Basins. This parallel between the two archipelagoes, thus, appears to support the notion of mixing Latin and Caribbean language and culture in the work.

NourbeSe’s 2008 work *Zong!* thus appears to confirm that the assumption of Latin as an alternative vocality holds true for Anglophone Caribbean women writers. Likewise, Greenwood observes that Anglophone Caribbean writers of both sexes “use Greek and Latin classical philology as a tool for resistance and radical rewriting to lend authority to new tales that bear ironic archaeo-colonial witness to the wounds of modern history” (31). Therefore, another important point that needs to and will be examined in this chapter is whether contemporary Caribbean women writers make similar use of Latin and ancient Greek as their predecessors Clarke, NourbeSe and Walcott.

Finally, in addition to NourbeSe, another important Black female Caribbean writer-theorist I would like to draw on for the theoretical framework of this chapter is Sylvia Wynter since her works, like those of NourbeSe, represented an important shift in Caribbean thought. Upon reading Sylvia Wynter’s influential essay “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation: An Argument”, it appears that there is another way in which Roman and Greek societies may appeal to female Caribbean writers, in addition to the ones outlined above. While Wynter does not refer directly to the Graeco-Roman Classics in said essay, published in 2003, she discusses the coloniality of being and the significance and consequence of anthropology, Christianity and Christian thought of the Renaissance and onwards for postcolonial societies. In her “Argument”, Wynter calls for Humanist anthropological or Christian figurations of Man, which are products of the West and its intellectuals and as such “made possible only on the basis of the dynamics of a colonizer/colonized relation” (Wynter 264; cf. Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*). Analysing Wynter’s argument, it could be assumed that the Classics pose one way of “‘unsett[ling]’ the ‘coloniality of power’” (Wynter 268): perhaps engagement with the Classics presents an opportunity of a return to figurations of Man that were not based
on racial “inferiority” categories of Otherness, which Amerindian or Black African people were allocated to by European intellectuals of the colonial era (Wynter 265ff.). It poses the opportunity of a return to a time prior to the establishment of the dichotomy Man/Native, according to which intellectuals of Man “own the Word”, while Native (i.e. “non-Western, nonwhite”) intellectuals can only “echo” Man’s Word (Wynter 329ff.; cf. Sartre’s introduction to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* 7–31). Thus, identification with and appropriation of the Classics – as cultures that preceded such anthropological configurations – may aid Caribbean writers and cultures in being recognised and classified as ‘on a par’ with Western, White humans and intellectuals, in a way similar to the one explained by Wynter:

If, as Sartre saw so clearly in the case of Fanon, ‘native’ intellectuals had ceased echoing and had begun opening their mouths for themselves in response to a parallel ‘phase of objectification’, a hardening insulation from what is human that is increasingly made evident by the ossification of our present order of knowledge and its biocentric paradigms, so Fanon’s ‘self-assertion’, his concentration on finding the lost motives, related no longer to Man’s but to our human self-interest, was to be effected by means of a redescriptive parallel to that by means of which the lay humanists had invented Man and its Human Others in the reoccupied place of the Christian genre of the human and its pagan/idolator/Enemies-of-Christ/Christkiller/infidel Others. Nevertheless, while these lay humanist intellectuals had indeed effected a redescriptive statement by means of which they secularized human existence, detaching it from the supernatural agency of the divine realm, they had done so only by opening the pathway that would eventually lead, with Darwin, to a new descriptive statement, itself reanchored in the no less extrahuman agency of evolution, thereby reducing the human within the terms of a biocentric ‘human sciences’ paradigm to being a ‘mere mechanism’ driven in its behavior by its genetic programs – and, as such, subject to the processes of natural causation, rather than to the ontogeny/sociogeny or nature-culture modality of causation, which alone could enable (as Fanon brilliantly glimpsed) the reflexively self-aversive behavior of many westernized Black peoples, made into the Other to our present ethnoclass norm of being human, to repress the genetic instinctual narcissism defining of all modes of purely organic life. And what Fanon’s new answer to the question of who/what we are (its revalorizing ‘descriptive statement’ detached now from any form of extrahuman agency or authorship, theocentric or biocentric) enables us to come to grips with is precisely such a new mode of causation, thereby, with the still-to-be-explained puzzle of (human) consciousness(es), doing so outside the terms of our present ‘Two Culture’ order of knowledge and its adaptive ‘regime of truth’ based on the biocentric disciplinary paradigms in whose terms we at present know our social reality; this, as the indispensable condition of our continuing to assume that the mode of being in which we now are (have socialized/inscripted ourselves to be) is isomorphic with the being of being human itself, in its multiple self-inscripting, auto-instituting modalities. (Wynter 329–330)
However, it is important to note that this assumption of the Classics posing an opportunity to counteract such Christian and anthropological definitions of Man and return to equitable dynamics among humans hinges on a Caribbean appropriation – a claiming equal ownership – of the Classics. Due to the elitist character of the Classics as a discipline which has shaped and has been shaped by European scholarship for more than five centuries, a return to pre-anthropological, pre-Christian conceptions of Man and their implications for postcolonial people is only possible on the grounds of a deliberate Caribbean reworking, “redescription”, reinvention and re-owning of a Caribbean Classics that cancel out influences and connections to European Classics, as they have been fossilised since the European Renaissance. It will be particularly interesting to explore to what extent this is possible for Caribbean women writers of the twenty-first century since they were not exposed to the colonial Classics taught in the Caribbean during the era of the British Empire and, in the majority of cases, came to Greece and Rome through different ways and on their own terms (as I will also demonstrate in the next chapter based on interviews I conducted with Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century). I will try to establish whether the Classics are employed in this anti-imperialist way by Caribbean women writers of the twenty-first century.

Overall, it is my aim in this chapter to study whether Classics offer an opportunity to creativity, as described by NourbeSe, for contemporary Anglophone Caribbean women writers, a cultural means of (re-)building identity or in which (other) manners ancient Greece and Rome are relevant to Caribbean women writers and to which effects they are used in their writing. I will establish the nature of the engagement with Greece and Rome by contemporary Anglophone Caribbean women writers by way of example of the analysis of two recent pieces of writing: Curdella Forbes’ *A Tall History of Sugar* (2019) and Monique Roffey’s *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (2020). For even if allusions to classical antiquity in twenty-first century Caribbean literature by women may not occur in abundance, they can nevertheless be found to have been employed in a deliberate, significant manner in the works of a number of renowned Caribbean authors such as Jacqueline Bishop, Curdella Forbes, Shara McCallum, Monica Minott, Ingrid Persaud, Monique Roffey, Makeda Silvera and Tessa McWatt.
Curdella Forbes is a Jamaican author and academic with a particular interest in matters of gender, performance and orality in postcolonial literature. Throughout her writing career, Forbes has been playing with Graeco-Roman references in her works, as not only her short story collection for children, *Flying with Icarus* (2003), illustrates. Her most recent, widely renowned novel *A Tall History of Sugar* (2019) is no exception. Forbes’ handling of the Classics in her latest work deserves close analysis as her inclusive, comprehensive, almost egalitarian conception of antiquity distinguishes her from fellow Caribbean writers, including those studied in the previous chapter.

The myth-infused novel *A Tall History of Sugar* tells the story of protagonists Moshe Fisher and Arrienne Christie, who grow up together in Jamaica. Convinced they are two halves of a single whole, they try to establish their very own relationship and very own way of loving throughout their lives. Their story spans several decades from the end of the colonial era in the late 1950s to current times, “after Brexit and the fall of empire” (7). Moshe, who is born with “milk-blue skin” (14), “one sky-blue and one dark-brown eye, his hair long, wavy, and bleached blond in front, and short, black, pepper-grainy in back” (19) defies race and class with his appearance as “he did not look like anyone who came over in the holds of ships three hundred years ago” (8) nor did he look like a White person. His soulmate Arrienne, the first-person narrator for extensive parts of the story and “princess” to her relatively well-off father, on the other hand, is tall, with a dark purple complexion “the color of the wettest molasses” (78), thick hair and extraordinary good looks. Moshe is vulnerable, quiet and, due to his physicality, not allowed to leave the house for the first years of his life, Arrienne is strong and confident. Both children meet and fall in love on their first day of school, from which day on Arrienne protects Moshe from the consequences of his physique and the two learn to communicate wordlessly, regardless of the distance between them. The plot follows Arrienne and Moshe to university in Kingston as well as during their separation, when Moshe attends art school in London and becomes a celebrated artist while Arrienne works for the United Nations and has a child with another man, up to their reunion and eventual marriage in Jamaica many years later.

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13 *A Tall History of Sugar* was critically acclaimed in newspapers and journals around the globe, including *The New York Times Book Review* and *Vanity Fair’s* “Best Books of 2019” list. Moreover, it won the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for Fiction in 2020 and was shortlisted for several other awards such as the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature in the category ‘Fiction’.
There are few classical references in this most recent work of fiction by acclaimed Jamaican author Curdella Forbes. In fact, up until page 332 close to the end of the book there are hardly any noteworthy classical references. However, the lack of these up to this point in the novel is so remarkable and the eventual introduction of the Classics appears so marked and deliberate that despite the small number of allusions to Greece and Rome in the first half of the novel, Forbes seems to have put plenty of consideration into her use of these ancient civilisations. Therefore, the novel requires to be analysed in detail as part of this chapter.

In a number of independent reviews, *A Tall History of Sugar* has been described as “epic” in scope and form. This classification could simply be disregarded as meaning ‘remarkable’ or ‘large’ in said reviews since the novel follows Moshe and Arrienne from childhood up until old age, therefore being of a scope which would certainly justify the label “epic” with exactly those meanings. However, particularly with regard to how the novel is marketed on its publishers’ websites (Akashic, Canongate, Allen & Unwin), it becomes clear that the term reviews employ to describe Forbes’ work should not be hastily or short-sightedly discounted as not referring to the literary genre.

As a matter of fact, *A Tall History of Sugar* does feature characteristics that have been established as typical of classical as well as postcolonial epic in the previous chapter: it has an emphasis on orality, the sea plays a central role and so do the concepts of circularity and journeys, expressed for instance in Moshe’s return to Jamaica after his travels to England and Europe, similar to the kind of ‘boomerang journeys’ found in ancient epic. The idea of epic circularity in *A Tall History of Sugar* is further emphasised through a quote by Martinican epic author Édouard Glissant: “The return is always to a point of entanglement” (340). Moreover, Moshe’s search for his biological parents is certainly a quest for a place of belonging, which represents another typical asset of Graeco-Roman and Caribbean epic. At the same time, it also evokes resemblances to the ‘Telemachy’ (Hom. *Od*. books 1–4), Telemachus setting out to see Nestor in Pylos and Menelaus in Sparta in order to establish the whereabouts of his father Odysseus. Lastly,

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14 Including on the publishers’ websites (“a vivid epic following an unusual couple’s mysterious love affair” Canongate; “a haunting epic” Allen & Unwin; “an epic tale of two soulmates”, Akashic). See also Collins’ (2020; “an epic modern fairytale”) and Mabbott’s (2020; “a love story of epic proportions”) reviews.

15 Cf. for instance 24 and 57: “It was from Noah that he [sc. Moshe Fisher] learned the love of the sea” (57). Moshe’s father Noah Fisher is a fisherman, which is at the same time a biblical reference as it alludes to Jesus’ disciples (Andrew, Peter, James and John had been fishermen prior to becoming followers of Jesus) as well as arguably to the *ichtus* (ancient Greek for ‘fish’) symbol used in early Christianity.
the novel abounds with mythical elements, which has been shown to be a component of Graeco-Roman as well as African and postcolonial epic in the previous chapter. Thus, in these regards *A Tall History of Sugar* shows transformative processes of appropriations and hybridisations of classical as well as African epic material into a postcolonial Caribbean context (Bergemann et al. 48 and 50).

Nevertheless, up to page 340 near the end of the novel, Forbes does not reference epic directly a single time nor is the novel's form strikingly reminiscent of the genre's Greek and Roman formal conventions. In fact, in addition to the absence of epic mentions, there are few references to classical antiquity more generally in the first half of the novel. At the beginning of *A Tall History of Sugar*, the story of Moshe, who is found by his future adoptive mother Rachel in a basket near the water, initially evokes allusions to foundlings Romulus and Remus in the reader. However, this possibility is immediately ruled out as Moshe is linked to Moses, a parallel which is accompanied by a number of other biblical references (cf. 1, 14f., Noah's Ark on page 22, a quote from the second *Book of Kings* on p. 18 etc.). Apart from this alleged classical reference, there are merely two explanations of Greek- or Latin-derived words: hematridosis ("From the Greek aima, meaning blood; and hidros, meaning sweat" 210) and consummate ("My physical desire for Moshe has not diminished. I still want him as if he were the satisfaction of the one hunger. Consummate, from the Latin *consummare*. Consume" 337). While these do highlight the importance of language, especially 'alternative tongues' including classical ones, for women writers, these two references are, by themselves, hardly meaningful enough to allow for conclusions about the use of classical languages in contemporary Caribbean literature nor are they as significant allusions to Graeco-Roman civilisations as can be found in, for instance, the works by male Caribbean writers discussed in the previous chapter.

While it therefore may initially appear as though Forbes dedicates little or no consideration to classical cultures in *A Tall History of Sugar*, upon closer investigation the opposite appears to be the case: Forbes makes use of the Classics in a very selective, seemingly conscious manner yet – sometimes less is more – not by any means less impactful. However, Forbes' engagement with the Classics is intentionally arranged in such a way that renders her conception of antiquity a very broad, diverse one that is not reduced to classical civilisations but gives equal prominence to other antiquities, such as ancient East Asian and Egyptian cultures, as I will illustrate shortly. It seems Greece and Rome are very deliberately neglected for large parts of Forbes' novel, before being
introduced abruptly closer to the end, almost as if not to dedicate too much attention solely to the Classics.

Near the end of the novel, Forbes gives an extract from Aristophanes’ Speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, likening the described *androgy nous*, a primeval union of man and woman, to the novel’s inseparable protagonists Moshe and Arrienne. The length of the *Symposium* quote – approximately two and a half pages (332–334; note that this is also the only lengthy direct quote from any literary work in the novel) – and said comparison, which connects the ancient Greek primordial mythological conception of humans to the novel’s central characters, suddenly moves the Classics into the spotlight and lends substance to Greece and Rome in the context of this novel. Thus, the impression that considerable deliberation has gone into Forbes’ treatment of the Classics despite their almost complete absence in the novel’s first half, is generated.

The passage Forbes cites is 189D to 191D from Plato’s *Symposium*, his work in praise of ἔρως, both the deity and the feeling of an intense desire for an individual, and is given in translation (which is not stated) and with some minor omissions. Set at a dinner party at the house of tragic poet Agathon, the *Symposium* is made up of reported speeches by guests, including by comic playwright Aristophanes, whose discourse Forbes is drawing on. Nowadays the *Symposium* is often, somewhat vaguely, referred to as Plato’s “praise of love”. Thus, Forbes’ choice of this work to complement her love story of Moshe and Arrienne is witty and demonstrates a high level of acquaintance with classical literature.

Aristophanes’ aetiological speech has folklore character (Dover 129) and relates the origin of the sexes of the human species and our desire to find our ‘other half’. Humans were, according to this tale, once round-bodied creatures (resembling their parents the sun, the moon and the earth) with “four hands and the same number of feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways” (*Tall History of Sugar* 332) and three different sexes were differentiated: male–male, female–male or female–female (Plat. *symp.* 189D–190A). After these primeval humans had behaved arrogantly and attacked the gods, Zeus, instead of punishing their insolence by obliterating humankind and thus also putting an end to the worship and sacrifices offered by them to the gods, decided to split them in half (ibid. 190C–E). Thus, according to this aetiological myth, us humans have ever since desired a more lasting union than sexual intercourse, we have desired to find our ‘other half’.
Forbes draws on this episode from classical myth to explain Moshe’s and Arrienne’s supernatural connection, which enables them to feel each other’s feelings and communicate wordlessly across great distances. Aristophanes addresses humanity’s failure to perceive the power of love in his speech (ibid. 189C), which even Arrienne, despite Moshe’s and her lifelong love for each other and despite their “twinship”\(^{16}\), temporarily questions in a moment of petulance, having been hurt by Moshe’s leaving her behind to investigate his ancestral roots in the UK. This is illustrated in Arrienne’s angry journal entry, which in the novel directly follows the Symposium extract:

Well, Maas Plato and Aristophanes, everybody have him version. Rachel Bible have another version too. I will stick with my version. The universe is not three but billions upon billions of constellations within uncountable galaxies and we are neither one or two or three kinds split in two or split because of the jealousy of any god. And we not suppose to be no one-horse comedy either so you can stop your laugh. Long before we start count time we were meant to be this plentitude, a multiplicity of differences so infinite and so vast that none could be replicated, for if I were to think of a God, God not jealous and mean, God is an infinity, and I bend myself to learning this unreplicable singularity that is Moshe and me that arise out of infinity’s replications. That is what it mean by ever after. So tek dat, Mr. Comedian Aristophanes. (334).

There are three aspects which make this excerpt from Plato’s Symposium in the context of A Tall History of Sugar and Anglophone Caribbean women’s writing of the twenty-first century particularly interesting and noteworthy. Firstly, it is remarkable that Forbes’ character Arrienne displays such good knowledge of classical literature that she employs this passage from ancient Greek literature to explain her intimate, superhuman connection to Moshe and vent her anger at the same time. One the one hand, this mythical episode of Zeus splitting primeval, integrally connected humans in two to inflict a penalty upon them for their arrogant conduct lends itself perfectly to illustrating and helping readers understand the relation between Moshe and Arrienne, which lasts from before their birth to the end of their lives (and arguably beyond). Arrienne attributes Moshe’s skin colour and their opposite yet complementing characters to this supernatural, prenatal link similar to that of the first humans in classical myth. On the other hand, the fact that the episode is narrated by the ancient comic playwright

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\(^{16}\) “Moshe and me, who were meant to be one person from the beginning, but something zigged and then zagged. In the levitation of zygotes, or the transliteration of embryos. I struggle to understand the twinship between Moshe and me, and why it is that in our splitting apart I was the one who got all the skin and he came naked into the world.” (Forbes 335)
Aristophanes in an amusing tone (Dover 129f.) makes it an ideal extract to utilise for Arrienne in order to make this comparison, yet be able to vent the emotions she is feeling due to Moshe’s actions, which she does by venting her anger at the comical tone in which the story is presented instead. Therefore, Forbes’ and her characters’ familiarity with the Classics and Graeco-Roman literature needs to be stressed once again.

Secondly, it is germane to note that even while Arrienne is drawing heavily on classical antiquity, she is simultaneously referring to other antiquities – in this case the Holy Land and the creation story in the “Rachel Bible” – here referring to the Bible, which Rachel owns and recites psalms from even though she is a Yahwehist (cf. 17f., 283ff.), – adding to the multifaceted image of antiquity Forbes creates throughout A Tall History of Sugar. Moreover, it appears that Forbes is using this rather brief discussion of religions to weave some anti-imperialist critique into her work. While Arrienne seems to reject both the creation story of the polytheist religion of the ancient Greeks (and Romans) as well as that of the Bible, it becomes clear on the following pages that she was talking from a place of anger. Arrienne subsequently doubles back on her rejection of the Greek divine myth, which she continues to ponder (335ff.), but not of her rejection of the story in the Bible (which is not referred to in more detail). Thus, one possible reading of this is as a rejection of monotheist religion, an omnipresent theme in the novel due to Rachel’s belief, which is repeatedly discussed in A Tall History of Sugar, that disregards the Christian Bible and faith as “distorted” (17). The perception of monotheist religions as being of imperialist character is not new (cf. for instance Maier 113–164) and it clearly matters to Caribbean women writers, as A Tall History of Sugar reflects and as is further confirmed by writers such as Shara McCallum (cf. the transcript of my interview with McCallum in the appendix).18

Thirdly, there is an implicit meaning to Forbes’ reference to Plato’s Symposium which needs to be discussed. Homosexuality is an important theme in the Symposium – made the subject of discussion significantly more than heterosexual ἔρως (Dover 3f.) – which is in keeping with conventions of Athenian society of Plato’s time. At the same time, homosexuality and different forms of love are also an important theme in A Tall

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17 I am referring to the iteration of this mythical episode at the party at Agathon’s house; in Plato’s Symposium, it is naturally reported by Apollodorus based on what he heard from Aristodemus, as are all speeches in the work, thus representing a series of displacements in itself.

18 McCallum: “But Jamaica shares a lot more with fundamentalist evangelical Christianity, which is rabid in its belief that there is one God, one way. At least, Jamaicans still have Obeah, another West African practice – I say ‘at least’ because to me, the problem of monotheism is imperialism [laughs]. Once you believe there is one God, one way, it generally does not end well.”

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History of Sugar, not least due to protagonist Moshe’s homosexuality, which he slowly discovers and comes to terms with in the course of the novel (see for instance 214–223, 225ff., 259, 345 etc.). However, in sharp contrast to Athenian society of the classical period, Jamaica, once described as “the most homophobic place on Earth” (Padgett; cf. Smith 10–14)\(^\text{19}\) continues to have laws prohibiting consensual same-sex conduct and to struggle with homophobia and violence against gay people (Human Rights Watch).

Homosexuality is a recurring theme in works by female Caribbean authors of the twenty-first century that draw on the Classics, which seems to hinge on the acceptance and fondness of homosexual relations in ancient Greece and Rome, that is in contrast with homophobia and discrimination against LGBTQI+ people in many Caribbean countries – which is of course interrelated with the establishment of Christianity in the islands –, even though social change towards greater acceptance can now be observed across the (Anglophone) Caribbean (Andersen/MacLeod, Murray). In addition to Forbes’ novel, Monique Roffey’s *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, which I shall discuss below, explores the theme of homosexuality through the character of Hank Clayson. Interestingly, it is Hank in particular who alludes to the Classics several times throughout the novel, for example by referring to the mermaid as his “Helen of Atlantis” (see below). Another significant work which both alludes to the Classics and takes different forms of love, homosexuality and homophobia as its central themes is Trinidadian writer Ingrid Persaud’s *Love After Love* (2020), thus further confirming the impression that these themes often occur hand in hand in contemporary Caribbean women’s writing, which offers fruitful material for future research.\(^\text{20}\)

Overall, there are transformation processes of focalisation at work in Forbes’ selective approach to the Classics (Bergemann et al. 50), which enable the author – and agent of transformation – to concentrate on certain notions from classical antiquity and

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\(^{19}\) More nuance is certainly required in understanding sexuality and homophobia in Jamaica and the Anglophone Caribbean, as Anderson/MacLeod show in their recent book *Beyond Homophobia* (2020) and as Glave’s *Our Caribbean* (2008) illustrates. Nonetheless, the point stands that Graeco-Roman cultures seem to appeal as points of reference to Caribbean (women) writers due to their societal acceptance of same-sex relationships.

\(^{20}\) Another theme that is notable in Persaud’s novel (and central in other recent novels by Trinidadian women writers such as Allen-Agostini’s *The Bread the Devil Knead*, 2021) and which to some extent ties in with that of homosexuality, but also domestic abuse of women is that of (sexual) violence in Caribbean countries. More investigation is required but it seems that there are certainly parallels between the Graeco-Roman myths and twenty-first century Caribbean women writing with regard to violence that becomes a fertile ground on which narratives are developed.
intensify her handling of these, while neglecting other aspects of these reference cultures. Thus, Forbes is able to draw on the Classics in a meaningful fashion and incorporate classical ancient cultures into her novel as well as into her portrayal of antiquity created in it without giving Greece and Rome an overly prominent position.

The observation that Forbes utilises the Classics in a very conscious, eclectic fashion is further confirmed by certain gaps in *A Tall History of Sugar*, which suggest that Forbes is purposely avoiding the Classics at certain points in her novel. On page 134 for example, Arrienne reflects on Moshe’s and her new curriculum at high school, after having both won government scholarships to an elite school in Jamaica. The absence of the Classics (and, for that matter, of English literature) in the curriculum is notable and peculiar given that Moshe and Arrienne were born before Jamaican independence and, thus, at a time when the majority of prestigious Caribbean schools, i.e. those students needed to win scholarships for, taught Classics as one of the three central pillars of British colonial education, as I have shown previously:

> At the school in Ora they were not any particular kind of star but just two among the thirty in the alpha stream, the elite group that had won full or government scholarships in the Common Entrance examinations. [...] In almost every subject except history there were students who never wavered to take the top spot. Arrienne wrote better than anyone else in their class; everyone accepted that the prizes for literature and English language were going to be hers, long before the end-of-year examinations.

> History bored almost everyone, with its recitation of dates, its long list of heroes of European wars and navigators of straits – Magellan, Cabot, Cook, Pizzaro, Drake, Hawkins – so there were no takers for that crown. In the second form it had been worse, endless pages of a soulless book on slavery, read to them in a monotone by a disinterested teacher [...] (In elementary it had been different. There they heard stories of young warriors and revolutionary heroes, names tripping off their tongues like poems, Nanny, Tacky, Cudjoe of the Marrons, Juan de Bolas, Simón the Bolivar [sic], Three Fingered Jack; legends of a wild woman and wild men that had set their imaginations on fire during lessons held outside under shade trees in the afternoon. But that was in elementary school, a lifetime ago. (134–135)

It cannot be determined with certainty whether Moshe and Arrienne were not taught in the Classics or whether Arrienne does not mention their Greek or Latin lessons deliberately. Regardless, the impression that the Classics are intentionally conceded limited significance in *A Tall History of Sugar* is reinforced in this passage.

Meanwhile, the principal focus in this excerpt is clearly placed on history, and Jamaican history more specifically. The examples Forbes draws on in the second half of
the extract are exclusively Caribbean independence fighters of some description and they are spearheaded by a Ghanaian-Jamaican woman, Nanny, a maroon leader and only female Jamaican national hero. In other words, it is important to note that none of the examples are European (those European examples given in the middle of the excerpt are dismissed as “boring” and irrelevant to the students), none of them are middle-class and neither are they exclusively male. In this respect, Forbes’ approach to history is reminiscent of Kwame Dawes’ epic impulse: it is an articulation of origin and an attempt to define an understanding of self, an identity. However, in contrast to Dawes, Forbes is undertaking this quest for identity as a Black Caribbean woman writer and, as such, a quadruply displaced individual. More importantly, she is therefore pursuing what NourbeSe and Cazenave previously defined as imperative for Black female writers in their reacquisition of a voice and of power, she is recreating her own local history, cutting out reductive European, middle-class, male-focused concerns – and, consequently, also the Classics with their often culturally dominant status.21

Finally, there is one further classical reference in A Tall History of Sugar that needs discussing. During his search for his biological father, Moshe makes an acquaintance in a churchyard in Ramsgate, a British woman called Mavisette Atkinstall. Mavisette is sceptical of Moshe’s appearance at first; nonetheless, the two share their stories and what brought them to this graveyard. Hearing that Moshe is Jamaican, Mavisette quotes from an originally Latin poem by John Alleyne, “Commercium ad Mare Australe” or “The South Sea Trade”. However, the poem – that is, just like Mavisette, brimming with nostalgia for British colonialism – is recited in English, with only a footnote explaining that it had been translated from Latin:

[Mavisette says,] ‘I know Jamaica used to be the pearl of the Empire. Rum, sugar, bananas, we imported. I remember. There was a poem – how does it go now?’ She fished about in her memory, brought it up at last triumphant, like a sweet rescued from the bottom of a large handbag, “Yes, I have it. Thou also O land abounding in thy native nectar (that’s the rum and sugar); something something something, join in with gladness due; no more shall I

21 There is another passage in A Tall History of Sugar which highlights Forbes’ contempt for reductive comparisons of Caribbean culture to middle-class cultural goods of the Global North. After having achieved international recognition and fame and having continuously been compared to European artists such as Michelangelo, protagonist Moshe ruminates: “Moreover, he could not understand why greatness must always be measured by comparison with someone from this part of the world, the northern part, why it was never said that he was a reminder of any painter from the part of the world that he was from, or any part of the world that was like the part that he was from, although there were such, including some who had become famous.” (225–226) Given this contemplation by the central character of A Tall History of Sugar, it is easy to project these thoughts onto the traditionally elitist, Eurocentric, canon-defining Classics and comprehend why Forbes was reluctant to concede Greek and Rome central prominence in her novel.
complain you lie in the farthest reaches of the kingdom, no more will you be the last point of Anna's rule; gaze now upon an English South – I see you in the middle of the world and the British Empire.**

* [The footnote states:] 'The South Sea Trade' (Commercium ad Mare Australe) by John Alleyne (1695–1730), referring to the Alleyns in Barbados. Translated from the Latin by John Gilmore. (167–168)

Therefore, due to Latin being quite literally a footnote as well as due to the clearly comical nature of the quote seeing as Mavisette, despite her enthusiasm for British imperialism, is confusing Barbados and Jamaica, this allusion appears to hardly be a meaningful reference to classical antiquity. Nonetheless, this particular reference to the Classics reflects transformation processes of ignorance (Bergemann et al. 51) and negation (ibid. 52), based on the conscious disregard or renunciation of certain aspects of the classical reference cultures and their reception history – in this case particularly colonially connoted British poems of the 18th century, which were composed in Latin. Therefore, the choice of poem doubtless stresses the imperialist character of Latin. Moreover, since transformative negation processes usually represent a demonstratively denying relationship with the relevant reference cultures, this allusion to the Classics and their reception in the British Empire, even though it may appear insignificant at first, thus needs to be read as a conscious refusal to acknowledge the Classics, which is in line with Forbes' endeavour to create an equitable representation of antiquities.

Considering all of the above, it becomes clear that it is not Forbes' intention to assign Graeco-Roman civilisations a unique status in her work in the way some of her male Caribbean predecessors such as C. L. R. James, Derek Walcott or even contemporaries such as Anthony Kellman have done in their works. On the contrary, it is Forbes' broad, diverse and egalitarian conception of antiquity, in which no single culture is put on a pedestal, that sets her and her fifth novel apart from such previous and contemporary pieces of Caribbean literature.

In Forbes' equitable, multifaceted approach to history in A Tall History of Sugar, the Classics are treated as on a par with a number of other ancient cultures. Firstly, there are ancient China and Korea that run through the book as a common thread, not only in several references to tae kwon do (86f.) but also to Arrienne's father's book of ancient Korean stories and embroideries (88f.). Interestingly, the book is one of only three books

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22 Even though these writers' influences on Forbes' writing can certainly be detected. There are multiple references to previous male Caribbean writers such as Sam Selvon (177) and Derek Walcott (201, 328) in A Tall History of Sugar. Moreover, reading Moshe and Arrienne's accounts of civil rights protests taking place in Jamaica in the late 1960s/early 1970s (150–151), I was struck by their resemblance to Kellman's portrayal of similar scenes in Barbados in Limestone.
in his collection – along with the Jamaican constitution and Marx’s *Das Kapital* – and young Arrienne mistakes its writing for Chinese calligraphy. The book remains important to Arrienne throughout her life until her reunion with Moshe at an advanced age:

When Arrienne saw him again naked, she was terrified, for the traceries had morphed and come to resemble a form of writing in the Chinese book in her father’s cabinet that she had tried to read and been driven into speechlessness by instead (296).

Secondly, references to ancient Egypt contribute to *A Tall History of Sugar*’s multifaceted portrayal of antiquity. There is a key scene in the novel which involves Moshe reciting funerals for the Egyptian mummies at the British Museum as well as his own biological mother, after having accepted that he will never be able to locate her. This allusion to Egypt is of course partly based on wordplay around the ambiguous meaning of the word ‘mummy’. Nonetheless, ancient Egypt is given centre stage as not only is the funeral scene opulent and memorable in itself but it also marks the end of Moshe’s years-long wanderings in search of his biological parents and his momentous decision to return home to Jamaica.

He [Moshe] told me that this night now after Bristol [where Moshe had looked for his father and got arrested for vagrancy] he tried with all his strength to summon the spirit [of his mother], as he had done many times before. […] I, five thousand miles away, could feel his heart beat, but his mother, who had carried him under her heart for six and a half months […] could not, being too far removed from him in the shadow space between the living and the dead. […]

But now he had to leave; he would buy his ticket home tomorrow. and knowing this, he felt compelled to do something, to engage in some momentous act that would say, This part of your life has not been without meaning. So at the end of the long hours battling the dark and failing to make it up give up its ghost, he pushed himself to his feet and did the only thing that a man of such grave superstitions could think of to do: he held a funeral. […]

This night, however, as he sat in the dark for the umpteenth time trying to summon his birth mother’s spirit from the universe’s behindparts, something in him gave out. Pushed over the edge, he decided to make his own conciliations with death. He blessed water and sprinkled it on a cross that he drew on blank binder paper. Then he recited funerals for the dead, first for his mother and then for the Egyptians removed from their burial grounds to unhallowed rooms. (278–279; 281)

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23 “It was a large clothbound book, handwritten, it seemed, in Chinese calligraphy (but it was in fact Korean), on the finest silk cloth, each page luminous and glutted with embroidered scenes from the stories that were told in the writing nobody in Tumela could read. The colours of the embroidery and the ink drew the child like a spell […]. Every morning, at her beseeching, her father unlocked the cabinet and turned the book to a new page so that she could see a different set of embroidered drawings, and in this way, deciphering the pictures, she made up stories she thought lay like secret treasure in the book. She called it *The Book of Things.*” (88–89)
Moreover, in the unfolding of this funeral scene, Forbes’ deliberately diverse conception of antiquity is accentuated:

One mummy in particular drew his gaze; it must have been a young man […]. The body was black, a powdery, ashen black, it seemed all over. He did not know if this was from centuries of preservation or if the young man was really black, in his natural skin, as he had been born. So Egypt was in Africa and people said the Africans were all black, but this he knew was not true, even without taking into account the Arab mixtures in the east and north of the continent or the Semitic heritages from the ancient world. (280)

Not only can Moshe relate to the Egyptian mummy due to its skin colour being indeterminable like his – a similarity to Moshe and Arrienne being likened to the classical Greek concept of the androgynous later in the book –, but Forbes also highlights cultural and racial exchanges and interrelatedness of ancient civilisations on all sides of the Mediterranean Sea, as were pointed out by scholars such as Bernal in Black Athena. In this respect, Forbes challenges notions of a pure, marble-white antiquity but also alludes to racist scholarly debates of the last century that questioned Egypt’s status as a Black African culture, due to the relevance of this question to the development of world civilisation.24

Moyer et al. make an observation in their introduction to Classicisms in the Black Atlantic that seems germane with regard to Forbes’ treatment of multiple antiquities including her allusions to Greece and Rome and Egypt. They state:

As Bernal has shown, the racial and national identity of classicism has always been under debate: but perhaps it is time to consider classicism not simply as an object through which the Manichaean polarities of European or African, white or black, colonizer or colonized are negotiated and understood, but instead to think about its deployment by individual figures with a view to expressing constructively their own futures and hopes rather than always as a source of agonism with immovable and divided inheritances. (11; emphasis in original)

On the one hand, Moyer et al. point to the racial and national character of classical reception and scholarship to this day. It can doubtless be sensed throughout A Tall History of Sugar that Forbes’ inclusive depiction of antiquity is based on racial and national, or anti-racist and anti-imperial, considerations. Several Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean antiquities are explored and presented as equally important to the development of civilisation around the globe so as to counter narratives of the supremacy of the Graeco-Roman Classics over other cultures or of antiquity as ‘white’ (as for example reflected in the denial of cultural exchanges between North African civilisations

24 See for example Kamugisha’s summary of the debate around Egypt and its Africanity in “Finally in Africa?”.
and Greece and Rome as well as, subsequently, in the debate around the Africanity of Egypt). On the other hand, and equally importantly, Moyer et al. – in the fashion of the theory of transformation – shift focus to the present time and initiate reflection on the effects of such depictions of antiquity in contemporary postcolonial literature. In the case of Forbes’ novel, references to past civilisations certainly seem to bear an orientation towards the future. They appear to express hopes about equitable treatment of cultures and equitable canons that recognise Caribbean literature fully for its own value on a global stage, hopes about decolonisation of scholarship and recognition of the role of African and other non-European cultures in the development of world civilisation. In addition, they convey hopes about recognition of the damage of and reparation for European imperialism, which was ultimately driven by similar Eurocentrist worldviews and motives as the problematic narratives outlined above. In that respect, Forbes’ multifaceted portrayal of antiquity is representative of a rejection of Eurocentrism on multiple levels. Moreover, her relationship with the Classics is ambiguous: while she displays a level of identification with some aspects of Graeco-Roman culture, for instance with regard to religion or sexuality, that thus reads like anti-imperialist critique, there is doubtless a sense of distancing from the Classics, at least with regard to what they represented to and how they have been used by the colonisers.

Another ancient culture treated as on a par with Graeco-Roman civilisations in A Tall History of Sugar is that of the ancient biblical Land of Israel, the Holy Land. Particularly Yahwism, the polytheistic religion of the ancient Land of Israel, and Kabbalah are some of the work’s most important recurring themes (cf. 1, 16ff., 44–49, 297 etc.), not least because Moshe’s (adoptive) mother Rachel is a Yahwehist:

There was no Yahweh church in Jamaica at the time and there probably isn’t now, but Rachel got her religion the way many poor people at the time got their reading material (Reader’s Digest) and overseas education (Durham College correspondence courses) […]. According to Rachel’s understanding, an understanding which like all understandings of foreign goods in Jamaica was only a version of the original (the meaning change always began in the passage across the sea), the essence of Yahweh (the religion, not the god) was that the Christian Bible had distorted the truths of God by translation. The force of Yahweh consisted in returning to the Hebrew pronunciations of words. (16–17)

Not only is it crucial to note the reference to the Middle Passage (as a metaphor for translation) in the context of this quote, but it is also indispensable to dwell on these remarks about early Christianity for a moment. The earliest known translation of the Hebrew Bible is the Koine Greek Septuagint produced in the third century BC, which
would later become the accepted version of the Old Testament and, thus, basis of the biblical canon in the Christian church. Another of the best known early translations of the Hebrew Bible that was to become dominant in Christianity throughout the Middle Ages followed some centuries later in the form of the Latin Vulgate. Thus, in bypassing “the Christian Bible[s that] had distorted the truths of God by translation”, Rachel is not only attempting to avoid English versions of the Hebrew Bible as much as possible but she is interestingly avoiding Greek and Latin renderings of Hebrew biblical writings. Therefore, Rachel’s “return” to Yahweh religion and Hebrew versions and pronunciations of the Bible can be interpreted as yet another way in which Forbes refuses to endorse the dominant role of Greek and Latin culture and language in European and world history and, thus, distances herself from them.

In conclusion, all of the mentioned antiquities – the classical, East Asian, the Egyptian and that of the ancient Land of Israel – are given equal significance in Curdella Forbes' fifth novel. Moreover, they appear alongside intertextual references to literature from different periods and parts of the world: Jamaican myth runs through the entire work, in addition there are references to Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen’s The Princess and the Pea (140ff.), Czech-German Franz Kafka’s Metamorphosis (169, 274) as well as to British authors John Keats (335) and D. H. Lawrence (Sons and Lovers, 337). Forbes draws on and combines artefacts from different epochs and regions in A Tall History of Sugar, creating a remarkably flat or non-hierarchy of cultures, in which neither ancient Greece or Rome nor any other civilisation past or present is given precedence over the others.

It could be argued that Forbes' multifaceted, equitable portrayal of antiquity and her culturally diverse allusions in A Tall History of Sugar are simply to be read as a postmodernist endeavour by the Jamaican woman writer to rewrite and reappropriate history and, in doing so, to recalibrate the cultural canon from her Caribbean, Black, female, quintuple displaced perspective. While this is certainly valid, it needs to be noted that Forbes’ dealing with different antiquities goes significantly beyond the engagement with a diversity of ancient cultures that can be observed in the works of male Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries such as Walcott, Kellman or Dawes, making her use of the Classics but also Egypt and Asian high cultures particularly remarkable. While there are references to Egypt, India and other ancient cultures in Omeros (30, 112f.), the Classics are granted a dominant position throughout Walcott’s epic. Forbes takes a more balanced and explicitly diverse approach to antiquity,
constantly weaving aspects of non-classical antiquities, alongside classical references, into *A Tall History of Sugar*. Moreover, not only does she use the Classics and processes of transformation of antiquity in a very selective, clever fashion in order not to dedicate a status of supremacy to Greece and Rome, but she also alludes to the colonial character of Latin and Greek civilisations and languages and explicitly problematises Eurocentric, 'purified' civilisational narratives of a marble-white Graeco-Roman antiquity as the sole cradle of European culture that were constructed by and for the Western world. Moreover, Forbes references Afrocentrist civilisational theories by scholars such as Bernal, which manifest cultural and racial exchanges in the Mediterranean, as I discussed above.

Therefore, in sum, Forbes does show attachment to the Classics, for example based on her excellent knowledge and smart, impactful use of Greek literature, as has been shown. At the same time, however, she also shows a sense of (quintuple) displacement from the Classics, which appears to be in part based on the history of classical scholarship and classical reception since the Renaissance, which Forbes, to a certain extent, exposes to have been shaped by racist and anti-semitic ideas. Thus, Forbes' treatment of the Classics and other ancient cultures is reflective of a balanced conception of both Greece and Rome as well as other antiquities, be they Asian, African or else, as origins of cultural value. Forbes counteracts the notion of classical antiquity being merely a cultural object that is contested by coloniser and colonised (cf. Moyer et al. 11), liberates the Classics from their ‘European ownership’ and uses them on her own terms and for her own anti-colonial critique in her quadruply displaced, female Caribbean fashion.

Monique Roffey’s *A Mermaid of Black Conch* displays a number of striking parallels to Forbes’ *A Tall History of Sugar* with regard to uses and status of the Classics. It sketches an equally diverse, complex image of antiquity that is worthy of attention, drawing on the Classics – sometimes through processes of appropriation, sometimes through more critical processes of negation – as well as, for example, on ancient Egypt and ancient Caribbean tribes, making the novel an important work with regard to classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean women’s writing of the twenty-first century, as I am going to demonstrate next.
Monique Roffey: *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (2020)

*The Mermaid of Black Conch* is the latest publication by Trinidadian-born writer Monique Roffey. The novel deals with the modern-day repercussions of an ancient Caribbean myth that is in part inspired by classical myth, as the author acknowledges herself. In addition to Graeco-Roman myth, the novel is inspired by classical antiquity in several other ways. At the same time, Roffey reassesses the Caribbean’s imperial history through a current-day lens, touches on matters of racism and homophobia and weaves feminist critique into her sixth novel – all of which make the work an important one to be studied for a project exploring the ties between postcolonialism and the Classics.

At the centre of the work's plot is an ancient mermaid, Aycayia, who hails from the indigenous Cuban Taíno tribe. As a teenage girl she was cursed “with perpetual virginhood” (196) by other women of her people and “banished to the sea because of her irksome beauty” (240). Centuries later in 1976, Aycayia, who has been living in the waters off the fictional Caribbean island of Black Conch, meets fisherman David. Both routinely return to the jagged rocks off the coast of the island, where David anchors to play his guitar and sing, while Aycayia listens. Their intimacy is destroyed when an American father-son duo, Thomas and Hank Clayson, arrive on the island of Black Conch to go deep-sea fishing, not an uncommon occurrence in the Caribbean – until they catch mermaid Aycayia. Driven by a thirst for money and publicity, Thomas Clayson decides to bring Aycayia back to the jetty where he strings her up along with fish, “gagged, bound, and unconscious” (34), in order to sell her to the highest bidder. However, while the two men are at the local bar celebrating, David finds Aycayia and hides her in the bathtub of his modest house, where Aycayia metamorphoses back into a woman.

Several weeks later, after Aycayia has re-learned to walk and been taught both English and sign language by David’s friends Miss Arcadia Rain and her deaf son Reggie, Thomas and Hank Clayson return to the island (having been tipped off that Aycayia is still alive and on the island) in order to claim what they believe to be their property. At this

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25 “Myths of mermaids, sirens, exist in every part of the world, often young women cursed by other women. This story re-imagines an attempt to reintegrate an ancient exiled woman into modern life in the Caribbean.” (247)
point, David and Aycayia have fallen in love but Aycayia’s curse has meant that through supernatural events, the ancient souls and deities have urged her to return to the sea.26

The Mermaid of Black Conch is narrated from an omniscient perspective, intercut with Aycayia’s first-person accounts of events in verse (e.g. 5–7) as well as David’s diary entries dated to 2015, almost 40 years after the events took place (e.g. 7–10). This combination of prose and poetry elements is reminiscent of modern epic, which marries elements of both. Ancient epic elements are also prevalent throughout the novel and closely interwoven with Roffey’s postcolonial agenda.

Firstly, the undeniable centrality of the sea in Roffey’s novel (6, 99f., 141, 165) roots the work in the (Caribbean) epic tradition. Notably, in an interview on her 2012 novel Archipelago, in which Roffey partly draws on Greek philosophical thought on the sea, the author explained that the prominence of the sea in her works is not only grounded in the Caribbean literary tradition but equally owed to classical philosophy, as well as influences from other antiquities:

In Greek philosophy and science the element of water was associated with emotion and intuition, in Hindu philosophy, water is associated with Chandra or the moon, and with Shukra, or Venus, who represents feelings, intuition and imagination. In Pagan and Wiccan traditions, water is also considered a feminine energy. In French the sea is gendered, la mer. I felt enormously humbled being sea [sic], and had a keen sense of constant danger. And yet, a small craft can make it across a massive ocean. The sea is immense, bigger than a single person or many, large vessels can go down at sea. I suppose you could say it has a very challenging personality! (Roffey in Foyles)

Moreover, colonial, racial and feminist27 critique bear heavily on The Mermaid of Black Conch. Ignoble tales of defeat and hardship in the novel unquestionably correspond to the definition of postcolonial epic that has been established previously, rooting the work in the (Caribbean) epic tradition (chapter one 40f.). The capture of the

26 “And then, an unmistakable cackle. The laughter of many women up the heavens. Then the sky opened. Hundreds of silver carite rained down through the trees” (137); “Things began to land on the pavement and the roof and they could all hear the sound of hard-soft thumps. Everyone looked out the windows and people rose from their chairs to check if their eyes saw right. Jellyfish, man o’war, falling from the sky, suspended like in jello, and then hitting the ground. Like the ocean tipped upside down from a bucket. Starfish, jellyfish, octopus…all manner of sea creatures were falling from some kind of hole in the sky” (232).

27 Like all other works studied in this chapter, The Mermaid of Black Conch is interwoven with feminist ideas, most notably represented by strong, independent female characters such as Aycayia and Arcadia, who is “very particular about women and how they get treated” (39). Aslanyan observes in her review of the novel: “Feminist motifs are amplified through role reversals and literary parallels: a mermaid seduced by a man’s singing; a catch scene inspired by Hemingway, whose machismo is shared by the fishermen struggling ‘to keep a cockstand from bouncing up in their pants’ as they hunt their prey” (24).
mermaid serves as a modern analogy to past imperialist intrusions into the Caribbean by Europeans and as such, lends a sense of acuteness to Roffey’s anti-imperialist commentary. The following excerpt from the novel, an account of the Claysons’ return to Black Conch, illustrates this:

American fishermen. They came and went; they snapped plenty photographs of pirogues, of sunsets, of rasta men liming, one leg cocked up against a wall; they fished and fucked the local women, smoked the local weed, drank the local babash; and now and then they claimed to catch all sorts of things: whales, great white sharks, double-billed marlin, and even a merman once, some time ago. Some old colonial-times man had made up that story – Dutch, English, French, no one knew. […]

The old man, Thomas Clayson, had spent a second day at sea. He’d taken a rifle with him, this time, and some marine flares in case they got into trouble, also an axe and a cutlass as back up to the gun. He would shoot her if need be; that would be the end of it. He’d shot big game, before. He’d shot a lion in South Africa, once. The head had been stuffed and mounted and was now above his desk in his den at home. He’d shot a buffalo in the Yukon, a female too; he’d even shot a grizzly bear, once, up in the Rockies. He would shoot the bitch, no messing, bring her in. (51–53)

Doubtless, the exploitation of the Caribbean people, but also the Caribbean wildlife and sea by Americans Thomas and Hank Clayson is to be read as a form of modern imperialism.\(^{28}\) The episode of the mermaid’s capture functions as both a condemnation of all kinds of imperialism as well as a current-day parallel to European colonialism of past centuries, which brings home the cruelty and absurdity of the uncritical satisfaction with which European ‘explorers’ followed their ‘civilising mission’, killing, subjugating and displacing millions of people.

At the same time, the tale of the mermaid appears like an attempt at reversing history, with the mermaid posing a gateway to long foregone times of indigenous people living uninterrupted on the Caribbean islands before the arrival of the colonisers. Thus, if not a reversal of history, the mermaid serves at the very least as an urging reminder of this peaceful, pre-imperialist period in Caribbean history – which is starkly contrasted with accounts of colonisation, slavery and the difficulties of eventual emancipation. As such, the mermaid is symbolic of Roffey’s ‘quest for another history’, in accordance with Kwame Dawes’ definition of the (postcolonial) epic impulse (cf. chapter one 96ff. and esp. 99), as the following passages from the novel highlight:

\(^{28}\) Especially since Aycayia and the Taíno people had once inhabited the Caribbean islands in harmony with and respect of nature, “[liv[ing]] an ital life”, “[see[ing]] meaning in every natural thing that lived” (64–65) and “practis[ing] peace” (119). See also Maier (165–177) for a discussion of the exploitation of nature and wildlife as driven by imperialist motives, and Aslanyan on different forms of oppression, including “ecological prejudices”, in The Mermaid of Black Conch.
Over four hundred years, Black Conch Island changed hands twenty-three times. Settlers, buccaneers, naval men, rogue and official, arrived and departed from St Constance for centuries. Some were left alone by the Caribs, others were attacked and killed; some gave up, but not before naming bays and hilltops after a piece of Europe. Every bay had seen a bloody sea battle and there’d been countless murders on the beaches. White men of varying types arrived again and again, all with inflated notions of their possibilities. Usually they bit off more than they could chew and abandoned their attempts at domination and fled, deciding no, it was all too difficult. […]

This woman [sc. the mermaid] was different and everything about her threw him [sc. David] back on himself. […] An admiration had seized him. Her people had died out, whoever they were. Now he could see who they’d been. It was like she opened a door in the universe, showing him the first people who had lived long ago in these islands. (102–105)

Overall, there are two dominant antiquities in The Mermaid of Black Conch, classical antiquity and native Caribbean antiquity (9, 70, 75, 101ff., 114). It is worth noting, however, that in the fashion of Forbes’ A Tall History of Sugar, there are also mentions of Egyptian mummies in The Mermaid of Black Conch (e.g. 59), which once again highlights the diverse, multifaceted image of antiquity Caribbean women writers create in their works.

However, while Forbes takes a global approach to representing diverse antiquities in her novel, Roffey focusses on two areas in particular: the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. As I have demonstrated, the exploration of parallels between the two archipelagic spheres has been a common motif in Caribbean literature during the last two centuries (cf. chapter one 51ff.). Thus, this comparison places Roffey in the tradition of the Caribbeans’s literary big names such as W. A. Roberts, Glissant or Walcott. However, on closer consideration, it seems that rather than just continuing this motif in the generation of twenty-first century writers, Roffey is adding another dimension to the analogy between the Caribbean and Mediterranean in The Mermaid of Black Conch.

Similar to Forbes’ mentions of Egypt, Roffey’s references to Egyptian mummies, that stand alongside references to classical antiquity, can be read as attempts to rehistoricise accounts of civilisational unfolding in the Mediterranean region and, thus, give emphasis to Afrocentric civilisational narratives of the exchange between North Africa and Greece and Rome, in the way I discussed previously. Equally, Roffey’s references to ancient tribes in the Caribbean islands, that are intercut with discussions of

29 Cf. 48ff., 101–104, 112, 121ff. for further accounts of slavery and the post-emancipation era, which poses its very own problems for the Caribbean people, both on a local as well as on a global level.
European and modern American imperialism in the region, also need to be read, in parallel with the previously mentioned ones, as attempts to rehistoricise accounts of civilisational unfolding – but this time in the Caribbean Basin. Through references to diverse Mediterranean antiquities that are contrasted to accounts of different epochs in the settlement of the Caribbean, Roffey is subliminally also comparing two dominant civilisational narratives: Eurocentric stories of European civilisation and Eurocentric and, in more recent times, American-centric stories of Caribbean civilisation that are related to imperialist missions to charter and appropriate ‘uninhabited’ or ‘uncivilised’ lands by the Romans and Greeks or the Europeans and US-Americans respectively. Thus, Roffey shows both narratives to have been shaped by racist and colonialist ideology (cf. Mergeai 69). In this respect, the degree of displacement from the Classics that Roffey displays in certain parts of her novel, as I will show, needs to be read as anti-colonial criticism and rejection of presiding civilisational histories.\footnote{For another study of Roffey’s challenging of Euro- and American-centric ideologies, specifically in her novel \textit{Archipelago}, see Marshall.}

However, as I mentioned previously, \textit{The Mermaid of Black Conch} does display transformative processes of appropriation (Bergemann et al. 48), particularly with regard to literary genres and especially the epic genre, and therefore degrees of identification with Graeco-Roman culture. After having been brought ashore, Aycayia is constantly drawn between a longing to return to the sea and a yearning to leave her century-long solitude behind and build on her newly-established relationships with her lover David and her friends Arcadia and Arcadia’s son Reggie Rain. Thus, Aycayia’s story is representative of the experience of displaced colonial subjects. This epic exploration of the notion of displacement and the individual search for a place of belonging in \textit{The Mermaid of Black Conch} becomes especially tangible on pages 161 to 164, when Aycayia’s emotions are literally juxtaposed (on neighbouring pages) to those of another central character in the work, Life. Arcadia’s lover since childhood, despite him being Black and her being a descendant of local White landowners, Life left Arcadia when she was pregnant with their child Reggie. Both Aycayia and Life represent displaced individuals on their search for a place of belonging, as the following passage beautifully highlights:

\begin{quote}
He [sc. Life] went across to her [sc. Arcadia] […], he felt relief because he […] had been lonely for a long time. It was the price he’d paid for his freedom, a loneliness he hadn’t expected to feel. All those other women he’d tried to lose himself in and with – they’d all melted away, one after the other. Life had lived a long time, a decade, without the love he’d known for this woman. He’d never really trusted her, a white woman, in truth, not once
\end{quote}
they grew to adulthood; and he had never trusted himself, either. Things had changed when they grew up and she had inherited the house and all the land around. He had needed to get away from Black Conch, away from this white woman, and all that meant. He’d needed to make his mark, discover his possibilities out there in the world. [...] When he’d heard there was a child on the way he’d fled one night, on the ferry. His one chance for a new life. A child meant he would be bound to Black Conch and to his place in it, no matter which way he calculated it; he’d be put down, relegated. She was high and white. He had only ever snuck into the house at night, avoiding her parents, her brothers; it had been time to get out. He’d never expected his love for her to run him down. [...] It was all mixed up with how he felt about this place too: Black Conch.

Aycayia puzzled over the question David had asked her. She didn’t understand the new language she was learning well enough yet, so she wasn’t sure, to start with, if she had understood him. Marry? What did it mean in these times? [...] She had never expected any of this: clothes, new legs, being able to talk in Black Conch parlance, making hand signs with Reggie – and a man to be with. She had almost come back to some kind of life.

She missed the sea, though. She missed the hiding she could do in it. She missed her tail. She had been a tremendous mermaid. But there was something in her old power that hadn’t come with her, that had fallen off with her tail. On land she was a small woman. [...] She had been a graceful fish and now she was an awkward woman. [...] She wasn’t the young Taino woman she had been before. She was the same age, a thousand or more years later, but there was the sea inside her; that was the main difference. [...] She considered her ex-life, her banishment, a life she had been put in and then taken from. Two things were true. She had outgrown it. But she was still part of it. The sea was her home, and her exile. She felt passion for it and another feeling, too, close to revulsion. She was now part of the entire archipelago, land and sea. (161–165) 

As this passage illustrates, issues of race and racism are foremost presented and dealt with as consequences of imperialist interference in The Mermaid of Black Conch. Life struggles with his and his lover’s racial identity due to the connotations of their ancestors’ status during colonial times, which bears consequences for their relationship in the emancipation period (as mentioned before, the novel is set in 1976, just over a decade after the first British Caribbean territories had gained independence). Likewise, Aycayia would not have found herself in this position of neither belonging fully to the sea or land, had it not been for the imperialist exploitation of Caribbean marine life by the Americans. By being captured and brought to land, she was once again uprooted, this time from her exile which she had been banished to due to an ancient curse.

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31 For a discussion of the exile theme in Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century, cf. chapter three.
Consequently, it seems appropriate to deviate from the exploration of epic features in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* in order to pursue the issue of race in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* and Caribbean women writers further (even though, as I have pointed out, notions of race and displacement are thoroughly epic topics).

Characters whose appearance defies race stand out as an important feature of twenty-first century Caribbean women’s writing. In Forbes’ *A Tall History of Sugar*, protagonist Moshe defies categorisation as White or Black due to his skin, eye and hair colour as well as his facial features, as I have demonstrated above. Similarly, *The Mermaid of Black Conch* features not only one, but two characters that escape ‘clear-cut’ racialisation – both of whom are interestingly strong women at the heart of the novel that carry its feminist agenda.

On the one hand, there is Arcadia, central character of *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, who was born into a White Christian family who have owned land on the island for centuries yet “[s]he was like the Black Conch people, except white” (46). As Sylvia Wynter pointed out in her early, yet authoritative essay “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation”, “the plantation system, a system owned and dominated by external forces, and what we shall call the plot system, the indigenous, autochthonous system” (96) continues to influence Caribbean fiction (cf. Edwards passim). In consequence, the role of White Caribbean people – who, for the most part, formed the elites that owned plantations – as fictional characters and authors continue to be germane to readings of Caribbean literature (Shields passim). This is illustrated by the fact that Monique Roffey and the relevance of her racial and ethnic identity – and consequently, her “historical sensibility” (Lucien) – to her writing (as author and literary critic) have been the subject of multiple essays which make the argument that due to the author’s White creole identity (similar to that of Arcadia), Roffey should or cannot speak about or for Caribbean people since, due to her identity, her writing perpetuates plot and plantation clashes (Lucien; Miller). While said essays sparked a heated debate that was oftentimes charged with emotion, sometimes at the expense of critical distance and objectiveness, they highlight the significance of continuous discussions about race (as well as gender and privilege) in Caribbean literature and, consequently, in classical reception in Caribbean literature.

Wynter goes on to quote Asturias who “defines this clash as the struggle between ‘…the indigenous peasant who accepts that corn should be sown only as food, and the creole who sows it as a business, burning down forests of precious trees, impoverishing the earth in order to enrich himself’” (ibid. 96; italics in original).
Roffey addresses such issues of race in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* in part by means of drawing on the Classics. The tongue of said character Arcadia is a constant reminder of the Anglophone Caribbean’s history, it is “a mixture of words from the oppressor and the oppressed” (116; cf. 44–49 and 103ff.: “[Arcadia] had come to terms with the strange fact of being a white woman with a Creole song in her mouth”). Like her language, Arcadia’s appearance reflects a hybrid of features of the oppressors and oppressed, too, and Roffey’s overt play with the question of Arcadia’s race in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* finds its climax in one particular scene. Upon his return to Arcadia, Life gifts her a bust he made for her:

> It was a bust of a human head; it was heavy and red, *red like the ochre red of the clay that came down the hill when it rained*. When she examined it closely she saw it was a small sculpture of herself, her shoulders, her head. [...] Arcadia weighed the cold red image of herself in her hands; it was as heavy, *same face as hers, but another tint*. (161; my italics)

On the other hand, there is Aycayia, who defies race both due to her being half-animal and half-human as well as due to her ancient features, which become visible after she has metamorphosed back into a woman:

> It was her eyes – they were silvery in the whites, and they gazed at him [sc. David] with such fierceness and, in time, such gentleness, it was hard to endure her gaze. He felt those looks she gave him came from a different time of human consciousness. [...] Everything about her was a mystery and suggested antiquity. Her skin was red-brown, like people from the Amazon. Excepting Guyana and Puerto Rico, he knew her people were mostly all gone from the Caribbean, except in tiny pockets and mixed in with other groups. Did she know? (74–75)33

Notably, both women are likened to each other on the basis of their lack of fitting racial categories. Moreover, it is doubtless not by coincidence that the red hue of Arcadia’s bust resembles Aycayia’s skin tone; yet it is highlighted that the two women are not the same. These similarities and differences between the two women are further contrasted when Arcadia starts to teach Aycayia Black Conch English:

> There, at the table in the grand room with wooden floors, sat an indigenous woman of the Caribbean, cursed to be a mermaid by her own sisterhood, whose people had all but died out, slaughtered by the Castilian Admiral and his kind; a woman who, as a mermaid, was pulled out of the sea by Yankee men who wanted to auction her off and if not that, stuff her and keep her as a trophy; a woman who was rescued by a Black Conch fisherman; a mermaid who had come back to live as a woman of the Caribbean again. She sat quietly puzzled as she learnt language again from a woman she wasn’t sure if she could trust. This woman was white, dappled with freckles,
and no matter what she wasn’t, she was of the type who had wiped her people out. (116)

Interestingly, for both women, language – or, to be precise, Standard English language – is one of the central aspects that obstructs their unambiguous racialisation, in Arcadia’s case as a White or Black Creole woman, in Aycayia’s case as a mermaid or human. The treatment of the problematic relationship of Anglophone Caribbean people and writers with the English language is in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* perforated with allusions to the Latin language, for example in the following passage:

She [sc. Aycayia] know language of her own […]. But it was long-ago language and her memory of it wasn’t strong. She hadn’t spoken it for so very long. While we lived together, we learn the name of every fish, she and me, from the same encyclopedia that belong to Miss Rain. […] Aycayia like to learn and she wanted to know the name of every fish in the whole damn ocean, everything in the sea and along the shore. I learn half those names myself – and every fish have a Latin name too. So all now she is a mermaid who know the names of every damn fish in the sea in two languages, an’ some she can call in she own tongue. (8, my italics)

These allusions to Latin function, as Greenwood put it in her analysis of NourbeSe’s and Walcott’s use of Latin, as “tools for resistance” to the colonial baggage of the English language while testifying to the “father tongue of Europe” character of the Latin language. What is not fitting about using the Latin language to cancel out the burden of imperialism and transatlantic slave trade born by English, “the father tongue […] fashioned to exclude, deride and deny the essence of one’s being” (NourbeSe *Genealogy of Resistance* 120), for Caribbean (women) writers? Especially since – like in Aycayia’s personal case, as the quote highlights – there remains very little knowledge of indigenous Caribbean tongues in the region (and around the globe), which could pose other alternatives to English?

As I hinted earlier, classical literature and myth also come into play to further support notions of racial ambiguity in *The Mermaid of Black Conch*. Firstly, Arcadia’s name immediately evokes associations with (Virgil’s) Arcadia, with an unspoilt, idyllic land of the shepherds in Roman pastoral poetry. Whether this name adds to the resemblance between Arcadia and Aycayia – linking Arcadia to the peaceful, harmonic era, during which the Taíno tribe Aycayia originates from inhabited the Caribbean islands – or whether it is in ironic contrast to the invasion of Black Conch and purchase of land on the island by Arcadia’s British, Anglican ancestors, Roffey employs this classical reference cleverly to support her imperialist criticism.
From a transformation of antiquity point of view, this is a prime example of a chain of transformations (Bergemann et al. 54ff.) and, consequently, of fragmented reception, which is a very common phenomenon in Anglophone Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century and postcolonial literature more generally. While Roffey assimilates (ibid. 48) a reference object from classical antiquity, the mountainous Peloponnesian region of Arcadia, she neglects or reinterprets the original meaning of Arcadia as a result of chains of transformation with two key intermediary stages. Firstly, from late antiquity through Goethe’s times, in art, literature and classical scholarship, Arcadia has come to be associated foremost with Virgil and the pastoral idyll of the “geistige Landschaft” that is “das Land der Schäfer und Schäferinnen, das Land der Liebe und der Dichtung” which the Roman poet ‘discovered’ in his Eclogues (Snell, in his authoritative yet nowadays partly refuted and outdated essay “Arkadien/Die Entdeckung einer geistigen Landschaft” 257), even though the original meaning of Arcadia to Virgil is a matter of controversy to this day (Jenkyns; Garber esp. 33–42). Secondly, Roffey is configuring new meaning of Arcadia since she is using the term in a chain of transformation, which spans from the British colonial import of the Classics to the Caribbean, including conceptions of Arcadia, to contemporary Caribbean writers resisting the imperialist connotations of the Classics and reappropriating them to make them their own. Just like other postcolonial or even English authors at the margins of society before Roffey, who manipulated the Classics to appropriate them and write themselves into the cultural and political focus (Burrow 112f.), Roffey does so by borrowing the ancient notion of Arcadia for her character’s name yet utilising the concept in a loose, abstract manner and on her own female, Caribbean terms.

Moreover, the siren-, mermaid- and Gorgon-like imagery Roffey employs to form her race-defying character Aycayia calls strongly on classical myth. Following depictions of Gorgons in Greek myth, most probably borrowing Medusa imagery, Aycayia is described as resembling “a human woman who once lived centuries past” (9), whose “hair was full of seaweed too, black black and long and alive with stinging creatures – like she carry a crown on her head of electricity wires” (ibid.). Furthermore, her hair is reported to be “a mess of fire and ropes of this and that” (29) with “long dreads [that] floated around her like snakes” (142), “like she could kill with just one lash from those tentacles” (22), clearly resonating with mythical portrayals of gorgoi in ancient Greek and Roman literature (Apollod. 2,4,1–2; Hes. theog. 270f.; Ov. met. 4,604–5,249; Pind. P. 10, 44–48 etc.).
In addition, Aycayia is stylised as “a hybrid of mythical dimensions, a creature only told of in stories” (239). Her hybrid appearance is inspired by classical myths involving creatures that are half-human and half-fish\(^{34}\) as well as sirens, fictional half-human and half-bird beings\(^{35}\). Thus, racial ambiguity in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* is supported by analogies to Graeco-Roman religion and myth (cf. goddess Atargatis and Plin. nat. 9,9–10 or Claud. carm. 10,160; Hom. **Od.** 12,37–54 and 158–200, Apoll. Rhod. 4,891–967). Like other classical myths, those of sirens and other half-human creatures show oriental or other non-Graeco-Roman ancient influences and have of course been mediated and fragmented in their reception history. Nonetheless, the classical inspiration for these hybrid creatures in Roffey’s novel is clearly visible, as is further evidenced by Hank Clayson referring to the mermaid as his “Helen of Atlantis” (32, 36), lumping together the story of the Trojan War and (the reception of) Plato’s island of Atlantis in the *Timaeus* (Plat. **Tim.** 24e–25d). Interestingly, sirens occur frequently as inspiration in contemporary Anglophone Caribbean women’s writing. The poetry of Jacqueline Bishop, an important Jamaican woman poet whose work I will discuss at length in the next chapter, is – like Roffey’s – also tremendously influenced by ancient tales and depictions of sirens. Both authors utilise sirens for feminist motifs, by playing with the reversal of roles of sirens and men. Thus, the Classics and sirens are not only employed to challenge racial categorisation but also established gender roles in Caribbean women writers – e.g. when David’s singing attracts Aycayia in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* or when Gaugin, a European man visiting Martinique in Bishop’s poem “Sirens” (*Snapshots from Istanbul*, 2009), who is warned “not to eat from the negresses”, wonders: “Whose desire is it?/Who is desiring whom? And who is afraid of his desire?” (30).

Thus, it has been shown that Roffey appropriates classical literature and myth freely where it supports her exposure and discrediting of racial and gender stereotypes. Moreover, it has been seen that *The Mermaid of Black Conch* does not only contain stylistic elements that are reminiscent of the epic genre but also content, as stories of

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\(^{34}\) Cf. 22; 30: “Her torso was sturdy and muscular, finely scaled over, as if she wore a tunic of sharkskin. […] They saw that when her diaphragm heaved, it revealed wide slits which were gills and they looked sharp enough to slice a finger off. […] Her spine spikes were flat, like the spokes of a folded umbrella, but when they flared and spread, they revealed a mighty dorsal.”; 59: “her enormous silver tail”; 60ff.

\(^{35}\) Aycayia’s name means “sweet voice” (cf. 178). Cf. also 30; 119; 132: “her voice was like no other she’d [sc. Arcadia] heard. Aycayia spoke as if she had honey in her mouth. Pretty voice, in truth. Now and then she would sing a melody and Miss Rain would close her book, sit back and the lesson would cease, temporarily, until she had finished her song. The songs came whenever they chose to arise. Aycayia couldn’t stop them; it was as if they were cued up inside her, waiting in a long line, and every now and then one would emerge”. 145
defeat which are not noble, including of colonialism, and quests for (racial) identity, history and belonging have been identified as major traits of epic poems in the previous chapter. Like in Kwame Dawes’ poetry, such notions are accompanied by multiple references to reggae throughout Roffey’s novel (80, 116, 169, 175) since the popular Caribbean musical genre has similar articulations of origin and definitions of identity at its heart, as I have demonstrated above (cf. previous chapter pages 88f.).

In addition to references to classical epic and myth, there are a number of allusions to other aspects of classical antiquity, if sometimes rather fragmented. For instance, it needs to be acknowledged that Aycayia’s and David’s love that is not meant to be is certainly reminiscent of Roman love elegy (4,9): her severe longing to belong with her newly-found Black Conch family that is antagonised by her curse, David’s intense love for Aycayia, which is thus doomed to be unrequited, and his kind of servitium amoris for the mermaid, whom he protects from the Claysons, accommodates and feeds in his home, teaches to walk and speak etc., all of which is nonetheless destined to result in sorrow and lament. Moreover, there are several other classical references in the novel through which Roffey assimilates notions from Graeco-Roman antiquity, yet transfers them into a Caribbean context through processes of hybridisation, such as the invocation of the muses at the beginning of The Mermaid of Black Conch36, the telling name of the character Priscilla that is derived from Latin37 or the idea of exile, a topos that was first made prominent in Roman literature38 and that seems to resonate strongly with female Caribbean writers including Roffey. Aycayia repeatedly refers to her fate as “exile” (“Exile = to stay away from home/Exile = to be rejected from home/Outcast, cast out/My life was exile from home”, 80; cf. 165) and Roffey herself describes her novel as “an attempt to reintegrate an ancient exiled woman into modern life in the Caribbean” (247, Author’s Note). A number of other female Caribbean writers have employed the notion of exile –

36 “For Irma, Laure, Yvette, and those ancestren before them, for those womxn I’m born from. Pisa, Port Said, Port of Spain. For the Goddess, the muse, the legends of the deep you are, to me.”

37 Priscilla “was the meanest woman in the village […] on account of her bad-mindedness and petty behaviour” (77). Like the ancient women of Aycayia’s tribe, Priscilla – whose name, tellingly, is derived from the Latin priscus, ‘old, relating to former times’ – is jealous of Aycayia, sees her as competition for David and, thus, wants to get rid of her like the women of her old tribe did. When Priscilla finds out that David is hiding Aycayia, she gives them away to a local police men, driven by greed for the fine she hopes the Claysons would pay for her eventual release. Thus, the analogy of Priscilla to Aycayia’s ancient peers is, as her Latin name signals, strong.

38 At least, accounts by the exiles themselves, e.g. Cicero, Ovid or Seneca the Younger. There are of course other, earlier reports of the fates of exiles such as Homer’s description of Ódysseus’ fate.
such as Ovid’s exile – in their fiction and poetry, including June Jordan and Jacqueline Bishop, as I am going to show in the next chapter.

It remains to ask how classical references in The Mermaid of Black Conch situate the novel in the Caribbean literary landscape. The already mentioned nickname Hank Clayson gives Aycayia, his “Helen of Atlantis”, is not only a reference to Graeco-Roman literature, but also a nod to Helen in Derek Walcott’s Omeros. Moreover, the setup of the novel – a small fishing village on a Caribbean island and a humble fisherman who speaks a thick Creole – is highly reminiscent of Walcott’s epic poem. This assumption is rendered all the more probable by the fact that there is a direct allusion to Walcott in The Mermaid of Black Conch: Arcadia owns “a first edition of Derek Walcott’s In a Green Night” (57). It is noteworthy that out of Walcott’s significant oeuvre, Roffey refers to this poetry collection which contains Walcott’s well-known poem “A Far Cry from Africa”. In said poem, Walcott condemns European imperialism and explores his personal racial conflict of his European and African ancestry. Thus, the reference to this poetry collection resonates with the imperial critique and topic of racial identity of The Mermaid of Black Conch. Furthermore, Walcott addresses the linguistic struggle of Caribbean poets in “A Far Cry from Africa” (“I who am poisoned with the blood of both, Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?/I who have cursed/The drunken officer of British rule, how choose/ Between this African and the English tongue I love?” In a Green Night 18). Therefore, the allusion to Walcott’s poetry collection also refers back to the problem of language, ownership and oppression that is a prevalent topic in The Mermaid of Black Conch, as I have demonstrated.\(^{39}\)

**Conclusion**

More so than in (male) Caribbean writing of the twentieth century, classical reception in the twenty-first century women writers studied has been demonstrated to be creative, often only loosely alluding to the Classics and fragmented. However, the observation that Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century are not wholly epic or classical in structural and contentual ways but fragmented holds true for both female and male Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century, as my analysis of works by Kellman and Dawes as well as Forbes and Roffey has shown.

\(^{39}\) “Miss Rain teach me the language of Black Conch island/She say it was a type of English parlance […] Black Conch English, a mixture of words from the oppressor and the oppressed.” (The Mermaid of Black Conch, 116–122); Walcott: “The English language is nobody’s special property. It is the property of the imagination: it is the property of the language itself.” (Hirsch 73)
The argument has been made by classicists such as Ziolkowski that since the first half of the twentieth century, modern authors’ engagement with the Classics (in the case of Ziolkowski’s study, specifically Virgil) has been increasingly fragmented and the Classics have “lost [their] authenticity for writers of a new generation” (229). Ziolkowski gives a number of reasons for this trend, most of which are relevant in the Caribbean context, including decreasing levels of classical education (236ff.). This has, according to Ziolkowski, resulted in only “scattered elements mak[ing] their way into the story” (230), which is certainly a phenomenon that can be observed with regard to classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century, both by men and women.

However, there are two important additional aspects to fragmented classical reception in the Caribbean context: on the one hand, it needs to be noted that fragmentation is a constant feature in Caribbean literature, including in Black Caribbean women’s writing, due to the trauma and fragmentation caused by the Middle Passage, as Walcott famously pointed out in his Nobel lecture “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory”.40 This notion of fragmentation is nowadays further intensified due to migration of individuals and writers from the Caribbean; it is reflective of the way in which Caribbean people have (re-)built and are expressing their identity and is thus also frequently reflected in Caribbean classical reception (Greenwood “Middle Passages” 37, McConnell 247 and 264f., Mergeai 76f., Moïse “Diasporic Caribbean Women” 82–88).

On the other hand, it needs to be acknowledged that fragmented classical reception in Caribbean writing cannot simply be attributed to circumstantial reasons such as a lack of classical education but needs to be read as deliberate. As Burrow asserted, classical “text changes with the times” (116) and is open to reinterpretation by each new generation of authors. As I have alluded to above, particularly writers at the margins of society, such as postcolonial writers, deploy the Classics to write themselves into the cultural centre. Moreover, particularly the opposition of a literary and political centre (such as London) vs. periphery (such as the Caribbean archipelago) is a very useful and

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40 “Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its ‘making’ but its remaking, the fragmented memory, the armature that frames the god, even the rite that surrenders it to a final pyre; the god assembled cane by cane, reed by weaving reed, line by plaited line, as the artisans of Felicity would erect his holy echo.” (Walcott Nobel Lecture)
important one in the Anglophone Caribbean context that functions in analogy to the same opposition between Rome and its provinces in antiquity. This classical idea of “writing from the province” is a stylisation which has readily been adopted by Caribbean writers.

However, the manipulation and reinterpretation of the Classics by Caribbean writers is – due to its fragmented, oftentimes loosely allusive character – markedly not symptomatic of a mere “writing back” which would owe debt for the Classics to the colonisers. Rather, it needs to be understood – in line with Gilroy’s concept of cross-cultural, cross-Atlantic circulation as Moyer et al. interpret it for the realm of Classics and postcolonialism (10f.) – as a deliberately fragmented classical Caribbean reception. This fragmented reception in Caribbean literature frees the Classics from the grip of European nations and should be read as an acquisition of ownership of ancient Greece and Rome by Antillean writers. It is essential to the crafting of a distinctly Caribbean Classics in keeping with Wynter’s notion of an unsettling of the coloniality of power via a revisitiation of pre-anthropological conceptions of Man. In this sense, such fragmented references to Greece and Rome mark more of a distance than proximity to classical cultures as well as European reception traditions and suggest a moving on to New Age or New World classicisms in Caribbean women’s writing of the twenty-first century.

As I have shown above, it is a distinct feature of Caribbean women’s writing that stressing the cultural value of different antiquities, challenging imperialist civilisational narratives and putting the Classics on a par with Egyptian, Asian, African, Caribbean history and culture plays into said acquisition and reevaluation of the Classics in Caribbean culture. This particularly female approach to history and the Classics is immensely relevant since even though fragmentation and fragmented classical reception can be observed in Caribbean writing by male and female authors, due to their quadruple displacement, due to the additional intersectional aspect of gender, women’s creation of their own history and identity – of their i-mage, to use NourbeSe’s term – has traditionally been more challenging and, as I have shown, women writers such as Monique Roffey have in the past been more likely to be attacked for their lack of “historical sensibility” (Lucien) in (re-)constructing their own history and identity than male Caribbean authors, regardless of their race.

To return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: The assumption that the Classics intensify a sense of displacement that accumulates to an insurmountable distance for Caribbean women writers in particular therefore, despite a lack of female literary engagement both in the classical world and in postcolonial classical reception and the resulting limited number of female literary models, needs to be
dispelled. Anglophone Caribbean women writers of the twenty-first century certainly express their distance to classical civilisations through processes of negation, focalisation, ignorance/neglect and hybridisation, which can be read as equalling an added, quintuple level of displacement. However, in the hands of writers such as Forbes and Roffey the Classics undergo conceptual and moral shifts. It is hardly surprising that Caribbean writers, given their colonial history, are doubtful of the classical tradition and its ideologies, that are predominantly European products. At the same time, however, Caribbean women and men writers seem to distinguish between the classical tradition – concepts handed down as classical in the Western tradition and that have formed the justification of European hegemony, which there is understandably resistance towards and rejection of – and the Classics as a source of cultural, moral, literary, philosophical and political value as well as their extra-European reception that has been and that could (and will) be (cf. Rankine 272ff.). Forbes’ and Roffey’s engagement with classical antiquity that reinterprets passages from Plato, plays with Graeco-Roman mythical creatures and sets other antiquities on a par with Greece and Rome are perfect examples of such uses and reconceptualisations of the Classics that, among other effects, serve to reject European cultural superiority.

This is however not to say that these women writers do not engage with the Classics on their own terms, in a distinct fashion from male Anglophone Caribbean writers of this century. Perhaps the differences in access of females to classical education in the (post-)colonial Caribbean educational system in some respects play out as an advantage, in the sense of marginality that generates a source of intense creativity, as NourbeSe described it. As my exemplaric analysis of Forbes’ A Tall History of Sugar and Roffey’s The Mermaid of Black Conch (but also wider readings of contemporary Anglophone Caribbean women’s writing and talks with authors) have shown, the most significant markers of female Caribbean classical reception revolve not only around rewritings of history that are inclusive of multiple antiquities but also around language and otherwise often silenced or neglected female experiences that are expressed with the help of female references to the Classics. One important example of this is Roffey’s giving voice to female perspectives on exile and migration – which, as I established above, have commonly been disregarded in fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first century -, most notably in the shape of Aycayia’s experience, which the author gives momentum to through references to Graeco-Roman myth and dealings with the exile topos. In this respect, the Classics serve as one – among other – means of a “demystification of home” to create Caribbean women writer’s i-mage, as NourbeSe and Cazenave describe it.
Lastly, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, reacquisition of their tongue is central to Black Atlantic women’s rewriting of history and creation of *i-mage*, and this significance of language for Caribbean women’s writing is also reflected in female Caribbean dealings with the Classics, as my analyses of uses of Latin in this chapter highlighted. In keeping with NourbeSe and Cazenave, a key observation from my analysis is that polycultural approaches that are typical of Caribbean women’s writing of the twenty-first century, as we have seen, are also reflected on the level of language: in addition to English and Creole, we have Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Korean, Taíno and sign language in the two novels by Forbes and Roffey alone. In this regard, this polyphony plays into the rejection of superiority of any singular culture and a reclaiming of identity through the acquisition of elements from different civilisations and cultural spheres for the purpose of female Antillean cultural production. Nonetheless, plenty more work certainly needs to be done on the role of classical languages in the field of tension between the poles of Anglophone Caribbean literature, classical reception and the historically colonially connoted English language as well as Creole languages – let alone the interdisciplinary study of gender and language in this context.
Chapter 3: The Notion of ‘Exile’ and Classical Reception in Anglophone Postcolonial Caribbean Poetry of the Twenty-First Century: Conclusions from an Author Survey

One advantage of studying the role of classical antiquity in twenty-first century Caribbean literature is that the authoring subjects are present to be questioned. Of course, as advocates of the New Criticism such as T. S. Eliot argued in the middle of the last century, authorial intent has been rendered irrelevant to the interpretation of a literary work since it cannot be reconstructed from the text. However, as the previous two chapters illustrate, it is beyond debate that Caribbean authors’ works speak for themselves with regard to the status and role of ancient Greece and Rome in them. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, it seems appropriate to rely on ‘external evidence’, as the New Critics call it, and in particular data collected during a survey among contemporary Anglophone Caribbean authors which I conducted in 2022. Since Anglophone Caribbean authors have traditionally always been vocal about cultural political matters relating to their work and identity outside of their writing – as Bishop’s book of interviews with Jamaican women writers The Gift of Music and Song (2021) is a perfect example of (among many others) – it seemed suitable to grasp the opportunity to survey the status and uses of the Classics among Caribbean authors, both with regard to their own writing and Caribbean literature more generally.

Between March and June 2022, I conducted a survey among Caribbean writers on the reception of classical antiquity in Anglophone postcolonial Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century. I asked participating writers to either complete a questionnaire on the subject which I had conceived, or to participate in an interview, which we conducted on Zoom.¹ The questionnaire also formed the basis for the interviews; however, I asked the three writers who agreed to be interviewed additional questions specific to their works. Having contacted approximately 20 authors, whose writing I knew to draw on the Classics, I received five completed questionnaires from Ishion Hutchinson, Diana McCaulay, Winsome Monica Minott, Marlene NourbeSe Philip and Robert Edison

¹ My survey and the questionnaire were approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Greek and Latin in March 2022.
Sandiford. Three authors, Shara McCallum, Jacqueline Bishop and Lorna Goodison agreed to be interviewed by me. The questionnaire can be found below; the completed questionnaires as well as transcripts of my interviews with McCallum, Goodison and Bishop can be found in the appendix.

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2 Barbadian-Canadian Robert Edison Sandiford is the author of *And Sometimes They Fly* (2013). His novel, which is set between Bridgetown, Barbados, and Montreal, Canada, does not only reference classical gods such as Poseidon but explores the concept of what it means to be ‘heroic’ and, in this respect, engages with notions of classical epic. While I do not discuss Sandiford’s work in detail, I hope that other scholars in the field of Caribbean classical reception studies will do so in the future.
SURVEY “THE RECEPTION OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY IN ANGLOPHONE POSTCOLONIAL CARIBBEAN LITERATURE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY” AS PART OF A PHD RESEARCH PROJECT AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Please answer each of the following questions by marking X on the scale from STRONGLY DISAGREE to STRONGLY AGREE AND, where appropriate, share your thoughts in the text box provided.

Please note that this survey uses the term “Classics” to refer to ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (including their politics, culture, literature etc.) as well as the academic discipline studying these. This term is used for the sake of simplicity and clarity; however, the author is aware of its problematic nature.

1. I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. [Please comment why / why not.]

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Comments:

2. I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. [Indicate in what ways they are / aren’t.]

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Comments:

Page 1 of 5
3. What are your first three associations with the Classics?

4. What are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?

5. The Classics carry colonial connotations. [Why / Why not?]

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Comments:

6. In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics (multiple answers possible)? [Please specify as much as possible.]

- school: Latin / Ancient Greek lessons
- Caribbean literature
- theatre / plays / opera etc.
- music
- university
- school: other lessons
- non-Caribbean literature: fiction, poetry etc.
- TV / film
- non-Caribbean literature: non-fiction
- museums
- religion
- other
7. I was taught Latin and / or Ancient Greek and / or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean. [Please briefly describe the image of the Classics you perceived.]

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Comments:

8. Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

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Comments:

9. Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

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10. Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words / phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect.

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Comments:

11. The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures / epic traditions?

Comments:

12. Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

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Comments:
Thank you very much for your participation!

Further comments:
My analysis of the responses I received will be twofold: firstly, I will analyse the received responses for general perceptions of the Classics in Caribbean literature, as expressed by the surveyed authors, and briefly relate them back to hypotheses which have emerged in the previous two chapters, where appropriate and useful. Secondly, I am going to focus on one topic in particular, which stood out in my analysis of the questionnaires and interviews. Said theme turned out to be omnipresent in my received responses and was, thus, thought-provoking: exile, migration and outsidersness and their relevance to classical reception in postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean literature. For this part of the analysis, I will predominantly be drawing on my interviews with Bishop, Goodison and McCallum, as well as postcolonial theory and contemporary Caribbean poetry for illustration. Throughout all parts of my analysis, I will make reference to relevant poems for illustration.

This, in addition, is another focal point of this chapter: so far, my exploration of the role of classical civilisations has been lopsided towards Anglophone postcolonial Caribbean prose fiction. However, I would like to shift emphasis to the study of poetry in this chapter, not least since the participants of my survey bar McCaulay and Sandiford are all Caribbean poets. Matters of exile, migration, dislocation and related sentiments have proven to be particularly inherent to contemporary Anglophone Caribbean poetry.
Analysis Part I: “The delight and challenge posed by the stories that make up the Classics”

To begin with, it is important to state that this survey naturally – not least due to the small number of participants and due to the disproportionally high ratio of Jamaicans among them – does not attempt to give an exhaustive impression of the perception of Greece and Rome among contemporary West Indian authors and their relevance to their writing. Neither is its aim to record and represent opinions on the significance of Greece and Rome to the Caribbean literary scene statistically; such an endeavour would require a more large-scale survey with more funding, time and a bigger sample size. However, the contributors to this survey are among those voices that have shaped the Caribbean literary and cultural landscape significantly in the last two decades and therefore, the aim of this survey has been and is to capture a representative snapshot of the standing of Greece and Rome among these prolific twenty-first century Antillean poets. Using a mixture of qualitative and basic quantitative research methods such as open questions and Likert scales (McLellan et al., Nardi, Olsen, Oppenheim, Rea/Parker), the questionnaire – which was also adhered to during the conducted interviews, albeit with some additional questions specific to the writers’ works – was designed to record and highlight trends in twenty-first century Caribbean classical reception. The yields of this survey will be presented in a manner organised by theme, which responds to the thematic grouping of the questions in the questionnaire.

The authors’ responses confirmed some of the assumptions about Classics and postcolonial Caribbean literature that have emerged in previous chapters: firstly, due to the status of Graeco-Roman literatures as canonical, widely read and received literatures around the globe – indeed among many other literatures –, they impact or inspire Caribbean authors in the way that cultural and especially literary consumption naturally shapes their writing, as all authors agreed. As Minott reflected in response to the first question in the survey regarding the relevance of the Classics to her writing:

I believe a writer’s output is influenced by what he or she consumes: plays, movies, books, magazines and more. The intersection where imagination, memory, personhood and self, meet, -- is the space where new works unfold. Growing up, I was never seen without a book. I met some of ‘the classics’ in re-storied form early in life; these stories continue to be a ‘natural reserve,’ that I call upon in many instances to complicate an idea. I believe complicating a poem adds depth and hopefully will challenge

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3 Ishion Hutchinson in response to my questionnaire, question three.
readers. Infusing Greek mythology is one way to complicate a poem, so yes, there is a continuing relevance of the ‘classics’ in my poetry. This observation was confirmed by all other participating authors – note Hutchinson’s responses to questions three and four, in which he admitted that his main interest in the Classics revolved around narrative –, even though McCaulay added that she was not educated in the Classics. Likewise, Bishop remarked that the continuing relevance of classical literatures in the Caribbean is to some extent owed to their “enduring” character (question three) as timeless, spaceless, intergenerational narratives that deal with issues that continue to be valid and topical as well as relatable and evoking strong emotions for readers in postcolonial Caribbean settings in the twenty-first century.

At the same time, Minott’s above statement also highlights the mediated, fragmented character of classical reception in the Caribbean, as I pointed out in chapter two (147ff.), and illustrates that the majority of West Indian writers access the Classics through chains of transformations that include European, Caribbean, American or African literature and culture as intermediary ‘agents’. This is exemplified by the associations with the Classics (both generally and in a postcolonial context) that authors shared in the questionnaires, with Walcott and his refiguration of the Odyssey, Omeros, leading the list of mentions, followed by Caribbean writers that have famously explored the Classics in their writing such as Kamau Brathwaite, Lorna Goodison, Shara McCallum, Winsome Minott, NourbeSe Philip and even a postcolonial Anglophone writer from an Irish context, Eavan Boland (cf. responses to questions three and four across all questionnaires).

Interestingly, asked whether they would consider the Classics an inspiration to their writing, most authors (five out of eight) hesitated to agree or distanced themselves from this, with NourbeSe pondering “how applicable” ancient Greece and Rome are to the postcolonial Caribbean and its literature and what role they play in her life (question four). However, all eight authors, including NourbeSe, agreed that the Classics do function as a source that enhances their writing. Hutchinson contemplated:

I would take some qualms with ‘inspiration’ in this context, for I do not read the Classics for inspiration. Reading it, however, whether I’m conscious of it or not, does affect certain sensibilities of my writing. (question two)

As the responses to the following questions of the questionnaire show – note for example NourbeSe’s associations with the Classics, war and European history –, these reservations about Greece and Rome serving as inspiration appear to be in large part prompted by the history of the Classics as a European colonial tool (note also Lorna
Goodison’s remark that the Classics “were the food and drink of the colonialists”, question five), as I demonstrated in detail in chapter one.

Nonetheless, such associative connections of the Classics to historical ‘injustices’ can at the same time render them an inspiration to Antillean writers, as Minott explained:

I am often provoked by reading an article or a book that reports on a continuing injustice. Injustice transports me back in time to the history of how our people arrived in the Caribbean via trafficking by sea. I ask myself and others, ‘how can we move on without addressing: beatings, rapes, bodies, bones on the sea floor, and sharks following ships?’ When I hear of trouble on land or at sea, my thoughts drift to slavery and The Odyssey. (question two)

In line with Greenwood’s finding that twentieth-century Caribbean writers such as Walcott drew parallels between Odysseus’ naval journeys and their ancestors’ experiences during the Middle Passage (Afro–Greeks 20–68, esp. 42ff.), this remark highlights historical and cultural parallels and, thus, points of identification and connection for Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century with ancient Greece and Rome. Thus, Minott’s quote also underlines that classical references in Caribbean literature can serve as a medium to come to terms with and process the historical trauma caused by the imperialist intrusion, the Middle Passage and slavery in the twenty-first century.

In addition, while the majority of authors expressed some concerns about labelling the Classics an inspiration to their writing, it is worth considering Shara McCallum’s response to this question as it accentuates that while there are certain historical and social barriers between classical cultures and Caribbean culture that hinder identification, dealings with the Classics in Caribbean literature are often grounded in an appropriation of Greece and Rome by Caribbean authors that recalibrates the cultural canon. If not position twenty-first century Caribbean writers as natural successors of Homer, Virgil, Sappho etc. (see also Greenwood Afro–Greeks 226ff.), this appropriation at the very least provides them equal, yet unique ownership of a culture and literature which Europe had claimed exclusive holding of for centuries:

[…] I think there is also a sort of ‘post’-colonial – ‘post’ in quotes – but ‘post’-colonial perspective in the sense of, you know, these are my inheritance so I am going to write through them, back to them, rewrite them, you know. To make it that they can give habitation to the kind of people I am descended from. (McCallum; question one)

Bishop confirmed this consideration, specifically talking about Jamaicans’ approach to languages and culture including ancient ones (“Jamaicans take terms and words and make them their own all the time”, question ten), and so did Lorna Goodison, asked
about her poem “The Mulatta as Penelope” and the appeal of Penelope to Caribbean women writers (“I liked the fact that I was giving voice to Penelope from a Caribbean perspective, she was not a European Penelope.”, Part II of our interview). It is therefore important to stress that ‘appropriation’ of the Classics by Caribbean writers is not to be misunderstood as an adoption of ‘foreign’ artefacts but in the sense of taking ownership of something that never did not belong to them.

Another important way in which the Classics inspire contemporary Caribbean literary production, that I already drew some attention to in chapter two, is by stimulating Caribbean feminist writings, as Bishop, Goodison and McCallum pointed out in our interviews. Despite the marginality of women as authors, literary and public figures in much of Graeco-Roman culture, female authors like Sappho and figures such as Penelope, Calypso, Persephone or Julia and her mother Scribonia nonetheless – or perhaps for this very reason – serve as literary models for postcolonial feminist authors. Particularly in Caribbean women’s writing, they are employed in the sense of an appropriation of the Classics for the purpose of rewriting women’s stories as central narrative threads and, thus, addressing women’s issues. A plethora of poems that are feminist Caribbean reworkings of ancient tales, some of which I will be analysing in detail below, can be named: “The Mulatta as Penelope” by Goodison (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, 1986; 25), the poems “Persephone Sets the Record Straight” (52f.) and “Calypso” (75f.) in McCallum’s *The Water Between Us* (1999), her poems “My Mother as Penelope” (29), “My Mother as Persephone” (39) and “Penelope” (42f.) in *This Strange Land* (2011) and “Vesta to Madwoman” (20) in her latest poetry collection *Madwoman* (2017) or Bishop’s poems “Scribonia” (41), “Julia” (42) and “Ovid’s Wife” (46) in her volume of poetry *Snapshots from Istanbul* (2009).

McCallum stated:

[…] [F]or me, it is often giving voice to Caribbean women through these myths, rewriting them in that context. But the emphasis is on women insofar as I have always loved these stories. From when I was exposed to them as a teenager, they made a lot of sense to me in terms of archetypal rendering of human foibles and…just fascinating, I loved it. But it struck me, I think, kind of unconsciously, Annemarie, that the women do not really have a huge role in these myths. They are often secondary or tertiary characters. The men are always the heroes; whether it is Odysseus and Penelope is sat home waiting for him. So I think I sort of began to investigate it, just through the fact that much of my poetry is giving voice to those perspectives of women and Caribbean experiences that are not seen in Anglophone literature as readily as male perspectives and, you know, perspectives of people from the ‘centre of the empire’. (question one)
As McCallum’s statement makes very clear and as was further confirmed by Bishop, the underrepresentation of women in the classical world and in Anglophone Caribbean literature is not only a parallel which lends itself to be utilised by Caribbean women writers but it also poses a “source of intense creativity”, to borrow NourbeSe’s term, for Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. This shared displacement produces an opportunity to rewrite these figures, which little attention has been dedicated to, for the purpose of giving a platform to Caribbean women and women’s concerns generally.

In addition, Bishop’s poetry – certainly in part owed to her unique perception of her environment as a renowned visual artist – highlights another fascinating parallel between classical civilisations and the Caribbean with regard to artistic representations of women. In her poem “Pomegranate”, from the collection Snapshots from Istanbul, Hera is – in line with Graeco-Roman myth and receptions of Hera, particularly in the Western Mediterranean – described along with one of her most common attributes, the pomegranate:

My pomegranate – my apple of Carthage – you who gave us the seasons and the deadly grenade its name. […] Persephone was tricked into eating four of your blood-red seeds; consequently, you are said to be food-for-the-dead, the fruit of mourning.

Hera wears neither a wrath nor a tiara, nor the poisonous diadem made at the hand of Medea, But the serrated Calyx of your fruit, Selah! So astonishing you are to behold, my pomegranate, my triple goddess, the pan-ga-nat of my Jamaican childhood:

I willingly eat from your bruised red hand. (Snapshots from Istanbul 24f.)

Such depictions of female Graeco-Roman goddesses or mythical characters demonstrate striking resemblances to portrayals of women in Caribbean visual art and literature. Asked about this parallel, Bishop explained that her inspiration for referencing Hera in this poem came from postcards which are widely available in the Caribbean, in which women are typically depicted with such associations as fruits, vegetables or plants:

If you look at those postcards, that is what we associate Caribbean women with all the time. I actually started to see myself a lot in these [ancient] women [e.g. Hera]. It was never ever a question of racial difference – this sounds so very crazy. I am very interested in women’s stories and the difficulties I had with piecing together these women’s life stories is exactly the difficulties I have trying to piece together enslaved women’s stories. It was so similar to me. And these women’s associations with fruits and vegetables was exactly what was going on in the Caribbean. (interview with Bishop, Part II)
Of course, such natural symbolism that is associated with women is strongly linked to reproduction and as such is indicative of societal expectations and roles of women in classical antiquity and the contemporary Caribbean. In this respect, the stories of ancient women, be they real such as Julia or mythological and fictional such as Hera, are also tremendously relevant to Caribbean writers as the exploration of these figures presents an opportunity to address social inequalities with regard to gender in a universal, epoch- and culture-spanning manner.

To develop this thought further, it is important to recall that Caribbean women writers are subaltern postcolonial subjects in the Spivakian sense of a postcolonial, intersectional concept that is not confined to class like earlier definitions (such as by Antonio Gramsci and the Subaltern Studies Group around Ranajit Guha) had suggested. Spivak’s notion of the subaltern refers to non-elite or subordinated social groups that are subject to different forms of oppression with regard to gender, religion, race and other aspects of identity (ibid. 61f.) such as postcolonial Caribbean women. One of the main implications of this notion for Spivak is that it is necessary to draw distinctions within colonised people, their rank in postcolonial systems of power and resistance and, thus, their political and cultural representation (Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 271; cf. “The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.”, Spivak Critique of Postcolonial Reason 308). It is out of this observation that Spivak’s concerns with political and cultural representation of women in (post-)colonial contexts and her well-known, controversial statements such as “the subaltern cannot speak” or “[t]here is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak” developed (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak 307 & 308). For the context of Caribbean literature, Spivak’s subaltern theory entails that due to the intersectionality of race, coloniality and gender (among other factors), Caribbean women and their experiences and voices are not as readily perceived or considered as those of male European or even male Caribbean writers, as I also touched on in the previous chapter.

However, Jacqueline Bishop’s poetry and said particular instance of classical reception perfectly illustrate that the fact that the “subaltern as female” is not listened to as willingly as, for example, male postcolonial voices in Western discourse does not mean that the postcolonial Caribbean woman writer has no agency. By drawing on the Classics – and women who have traditionally been configured as White and the ‘mothers’ or predecessors of European women, such as Hera – to tackle issues of gender norms and inequality, Caribbean women as subaltern postcolonial subjects can overcome racial
differences, as the above statement by Bishop suggests. Thus, the postcolonial Caribbean woman writer can escape marginalisation by drawing on classical myth in order to render issues she is faced with due to her specific identity universal women’s issues that apply and are of relevance in various global and temporal settings – be they the Roman Empire or a British colony, in the distant past or contemporary, relating to a Graeco-Roman goddess or a Jamaican woman. In this regard, classical references are employed by Bishop, but also by McCallum and other female Caribbean poets, to create a global platform for addressing feminist issues that purposely neglects or perhaps even cancels out intersectional aspects of race and coloniality, which is remarkable.

To proceed with my analysis, I will now turn to questions five to eight in the questionnaire to analyse these jointly. These questions are interested in authors’ first or early encounters with the Classics in or outside of school and, at the same time, with the colonial connotations of the Classics in the Anglophone Caribbean. It is worthwhile to analyse these questions simultaneously as the Classics were an important colonising tool used by the British, just like the Bible and Christian belief, used to justify their imperialist advances and the Western ‘civilisational mission’, as I discussed in chapter one. Similarly, Hutchinson (cf. his responses to questions five and eight) and NourbeSe stressed in their responses to my survey: “Colonialism – British and/or European colonialism – was intent on destroying the cultures of the people they colonised, replacing it with what was of value to British culture” (NourbeSe, question eight).

Interestingly, despite the admittedly small sample number, my survey appears to yield that the more exposure writers had to Greek and Latin lessons in the Caribbean, the stronger their sense of the colonial connotations of the Classics appeared to be. Just like Lorna Goodison who received Latin lessons at school, NourbeSe, who was taught in Latin and the Greek myths at school in the Caribbean, confirmed this observation adding that as a child, she did not realise “how much they [the Classics] were a part – a necessary part – of the colonial project” (response to question seven). McCallum, McCaulay, Minott and Bishop on the other hand stated that they were not taught in Latin or ancient Greek at school in the Caribbean and gained access to the Classics outside of the Caribbean (McCallum, for example, studied Greek tragedies at high school in the US) or came to them on their own terms through reading or watching dramas at the Carib Theatre. While all four of these writers expressed that they appreciate the colonial history of the discipline of Classics as a colonisers’ tool, the communis opinio among them was that the Classics do not carry those colonial connotations from their point of view. If anything,
McCallum and Minott added in response to question five that they perceived the elitist, yet not the colonial character of the Classics. They stated that what stood out to them were the inequalities in accessing the Classics with regard to availability of resources and paths of education. Minott:

But I will say that they carry also for many people, erm, they carry a sense of hierarchy and privilege. They carry a sense of, like, you need to be erudite, you need to have been learned, you know. [...] So, you know, very few people will go on to study the Classics in their original, myself included. I have not studied the Classics in their original, it's always translation for me. And it's scattershot, it's not my course to study. I never took a course in the Classics for example, so it's always...always feel like I'm dilettantish. You know, I know Classics scholars and I listen to them and I think, I don’t engage like this. You know, I engage like a poet would, basically very happenstance, very picking and choosing what's interesting to me and leaving the rest. [...] But they do carry that sense that the only way to engage with them is through very learned ways. And that's not my way so that's perhaps why I don’t carry that baggage. (McCallum, question five)

In a general sense ‘the classics’ underscore domination, and the mis-allocation of scarce resources. Scarcity often results in continuing disenfranchisement of ‘persons without power.’ In Caribbean islands, with limited resources, there is a challenge to provide easy access to books required in many subject areas, not only the classics.

Elitist character of the Classics: As an individual who benefitted more easily from available books, plays, movies, I never thought of it then as having colonial connotations, no more than having access to a bible. In other words the information was more important than the bearer of the information. I was eager to read not considering the many who had no access. (question five)

However, as Minott’s remarks in particular demonstrate, the elitist character of the Classics in the Caribbean is of course to some extent linked to their status in Europe and to the aftermath of European imperialism, not least with regard to the state of the education system and lack of teaching materials in the Caribbean that Minott highlighted.

However, overall the writers’ responses have shown that there is a strong sense of ‘moving on’ and of a New World classicism that is no longer indebted to the British colonisers. In June 2022, I visited the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Barbados and spoke to authors and Caribbean studies lecturers such as Robert Edison Sandiford, Dr. Aaron Kamugisha or Dr. Nicola Hunte. During this time, the observation that twenty-first century Caribbean authors perceive the Classics as cultural entities that do not belong to the British or any other people any more than they belong to Caribbean people was confirmed. If anything, due to the Classics having been imposed upon the English-speaking Caribbean during the twentieth century, there is a sense that appropriations and uses of the Classics in Caribbean literature (can) surpass British dealings with the
Classics, similar to C. L. R. James’ description of West Indians “beating” the British at “their own game” cricket in Beyond a Boundary (1963) (cf. Lazarus 161ff.).

At the same time, this Caribbean New Era classicism is often fragmented and “very happenstance, very picking and choosing what’s interesting”. As Ziolkowski analysed for American and European classical reception of the early twentieth century, this fragmentation in classical reception in the Anglophone Caribbean is certainly connected to the Classics no longer being central component of (colonial) educational curricula in the region.\(^4\) In conversation with Dr. Hunte from UWI, she explained that less than two decades ago, two courses entitled “Classical Background to Western Literature 1 and 2”, which taught students about Graeco-Roman myth, history and literature, were offered as an elective to all undergraduate students at UWI Cave Hill (Barbados).\(^5\) According to Dr. Hunte, most Humanities and especially Literature students at the time took the module. However, due to decreasing enrolment numbers but also due to the university prioritising other modules for which they needed to provide teaching staff, the last academic year in which the module was offered at Cave Hill was 2012–2013. Nowadays, according to the information I collected during my visit in 2022, the Classics are no longer taught at any school or university in Barbados.

Thus, taking all author responses into account, due to changes in education curricula the Classics appear to be in the process of being stripped of their sense of pertaining to the European colonisers. This has offered exciting opportunities for innovative, contemporary engagements with them in twenty-first century Caribbean

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\(^4\) Cf. Bishop in response to question five of the questionnaire: “Well, let me explain something to you. When I was in high school in Jamaica, the education system that I went to high school in in Jamaica, had a heavy dose of Caribbean literature, in addition to English literature and British literature and American literature. So I had the benefit, perhaps, of age, of there never being a time when I did not know there was a Caribbean literature and not knowing that there were Caribbean writers. [...] And as much as we had literature and art in high school, it was never presented as a professional thing. It was more part of a civilising mission if you will, you know? This is what a cultured individual, a cultured young woman– she can sew, she can paint, she can sing, you know, this kind of thing. And in literature, Caribbean literature was incorporated. So while I was writing and doing my little drawings and whatnot, that was for Jacqueline. And what Jacqueline was going to be as a professional was a medical doctor. [...] The end result of all of this [...] is that I ended up majoring in the sciences, not the arts, right? And I always felt, damn, what a wasted opportunity. I always thought this was a wasted opportunity. But now as I am thinking about it and your questions, I am thinking perhaps it is not, right? Perhaps it was not so much of a wasted opportunity because I was not force-fed a British tradition and whatnot in literature. So consequently, when I started to develop as a writer and an artist and as a thinker, it was largely through my own resources and reading, which was overwhelmingly Caribbean. So I never felt ‘less than’ in that area.”

\(^5\) The reading list for these courses comprised (in translation): Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, Virgil’s Aeneid, Aeschylus’ Oresteia, Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone, Euripides’ Medea as well as select poems by Horace and Catullus.
literature, by way of a Caribbean appropriation or creolisation of the Classics, as my analysis of primary works throughout this study has evidenced. To borrow Brathwaite’s terminology from *History of the Voice* (9–10; cf. Minott’s remarks responding to question eight\(^6\)), due to their progressively being liberated from their alleged indebtedness to the British, including to English iambic pentameter translations of classical texts used in the colonial Classics classroom, the Classics can be wholly embraced by Caribbean authors and used to convey those Caribbean experiences they seek to express in ways that roar like a hurricane.

The next two questions of the questionnaire were less concerned with the status of the Classics but shifted interest to their uses in twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean literature. My curiosity with regard to the uses of the Classics was divided: firstly, I was eager to learn about the potential of classical references in said literature to generate anti-imperialist effects. Secondly, I was particularly interested in exploring to what extent the Latin and Greek language can, in the questioned authors’ opinions, be employed to anti-imperialist effects in Anglophone Caribbean literature, particularly in light of the previously established colonial connotations of the English language and Caribbean authors’ conflicted relationship with it.

On the whole, all authors conceded that both classical references and the usage of Greek and Latin in contemporary Anglophone Caribbean literature can have effects that counter and undermine notions of imperialism and coloniality. NourbeSe and Hutchinson acknowledged the potential of classical allusions to evoke anti-imperialist interpretations under the caveat that they are merely allusions and “allusion by itself does not bring about anti-imperial effect” (Hutchinson, question nine). Likewise, Minott stressed that while she certainly admitted the potential of classical references to generate such effects, this

\[\text{is dependent on many factors (including but not limited to) the context in which it was used; who will hear; and who will read what was written, e.g.,}\]

\(^6\) Minott: “Growing up in Jamaica in the seventies and eighties we had a British education, complicated by the nonsense of ‘Hey diddle diddle…the cow jump over the moon.’ I consider many English myths and fables as an appropriation of the ‘Classics’. Our exposure to Shakespeare, taught in all high schools in Jamaica came through our British structured education. Nevertheless, they took away our mother tongue, our African stories and gave us standard English. I am one with Kamau Brathwaite who wants to hear the roar of the winds and the sea in each sentence. How can we tread softly with words when we have endured so much as a people? Derek Walcott, a little while past mid-career acknowledged that ‘what may be the bad grammar … can be stronger than grammatical correctness.’ I say ‘we talk Jamaican, a little bit of this and a little bit of that, nothing to worry bout’.” (question eight)
when Walcott named his central character ‘Omeros’, Homer’s name in modern Greek, it may be construed as intending to have an anti-imperialist impact. Yet, we cannot always assume that this is so with Walcott’s referencing of the Classics. (question ten)

Nonetheless, despite these limitations, Minott confirmed that she does allow for a reading of Classics and classical languages in Caribbean literature as conveying anti-colonial meaning. She added with regard to an important voice in the Caribbean literary discourse of the twentieth century repeatedly referred to by her throughout the questionnaire: “On the other hand should Kamau Brathwaite infuse Greek or Latin words, without hesitating I would say it was his intention to generate an anti-imperialist effect” (question ten), thus highlighting the potential of classical references to achieve exactly that.

Furthermore, NourbeSe qualified that while she agreed that classical allusions including the use of Greek and Latin words can stimulate anti-imperialist readings, as they certainly do in her long poem Zong!, it is important to note that “European culture, including Roman and Greek culture are at the top of the pyramid of race, culture and values” (question ten). As NourbeSe’s, Hutchinson’s, McCallum’s and Sandiford’s responses to question eleven illustrate and as I showed in chapter one, one genre which particularly struggled with the cultural dominance of Roman and Greek culture and Eurocentrism of literary canons is the epic genre. As Hutchinson summarised, “its [the epic genre’s] popularity [in the Anglophone Caribbean] is certainly rooted in the lingering colonial style of education” (cf. also McCallum’s response to question eleven).

This is just one of many examples that illustrate that therefore, the use of Latin and Greek in contemporary literature could – depending on the circumstances that form the setting for the employment of Greek or Latin words or phrases – still have opposite effects that enforce colonialist or elitist ideas, despite what I established previously about the changing status of the Classics. It is for this reason that a complete, thorough appropriation of the Classics by Caribbean writers, a ‘making them their own’, and a considered use of classical civilisations which presents them on a par with other (ancient) cultures and prevents misreadings of Greece and Rome as symbols of European cultural or racial superiority often appear to be such a central prerequisite for Caribbean writers who choose to engage with the Classics, as could be seen with respect to works discussed in the two previous chapters.

Lorna Goodison’s response to question nine of my questionnaire confirmed this observation, both with regard to the Classics in general and Latin and Greek language specifically:
Well, one of the beautiful things I think about resistance, the strong resistance many enslaved people would put up to slavery and colonialism and imperialism all over the world is that we tend to co-opt many of the images and the things that we were given and turn it back and push back. You know, I always liked the fact that a lot of enslaved people with Greek and Roman names, I think they probably drew the spirit of those people [who they were named after]. If you were named Theseus or after some great Greek warrior, you have probably drawn some warrior strength from that. Or if you are called Juno or Venus, you probably think ‘I am pretty fine, I am nice’.

For example, I have been doing a lot of work on the Divine Comedy and there is a lot of interesting work that has been done on how much Dante has become a figurehead of...people read it, assimilated it and then took him on as a sort of anti-colonial or anti-imperialist fighter against oppression. So, you know, the colonialists and imperialists can mean one thing but what really, actually happens can look quite different. (question nine)

With regard to the epic genre, to return to this example, such an appropriation and creolisation can constitute itself in a return to the genre’s extra-European roots since, as Hutchinson observed, “the [epic] impulse comes out of the region’s natural storytelling background, which is the surviving instincts of oral cultures from Africa that predate European colonisation” (question eleven). NourbeSe, in addition, alluded to non-classical ancient epics such as the Ramayana or Sundiata, which did not only influence Graeco-Roman epic but also Caribbean writers such as Walcott directly, as he expressed in his Nobel lecture on the ‘fragments of epic memory’. Moreover, as NourbeSe pointed out, likely influenced by definitions of epic by Walcott and Glissant that stress the compatibility of Caribbean history with the genre (cf. chapter one), “the epic genre is relevant to the Caribbean because despite their position in the world today, they were at the centre of epic movements and events” (response to question eleven). Thus, as I also hoped to highlight in my discussion of the literary works discussed in chapter one, an appropriation and anti-imperialist use of the Classics can take the shape of a rethinking of epic definitions and drawing of parallels between Caribbean history, Graeco-Roman history and epic literature.

7 “Felicity is a village in Trinidad on the edge of the Caroni plain, the wide central plain that still grows sugar and to which indentured cane cutters were brought after emancipation, so the small population of Felicity is East Indian, and on the afternoon that I visited it with friends from America, all the faces along its road were Indian, which, as I hope to show, was a moving, beautiful thing, because this Saturday afternoon Ramleela, the epic dramatization of the Hindu epic the Ramayana, was going to be performed, and the costumed actors from the village were assembling on a field strung with different-coloured flags, like a new gas station, and beautiful Indian boys in red and black were aiming arrows haphazardly into the afternoon light. Low blue mountains on the horizon, bright grass, clouds that would gather colour before the light went. Felicity! What a gentle Anglo-Saxon name for an epical memory.” (Walcott The Antilles). Cf. the entire Nobel lecture, which is concerned with a Caribbean rendition of the Ramayana.
Furthermore, Minott and McCallum illustrated other ways in which references to Graeco-Roman culture or languages can have anti-imperialist effects in the context of Anglophone Caribbean literature. In response to question nine, Minott reflected on her own allusions to classical antiquity that “can be considered to have an anti-imperialist effect”, for example in her poem “Why Telemachus Sells Broom” from the collection Zion Roses (2021), which, at the time of writing, had just been longlisted for the Bocas Prize 2022. The poem reads:

And I is Telemachus,
original rasta and broom seller.
After the big man
dust out the rascal crew
stalking the house like jackals,
I and I had to flee
to Bobo Hill for fortification.

I imagined I-self as
Odysseus, with bushy locks
hanging like petals, blooms
from a poor man orchid.
Was not hard to engraft
I-self, an learn ‘bout Niyabinghi
and Twelve Tribes of Israel.

But the I became confused,
which was the right I?
Must a Black man have a
Black God, and sell broom
to reach heaven? And if
worse come to the worse,
should I, Telemachus,
cut mi locks and fly? (18)

Minott herself remarked on the poem that “Odysseus’ son has been transported over many centuries and many lives. He appears now as a ‘original rasta and broom seller’.” She further explained that “the hope is for readers who do not know the original Telemachus, to seek him out, also for readers who do not know a Jamaican Rasta man and his cultural proclivities, should likewise seek knowledge. The ultimate is for cross pollination. What I have said […] may be considered as having an anti-imperialist effect, but I defer to readers and critics to so determine” (Minott, question nine).

Telemachus is arguably one of the best-known sons in the whole of classical literature and, in addition, a character who is depicted as looking for his place and

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8 Broom making and selling is a trade commonly associated with Rastafarian culture. The broom is a symbol of purity and cleanliness in Rastafarian belief, which is why the art of broom making is a profession frequently taken up by members of Rastafarian orders (cf. Jamaica Gleaner).
vocation in the world in Homer’s *Odyssey* (cf. Carmichael/Miller passim). All of the above makes him a highly appropriate reference for a poem on identity and the quest for it, as Minott’s “Why Telemachus Sells Broom” certainly is. So much so, that it seems in the second stanza the persona, Jamaican Rastaman Telemachus, is fully identifying with Odysseus’ son (“Was not hard to engraft/I-self” *Zion Roses* 18), who is in turn identifying with and following the footsteps of Odysseus (“I imagined I-self as/Odysseus” ibid.). However, as Minott explained, this is not an identification in the sense of an assimilation of the classical Telemachus but a ‘transportation’ over centuries. Telemachus is integrated into contemporary Jamaican society: in regard to the setting, but also language since Minott switches between Standard English and Jamaican Patwa throughout the collection, as well as his looks (“bushy locks” ibid.), his profession and his culture due to Minott’s Telemachus having an interest in Rastafarian religion (“Niyabinghi/and [the] Twelve Tribes of Israel” ibid.). Thus, Minott employed transformation processes of disjunction and hybridisation (Bergemann et al. 49–50) to transplant Telemachus into contemporary Jamaica.

The possibility of said identification of the young Black Jamaican man with a figure from classical antiquity is, however, questioned in the following third stanza (“But the I became confused,/which was the right I?” *Zion Roses* 18) and no definitive answer is provided. Nonetheless, the fact that Minott employed classical literature and suggested the possibility of identification of Jamaicans with ancient Greek literary characters is remarkable and important in itself. One the one hand, because Minott’s engagement with classical antiquity throughout her collection *Zion Roses* is representative of that of her generation of Caribbean writers: while it may be classified as fragmented, it takes direct access to and ownership of the Classics for the sake of contributing to a Caribbean Classics which neglects and defies intermediate cultures. On the other hand, because while drawing on the *Odyssey* and the Classics⁹, Minott is at the same time rooting herself firmly in the (female) Caribbean literary canon, with her poetry not only evoking reminiscences of Shara McCallum’s and Lorna Goodison’s poetry – her poem “Trombone Blues” (10) references Goodison’s “Bag-a-wire” from her collection *To Us All Flowers Are Roses* and “Rundown” (31) echoes McCallum’s “What Lies Beneath” from *The Water Between Us* – and NourbeSe’s writings (cf. Minott’s “I-self” and NourbeSe’s “I-mage” in *Genealogy of Resistance*) but also of writers such as Forbes with respect to Minott’s

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⁹ Other classical allusions in *Zion Roses* include references to the Latin language (“Mama Ignota/…her name means/the forgotten one” 22) and Graeco-Roman figures such as Venus (32), Odysseus (55) and Circe (58).
diverse depictions of antiquity including the ancient land of Israel in *Zion Roses*. Thus, Minott’s poetry is testimony to the compatibility of classical culture with Caribbean concerns, including those of subaltern poets, and of the anti-imperialist effects it can yield in these contexts.

McCallum, in the meantime, mused on ancient Greek or Latin terms and concepts and their uses in Caribbean literature when asked about the anti-imperialist effects of classical references, with the notion of ‘ekphrasis’ serving as example. McCallum’s argument is reminiscent of Sylvia Wynter’s critique of anthropological, Christian conceptions of Man by eighteenth-century European intellectuals that continue to dominate modern-day culture and politics (cf. chapter two 117ff.) as she stated:

[…] [I am] trying to think through the language that I have inherited, even the fact that so much of the use of poetics is Greek. The word ‘ekphrasis’ for example […]. I am curious about the fact that by using it to describe something, that that is in a way constituting as, like, the origin of all things we could have used to describe. We could have chosen another language to describe the act of disruption and so on. But I say this one in particular because the word ‘ekphrasis’ and the notion of it is not actually located in ancient Greece, it is actually coming out of eighteenth-century British poetry and being used to define something that is located in…erm, its first iteration being in Greek text, do you see what I am saying? It is not actually original to those texts, it is the eighteenth-century British colonial enterprise, absolutely colonial enterprise, that is looking for an antecedent. And where is it going for that antecedent? So that is an example to me of a way in which, yes, the language we use can have an imperialist effect.

I have answered it in reverse of your question, you are asking, ‘Can it be anti-imperialist?’ I would say, what I can see is how it can be imperialist just by virtue of us sourcing language that way. When you use it though and you are using ekphrasis to anti-imperialist effect, you are in effect going beyond the etymology of the word at that point. So it could be then that the word itself is locating imperialist arguments but the use of, not the word or phrase, but the use of the form could become anti-imperialist. (question ten) Thus, while McCallum stressed the imperialist connotations of the Classics like NourbeSe, she simultaneously highlighted the potential of utilising them for opposite effects. Her remarks yet again underline the important fact that the colonial, elitist baggage the Classics carry is not ‘innate’ to them but primarily a product of religious, scholarly, cultural conceptions and uses of the Classics by Europeans of the last five centuries, just like Wynter demonstrated as regards conceptions of Man. Similar to Wynter’s argument, McCallum reflected that the use of the Classics by Europeans to elevate and promote Western civilisations above other civilisations can now equally be reversed by utilising the Classics to create anti-imperialist effects and find ‘new old’
approaches to ancient Greece and Rome that are not weighed down by their role in Europe’s history of imperialism.

Finally, another such parallel between the Graeco-Roman world and the Caribbean, which has repeatedly been used by Caribbean authors to establish points of identification with the Classics, relies on geographical similarities between the Caribbean and Mediterranean archipelagoes and (potential) similar resulting cultural impacts on the regions, which I asked authors about in the twelfth and last question of my survey.

As I showed in chapter one (51 ff.), many comparisons have been made between the two maritime areas, including by some of the Caribbean’s best-known writers and thinkers, such as Rex Nettleford, Vice-Chancellor Emeritus of the University of the West Indies, whom Lorna Goodison referred to in response to question twelve. Asked about their point of view on such parallels, the unison reply from the authors was twofold: while there are undeniably geographical similarities between the two regions (above all the centrality of the sea), which tend to result in similar cultural realities and sensibilities (McCallum: “there is something about the spatial construction that leads to cultural iteration”, question twelve), the decisive difference between the two landscapes is rooted in their different histories. As NourbeSe, Hutchinson, Bishop and McCallum all emphasised, the different historical reality of the Caribbean people of the Middle Passage, colonialism and slavery, which continues to have societal and cultural bearings to this day, has effected “unique cultural features” (Hutchinson, question twelve) that separate Antillean from Mediterranean culture, despite parallels between the regions that have – oftentimes somewhat romantically – been drawn.

Nonetheless, I would like to conclude this section by showing that Ishion Hutchinson repeatedly draws on Greek poet George Seferis in his volumes of poetry *House of Lords and Commons* and *Far District*, particularly for musings on the sea, wanderings, exile and homelessness. 10 Often, such allusions to the Greek poet are accompanied by references to Graeco-Roman myth in Hutchinson’s poems, for example Vulcan in “New World Frescoes” (*Far District* 17 ff.), or the use of Latin phrases. These

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10 See also Hutchinson’s review of Seferis’ *Blood and Ink*, which underlines the Jamaican’s interest in Seferis’ reflections on ancient and modern exile: “Exile and return rule Seferis’s poetry. The exilic condition subsumes the latter, making both the same state or act. Here the shade of Odysseus falls acutely, yet only partially. Odysseus’s twenty years away from Ithaca are spent, mythical distances aside, within the same small geographical location. Compared to Seferis, who had several diplomatic postings abroad, Odysseus is indeed a lost traveller, a military peripatetic who makes a single return, rather than an exile. Their obvious difference, one an ancient and the other a modern, matters insofar as the speed of Seferis’s many returns underscores the speed at which home is disappearing and is the crisis at the heart of his work” (*Poetry Society*).
allusions to Seferis’ poetry – the epigraph of section VI of “New World Frescoes” is taken from Seferis’ “Mythistorema” – and Graeco-Roman myth and language in Hutchinson’s works point to parallels between Caribbean and Mediterranean poetic sentiments, which – despite historical differences – result from the regions’ similar maritime geographies:

[I] The gull that bleeds in the Caribbean basin/is that Federation’s last emblem put on canvas/by a boy’s ratchet-wrists, opening like wings; then ferns shut on his prodigious task.

Beside him, St Omer sketches the contour/of the peninsula with suffering not present;/his Madonna, a dancing lemon-skin whore,/signed ad gloriam dei fecit (that’s her scent!), [...].

[II] Like Vulcan, though, his gift is metaphor/beaten into hurricane iambs, lacking linear elation and science/on canvas. The Prodigal turns to the sea,/to splayed leaves of palms and the surf for/a poetry in which to name each quay.

[III] Man’s hardest divorce is from the sea. [...]

[VI] Here end the works of the sea, the works of love. – George Seferis

Light breaks the pivot of Roseau Valley/where the Prodigal looks up as an omen-cloud/crawls over Sunday, ending service early. (Far District, “New World Frescoes” 17–20)

Hutchinson’s turn towards the ancient and modern Mediterranean for points of identification and, thus, his distancing from British poetry, in this poem is further supported by its form. While at first sight Hutchinson appears to be following a Shakespearean sonnet form of three quatrains and a concluding couplet – a very common form in English poetry – he not only merges the last quatrain and couplet of each section of the poem to form a sestet, but also regularly breaks the pentameter throughout the poem. Thus, he tweaks the poem’s form and, perhaps more importantly, significantly changes its rhythm from a metre famously judged by Brathwaite to be inappropriate for expressing Caribbean sentiments to a less rigid pattern.

Hutchinson’s interest in the Mediterranean for points of identification is further confirmed upon examination of his second volume of poetry, House of Lords and Commons (2016). In said collection, comparisons of the Caribbean and Mediterranean are a recurring theme, e.g. in the poem “Marking in Venice”:

I hop off the vaporetto mooring in
the after-storm harbour, puff-chested, shouting:
‘Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them’,

hitting over a handkerchief vendor – allusions
are cheap on Piazza San Marco – Desdemonas everywhere, clutching skirts, wilding the wind.

My first time, yet a return (islands have that trick
or in his poem “The Wanderer” (37f.), which I will discuss in the following section on the notion of exile. This aspect of classical civilisations, which the authors in my survey frequently referred to with regard to their associations with the Classics (questions five to eight), had not been anticipated to be as central as it clearly appears to be to West Indian writers. I will therefore dedicate attention to this topos in Caribbean poetry in the second part of this chapter.
Analysis Part II: Notions of Exile, Migration, Displacement and Outsiderness in Caribbean Classical Reception

Interestingly, one of the themes the questioned authors touched on several times in relation to the Classics, colonialism and the Caribbean during my survey – particularly during my interviews with Bishop, McCallum and Goodison – were notions of exile, migration, displacement and outsidersness. This was somewhat unanticipated, yet it is of course hardly surprising considering Caribbean geography, history and politics of the past (e.g. transatlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage) and present (e.g. the aftermath of imperialism and the modern US American influence). This centrality of notions of migration and exile in Caribbean culture has been reflected in Caribbean literature of the last two decades. Moreover, in addressing such notions, Antillean authors of the twentieth century (e.g. Dionne Brand, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Jean Rhys) but also of the twenty-first century have frequently drawn on the Classics and ancient dealings with exile and migration, as I will show. Nonetheless, despite the centrality of the notion of exile in postcolonial and specifically Caribbean literature, the dominance of this theme in my survey was to an extent surprising since Graeco-Roman culture offers an array of other cultural assets and contact points for postcolonial cultures, as the previous two chapters have illustrated.

Given the described prominence of the themes of exile and migration throughout my survey, I will therefore delve deeper into their relevance to classical reception in Anglophone Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century and support my argument by drawing on secondary literature as well as primary texts more heavily in this second part of my survey analysis. Since exile, migration, displacement, outsidersness and related concepts foremost occur in Caribbean poetry in the twenty-first century – which, as I stated initially, has so far been given less attention than prose fiction in this study – I will focus my exploration of these themes exclusively on poetry. This is also appropriate since all survey responses, with the exception of Diana McCaulay’s and Robert Edison Sandiford’s, were contributed by contemporary Caribbean poets.

The significance of the themes of exile and migration to the study of classical reception in twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean literature is twofold and this will be reflected in the structure of this part of my analysis. On the one hand, there is personal exile, the physical and emotional experience of Caribbean writers leaving the Caribbean behind, often to pursue their careers. Such transnational movements of Caribbean writers affect how they perceive and approach the Classics, as I will show. On the other hand,
there is poetic exile, poetic explorations of the themes of migration, displacement and exile in contemporary Caribbean poetry that are inspired by Graeco-Roman literature and myth, as I will start by demonstrating.

The lines between personal and poetic exile in conjunction with classical allusions are of course blurry, as personal exile, that affects dealings with the Classics, can inspire poetic dealings with exile, that is stimulated by the Classics; this will be reflected throughout the chapter. One of the best examples of this confluence of personal and poetic exile and classical reception in twenty-first century Caribbean literature is the mermaid. As I am going to demonstrate, the mermaid represents, among other things, a creature that inhabits an in-between space – very much like Caribbean literati who have lived outside of the West Indies for so long that it is as if they do not have a sense of belonging anywhere they go. In this respect – and as we already saw in fiction in The Mermaid of Black Conch –, the mermaid frequently serves as a metaphor for autobiographical dealings with migration and its attached sentiments in contemporary West Indian Anglophone poetry. At the same time, Caribbean poetic explorations of the mermaid are more often than not stimulated by Graeco-Roman myth and literature, foremost the sirens and the episode of the nymph Calypso in the Odyssey. Therefore, I will conclude this chapter by exploring the mermaid in Caribbean literature against the backdrop of personal and poetic exile and classical references.

Poetic ‘Exile’ and the Classics

As Toivanen asserts, in the twenty-first century, “notions of dislocation, transnationalism, and exile are central to the construction of [...] postcolonial authorship” (165). Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic (1993) represented a cornerstone in the exploration of transnational movements and dislocated conditions, with which cultural studies have been concerned for some decades, and the relevance of the (instability of) notions of race, nationality and ethnicity in this paradigm. Moreover, Gilroy’s work is certainly relevant with regard to classical reception in extra-European contexts as Gilroy himself addresses the Eurocentric tendency in classical scholarship and the controversy surrounding Bernal and his Black Athena volumes several times in the work (Gilroy 60, 190, 215). It is of utmost importance to the study of notions of ‘exile’ among Caribbean writers to firstly point to Gilroy’s assertion that all Black Atlantic authors find themselves in a condition of being “in exile from Africa” (ix) and at the same time have an “inherently ambivalent relationship”, a status of dislocation if you will, “to the West and its dubious
political legacies” (47) (cf. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness, which is central to Gilroy’s work). With regard to culture in particular, Gilroy asserts that “successive displacements, migrations, and journeys (forced and otherwise) [...] have come to constitute [...] black cultures’ special conditions of existence” (111).

The Black Atlantic has in the 30 years since its publication repeatedly been critiqued for neglecting gender and class11 as well as for neglecting the diversity of the Black Atlantic by focusing on the Europe-US axis (Durán-Almarza and Álvarez-López passim). However, this criticism appears superficial and needs to be qualified with regard to the region that is relevant to this study, the Caribbean. Gilroy does not only take the Caribbean into regard throughout his work and draw on West Indian intellectuals such as Fanon, Glissant or C. L. R. James, his remarks certainly hold true for Caribbean contexts, even 30 years on. Caribbean culture, too, is shaped by the history of displacement and migration Gilroy describes, which is not least indicated by the sheer number of fictional and non-fictional writings that address these notions which have come out of the West Indies. Moreover, Gilroy’s observations are particularly relevant with regard to the classification of postcolonial Caribbean authors as ‘transnational’ or ‘exilic’ vs. ‘local’, a categorisation that has become central in postcolonial literary criticism, including on West Indian literature, over the last few decades.

If, as Gilroy cogently asserts, all Black Atlantic authors are “in exile from Africa”, the categorisation of a writer as ‘local’ (i.e. living in the Caribbean) or ‘transnational’ or ‘exilic’ (i.e. living elsewhere) loses relevance with regard to Caribbean authors since it can be concluded that they will have the described “special condition of existence” and, thus, a poetic sentiment of displacement ingrained in them through West Indian history and culture. This sentiment may be, and likely is, stronger if someone has had a personal experience of migration and is living outside of the Caribbean (as I discuss below with regard to the authors discussed in this chapter, who have all had such experiences of migration); nonetheless, due to cultural experience and memory, it applies to Caribbean home authors too. Either way, such questions of experiences and sentiments of dislocation, both cultural and personal, are highly relevant to Caribbean dealings with classical cultures, as Greece and Rome continue to repeatedly deliver points of contact and, thus, literary models for studies on exile and displacement in contemporary

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11 See for example Durán-Almarza and Álvarez-López passim. Criticism which is important, yet somewhat unjustified as Gilroy explicitly writes with categories such as gender in mind, yet chooses to focus on primary texts by male writers since they are more relevant to his argument, for reasons he states clearly and convincingly.
Caribbean literature, as I will evidence by means of the poetry of Hutchinson, Bishop, McCallum and others.

In a Los Angeles Review of Books interview in 2020, Jamaican poet Ishion Hutchinson stated:

There’s this notion in Heraclitus that geography is fate, which I more and more think is a true concept. One somehow ends up in a place unplanned, or even when planned, the way one experiences it is without preparation. In the case of the Caribbean poet, it’s an old story that, for the Caribbean poet to survive as a poet, he or she must leave the Caribbean, because there are no structures in place to support Caribbean writing. In a sense, the Caribbean poet is fated to leave. That’s a reality of the structures and cultures of literature and has less to do with whether one can actually write at home. One can write at home; I did, and many Caribbeans did. But to enter into a global context of literature — the publishing world, for instance — that reality, unfortunately, is still not developed in the Caribbean.

(Hutchinson in Charette/Cato)

Firstly, it is noteworthy that Hutchinson draws on the Classics throughout his interview with LARB, particularly when musing on notions of migration, and describes the reality of aspiring Caribbean authors by means of drawing on a quote from Heraclitus’ philosophical writings. As Hutchinson admits himself later in the interview, the phrase “geography is fate” is a misquote of Heraclitus’ ἔθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων (fragment 119), which Ralph Ellison famously used for the first time in his 1971 lecture “Remembering Richard Wright” exploring the historical movements of Black people and their implications on modern-day societal struggles and African American identity. Hutchinson’s allusion thus speaks to the fragmented character of Caribbean receptions of the Classics, which are often perceived by modern Caribbean intellectuals as results of chains of transformations with several intermediate stations — one being African-American intellectuals, as this quote illustrates.

However, my main interest in the quote is that it is relevant to note that Hutchinson’s remarks on Heraclitus confirm that some of Gilroy’s other observations in The Black Atlantic also hold true for twenty-first century Caribbean writers. Just like Gilroy

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12 Hutchinson also discusses notions of journeying in Homeric and Virgilian epic (as I showed in chapter one, 1) in the interview.

13 Ellison: “Earlier today while considering my relationship with Richard Wright, I recalled Heraclitus’ axiom ‘Geography is fate’ and I was struck by the ironic fact that in this country, where Frederick Jackson Turner’s theory of the frontier has been so influential in shaping our conception of American history, very little attention has been given to the role played by geography in shaping the fate of Afro-Americans.” (Going to the Territory 198) Ellison used the phrase “geography is fate” several times throughout his career, including during a 1979 lecture at Brown University remembering Dr. Inman Page, one of Brown’s first African-American graduates and later principal of and inspiration to Ellison at high school in Oklahoma.
outlines for Black Atlantic authors, current-day aspiring writers from the West Indies too are “forced to move to and fro across the Atlantic” (113) and go into personal ‘exile’ in order to pursue their artistic careers due to economic disadvantages, racial differences (159) and “class divisions forced upon colonial peoples by the bloody, terroristic processes of imperial rule” (151), the effects of which continue to affect postcolonial nations to this day.

Consequently, Antillean authors respond to this postcolonial reality of migration in their literature and, often, resort to classical allusions in doing so. One example of this is Hutchinson’s poem “The Wanderer”, in which he reflects on his existence and (forced) wanderings as a Caribbean poet and, remarkably, draws on the Classics more than once, with allusions to Xenophon’s *Anabasis* (lines 1ff. and 26) and comparisons of Caesars (24) and European ‘explorers’:

The Wanderer

Still clear from its very first shout, ‘Thalatta! Thalatta!’
is the clamour every wave brings, 10,000 voices
arched into one, shaking the mountain clouds down
to mist, power they sing, spitting salt into flames, to outlast
the memory of those who toiled with the mongoose
and snake, never to sit like a colossal Memnon as his songs
turn into brass croaks, language reentering the guttural
cave before the first spark of flint. I can tell you this, boy,
history is that rusty anchor holding no ship in the bay;
it’s mineral, natural as colonies of polyps in the reef.
I am no paragon of science; I am a drifter, a sea swift
some poet once used to make a crest in Time. Thunder
rifts the grain of his epochs, spinning Cortés from quartz,
repeating Pizarro along with all the names that depopulated
the trees of parrots and stuck a yellow disease in the sand.
There the steel fronds of unsheathed Christianity speared
the souls of the arrowroot and wild maize and erected bells
rid the clanging shells of their healing.

The chattering beads
went silent, the porous rocks choked in the ceremonial basin,
the earth absorbed the goat’s blood (same blood that gave the soil
around these parts its colour). You cannot trust the sea.
But it’s good to arrive in such a peaceful harbour. How lucky
you are to sit ignorant of which Caesar roams this century.
All our heroes are asleep in that aqua-grave, they will not drift
like Xenophon’s army to shore, and change their cry
to Triana’s ‘Tierra! Tierra!’ Light; land: substance.

Both cries have congealed
Hutchinson refers to Cyrus the Younger’s Greek mercenaries’, the Ten Thousand’s, exclamation of relief “Thalatta! Thalatta!” upon sighting the Black Sea after Cyrus had fallen in the decisive battle of his campaign against Artaxerxes. The Jamaican contrasts this episode from the Anabasis with the anecdote of Christopher Columbus’ Spanish sailor Rodrigo de Triana becoming the first European conquistador to set eyes on the Americas. This is a clever juxtaposition of Greek and Caribbean history and of the Greeks’ sighting of the sea, which generated hope, and the sighting of land by Columbus and his sailors, which meant relief and euphoria for the sailors but ultimately meant death, colonisation and slavery for the region. Moreover, Hutchinson contrasts the march, or migration, of the Ten Thousand with the transatlantic journeying of the European ‘explorers’ for the purpose of illustrating that European imperialism is the reason for his personal obligation to “wander” and go into exile in the US. Thus, this comparison of journeys from different epochs, including the classical Greek epoch, serves as critique of colonialism and its aftermath that is still felt in the Caribbean in the twenty-first century (How lucky/you are to sit ignorant of which Caesar roams this century./All our heroes are asleep in that aqua-grave, they will not drift/like Xenophon’s army to shore, and change their cry/to Triana’s ‘Tierra! Tierra!’). In this respect, Hutchinson’s references to classical literature in “The Wanderer” represent transformation processes of appropriation and hybridisation (Bergemann et al. 48 and 50).

Moreover, Hutchinson’s rooting himself in the Caribbean classical tradition and utilising classical references for the purpose of anti-imperialist critique in this poem is arguably supported by its form. The unrhyming three-line stanzas the Jamaican employs several times in The House of Lords and Commons read as a nod to the terza rima, which Walcott famously used in his own classically inspired, anti-colonial long poem Omeros.

Since I have touched on Hutchinson’s poetry collection House of Lords and Commons, which “The Wanderer” is taken from, it seems appropriate to address the potentially problematic nature of studying aspects of transnationality in postcolonial authors from a Western perspective, that is reflected in comments like the one made by US-American poet and literary critic William Logan in his New York Times review of House of Lords and Commons. Logan writes that Hutchinson’s “descriptions find their urgency in his unsettled place between two worlds (Poetry, for the exile, may be a surrogate home)”.

At this point, it is important to stress that by exploring notions of exile and migration in contemporary Caribbean literature, I am by no means suggesting that the
authors dealt with in this chapter are to be understood as representative of a hegemonic conception of postcolonial authorship as a dislocated condition that brings with it primarily transnational interests (Toivanen 165). This conception has resulted from the power asymmetry between the West and postcolonies and the subsequent frequent movements of individuals from the ‘periphery’ to Western centres, as described by Hutchinson in his interview with LARB. Unlike Western authorship, postcolonial authorship tends to be primarily constructed around questions of transnationality and dislocation, while the ‘local’ is often neglected as a meaningful category (Toivanen 165ff.); thus, critics’ interest tends to revolve more around authors’ routes than roots.

In addition, as Brathwaite shows (Roots 14ff.), the image of roots is an important one in this respect in the sense of a local heritage or tradition which authors may claim. Indiscriminate categorisations of postcolonial authors as ‘dislocated’, ‘rootless’, ‘uprooted’ or ‘exiles’ can therefore be reflective of different sets of values that are attached to postcolonial as opposed to Western literary traditions. Thus, overgeneralising classifications of postcolonial writers or remarks such as Logan’s romanticised description of Hutchinson’s condition as an “exile” who is “in his unsettled place between two worlds” can be problematic.

There are a number of important considerations to make with regard to the classification of contemporary Anglophone Caribbean authors as ‘exilic’ or ‘transnational’ vs. ‘local’. Firstly, it seems germane to this distinction to study the meaning of the word ‘exile’. Definitions of ‘exile’ (both the state and the person) typically put emphasis on the aspect of political obligation, for instance in the Oxford Dictionary of English, which defines ‘exile’ as “the state of being barred from one’s native country, typically for political or punitive reasons” and “a person who lives away from their native country, either from choice or compulsion: the return of political exiles”.

As Hutchinson’s quote illustrates, many Caribbean authors are compelled to leave the islands to pursue their writing careers. This is a forced journeying in the sense that it is a result of global political developments of the last centuries, as previously mentioned, and as such seems to fit the definition. Political-economic obligations for migration are probably the main reason why some Caribbean writers refer to themselves and their peers as ‘exiles’ – such as Brathwaite below–, even when they have spent many years and built a life for themselves in a foreign country of their choice, such as Hutchinson, who has been in the US for close to 10 years and is a professor at an Ivy League university.
I would like to draw on *Roots*, Kamau Brathwaite’s eminent work on Caribbean literature, but also on its historical influences and the role of movements (routes) as well as origins and traditions (roots) for West Indian authors, to illustrate my point. Brathwaite speaks of the dichotomy of Caribbean “writers at home […] wish[ing] for exile” while “writers in exile […] recoil from their foreign status” (29). He continues:

The dichotomy […] is a permanent part of our heritage. […] It is a spiritual inheritance from slavery and the long story before that of the migrant African moving from the lower Nile across the desert to the Western ocean only to meet the Portuguese and a History that was to mean the middle passage, America, and a rootless sojourn in the New World.

The dichotomy expresses itself in the West Indian through a certain psychic tension, an excitability, a definite feeling of having no past, of not really belonging (which some people prefer to call ‘adaptability’); […] In [certain Caribbean] novels the same pattern can be traced: the vernacular description of a world through which the writer moves unerringly to his inevitable ‘escape’.\(^14\)

The point now is: what has he done with his ‘escape’? How has exile treated him and how has he expressed it? (30)

Brathwaite’s quote echoes Gilroy’s statement presented above (which, in turn, was probably at least partly inspired by Brathwaite’s writing) that Black Atlantic authors find themselves facing a sense of being in communal “exile from Africa” that expresses itself in a feeling of not belonging anywhere, which is conditioned by the Caribbean people’s past of displacement through the Middle Passage.

In my interview with Bishop, who moved to the US to attend college and has lived there since (with short stays in Canada and France), she confirmed this sentiment of being an outsider in her country of destination as well as origin, of occupying an in-between space and status:

This morning as I was trying to get breakfast [in Miami] and I am involved in several projects, I realised that perhaps what I have become is like the mermaid, which is the outsider within wherever I go. I was born and I grew up in Jamaica but if I go there, I have lived so long outside of Jamaica that I am still the outsider within. Because I was born in Jamaica and spent my childhood there, I am forever marked by that and wherever I go, that makes me an outsider, too. So if I am an outsider within Jamaica, then I am an outsider within everywhere, right? (interview, Part II)

The historical political compulsion of African people to ‘migrate’ across the Atlantic to the West Indies and elsewhere and the resulting sentiment of not belonging, of exclusion,\(^14\) Cf. also Glissant, who wrote in his *Caribbean Discourse*: “The truth is that exile is within us from the outset, and is even more corrosive because we have not managed to drive it into the open with our precarious assurances nor have we succeeded altogether in dislodging it. All Caribbean poetry is a witness to this.” (153–154)
may appear to justify the label ‘exile’ for Caribbean people. However, it is crucial to note that, as Gilroy and Brathwaite showed, this cultural experience of forced migration and exile and the resulting sentiment of not having a past and not belonging affects both Caribbean local and transnational writers.

As a term to describe postcolonial Caribbean authors living outside of the Caribbean – which I am interested in in this chapter since all my survey participants except for McCaulay and Sandiford reside in North America or Europe –, however, ‘exile’ with its heavily political connotations seems questionable, reductive and, as Lorna Goodison confirmed, offensive.

In our interview, I asked Goodison about her poem “Making Life” from the 2005 collection Controlling the Silver (70–71), in which she, who has lived in the US and Canada for over twenty years and used to teach at the University of Michigan, reflects on one of her US American students who had just returned from “spring break” with “the cherry afterglow of Negril” still visible in their face asking her “Lorna, how can you/live in exile?” (Baugh). The student’s question implies how anyone born in the paradise that is the Caribbean islands could choose to leave them and Goodison, deciding against giving her rationale for leaving Jamaica because it “is too long a story” replies in the poem:

[...] so I wander
and wonder instead:

is it because we came from a continent
why we can’t settle on our islands?

Did our recrossing begin with deportation
of maroons to Liberia via Nova Scotia?

Are we all trying to work our way back
to Africa? For soon as we fought free

we the West Indians picked up foot
and set out over wide waters, to Cuba

and Panama, anywhere in the Americas.
And we never call ourselves exiles.

We see our sojournings as ‘making life’. [...] 
I first came north to paint pictures, but
maybe I wanted firsthand acquaintance

with the fanciful places named in songs.
Isle of Joy, the song Manhattan was.

I’m from island in the sun, I had to come

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15 For an excellent analysis of Goodison’s poem and entire poetry collection Controlling the Silver by the distinguished Jamaican literary critic Edward Baugh see his review “Making Life” in the Caribbean Review of Books.
and my sweetheart poetry joined me.
Not really exiled you see; just making life.
(Controlling the Silver 70–71)

In line with her view expressed in “Making Life”, in my interview with her, Goodison expectedly strongly rejected the term ‘exile’ in response to my question whether she would refer to herself as such:

I have been asked this question before and I said at the time, to call yourself an exile when you can get on a plane and be back home in a couple of hours...I can get on a plane and be back in Kingston in the space of a few hours, nobody is stopping me, politically or in whatever way. What I am saying is, you are poisoning the wells if you use a term like ‘exile’ to describe people who simply work somewhere else or have a home somewhere else and go back and forth.

I felt very strongly about this when I was first asked about it because at the time, Wole Soyinka was in exile because Abacha was going to kill him. I mean, I am not joking, he was going to end his life, so Wole was forced to flee from Nigeria. He went to different places and actually spent quite a bit of time in Jamaica. I was thinking I do not have the right to say I am an exile in the same way that he does. There are now going to be lots of people from Ukraine who are in exile or people from all over the world, from the African continent or people who are having to flee from various oppressive regimes – I am something else, they are exiles. [The fact that the term is used to describe Caribbean writers who live abroad in literary criticism] is complete rubbish! It is presumptuous and it is not right. (interview, Part II)

Similarly, Hutchinson rejected the label ‘exile’ in a 2017 interview and explained:

Perhaps you are asking if I feel uprooted. I try not to make too much of my move to the US. It was a physical move and it wasn’t forced. It was in search of better opportunities that weren’t available where I was. There is an emotional gravity about it of course – you miss where you’re from. But there are people who live in actual exile. For me, the borders are fluid. It makes returning quite easy. (in Majumdar, “Harvesting Voices”)

Finally, asked about the concept of exile and its relevance to her writing, McCallum too explained:

Certainly being a person who is from Jamaica but migrated, you know, in late childhood to the United States, I really have a very bifurcated experience of being Jamaican and American in that national context because I was not fully formed in either world. I spent almost the first decade of my life, a really formative period, in Jamaica and then I was transplanted – through a series of familial narratives that spurred this, that really had to do with geopolitical larger narratives of history. I then spent my coming-of-age decade in the United States. So I think of myself as being of two worlds [...]. And that would be very different to Jacqueline [sc. Bishop], who left, you know, when she was a teenager fully formed in Jamaica. So I point that out to say that all exile experiences are not the same and the term exile has political dimensions to it that are not actually true in my case or Jacqueline’s case. If you are comparing it to somebody who is writing out of
a Tibetan experience for example or Palestinian experience. My country exists, it is just that it feels as if I cannot go back there, right? And that is a different kind of exile. (question one)

These quotations show, as Toivanen also demonstrates by the example of Zimbabwean-turned-Canadian writer Yvonne Vera (passim), that a sweeping classification of postcolonial authors living outside of their native countries as ‘exiles’ is therefore problematic. Moreover, it is simply not always possible or useful to determine the status of postcolonial writers as either ‘exilic’ or ‘local’ from a cultural or literary point of view for various reasons (ibid. 166ff.). One of those is the risk of reductiveness I outlined above. In addition, and in consequence of the former, from within these Western centres, postcolonial authors are too often recognised by their level of marginality, based on a reductive definition of the “rest of the world” against the West. Illustrative of such problematic classifications as ‘exilic’ or ‘local’ are debates to which extent transnational postcolonial authors are able to ‘represent’ their home countries or are overwhelmed by ‘historical weightlessness’ – a term used positively by postcolonial theorists such as Rushdie (10ff.) but negatively by thinkers such as Boehmer (232) – due to their emigrant status (ibid. 172ff.). Spivak raises the question to what extent ‘representatives’ from the margin, who have physically, emotionally, culturally and mentally been transposed into the ‘centre’ – i.e. for the purpose of this study countries such as the US, Canada or the UK, which the majority of (aspiring) Caribbean writers migrate to – can be

16 Given the ubiquity of the term ‘exile’ to refer to transnational Anglophone Caribbean authors in Caribbean literary discourse since the era of Brathwaite up until now, which I hope to respond and contribute to, I have despite my above argument decided to keep the term yet put it into inverted commas to signal some distancing from its uncritical use.

17 “It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal. But let me go further. The broken glass is not merely a mirror of nostalgia. It is also, I believe, a useful tool with which to work in the present” (12). Note that Rushdie also goes on to speak of the aspect of the freeing of voices that the migrant status facilitates for authors, which dismantles authority and enables a polyphony of voices.

18 “Indeed, in certain lights it may seem that [migrant] writers’ connections with their Third World background have become chiefly metaphorical. They can appear to concern themselves with scenes of national confusion and cultural brouhaha primarily to furnish images for their art, or to deconstruct playfully the allegedly bankrupt narrative of the imagined nation. What this means, once again, is that they thus participate in the timeworn processes through which those in the West scrutinize the other, the better to understand themselves. For reasons such as these, though migrant writers are themselves often vociferously opposed to neo-colonial malformations, their work has drawn criticism for being a literature without loyalties, lacking in the regional and local affiliations which are deemed so necessary at a time of mass globalization […] [which] is probably one of the main factors explaining migrant writing’s popularity in the West.” (232)
deemed to speak for Third World subjects or whether they actually divert attention from the ‘real’ peripheries (cf. *In Other Worlds* 107ff.; *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 277).\(^{19}\)

While there has been some criticism of transnational West Indian writers representing Caribbean people from within the islands (I am thinking, for instance, of the invectives of Caribbean writer-critics Lucien and Miller against Roffey, even though these were obviously directed at more than her transnational status due to her residing in London; see also Goodison in *The Gift of Music and Song* 86f.), it is crucial to turn to Brathwaite once again:

> The often intelligently qualified optimism of a decade ago [i.e. the 1970s] has given way, more recently, to anxieties and misgivings, in several quarters, as to the direction that West Indian writing is taking. […] [Some] register their doubts as to the value, *to the West Indies*, of those writers who have moved beyond the world of the Caribbean sea. […] I want to suggest […] that whether we think it desirable or not, the emigrant has become a significant factor on the literary scene and is, in fact, a product of our social and cultural circumstances. I want to submit that the desire (even the need) to migrate is at the heart of West Indian sensibility – whether that migration is in fact or by metaphor. (*Roots* 7, emphasis in original)

Brathwaite’s assessment that migration is “a significant factor on the [West Indian] literary scene” remains valid in the twenty-first century. Transnational writers continue to be formative in shaping the West Indian literary canon and, therefore, the twenty-first century Caribbean landscape is unthinkable without contributions by transnational authors.

Given that many reputed Caribbean authors are based outside of the West Indies or at least divide their time between the Caribbean archipelago and elsewhere (as the authors questioned for this survey are representative of, with only two out of eight being fully resident in the Caribbean; cf. also Gikandi 33ff.) and given that our definition of what makes Caribbean literature and what critical criteria we define it by are fluid, it is important to ask to what extent it is those exilic authors who *make* what we consider contemporary Caribbean literature.\(^{20}\) In this respect, it is also important to consider that Caribbean authors who migrated to the USA, Canada, UK etc. have in the past often received more attention than those writing from within the region. Thus, it is also

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\(^{19}\) Cultural theorists such as Anderson (549) or Bhabha (63, 68ff., 108ff.) have also emphasised the reductiveness of such margin/center axes since they “deny difference” to/among diverse Third World subjects.

\(^{20}\) Cf. Benítez-Rojo, 103: “It is sterile and senseless to try to confine the Caribbean to a given geographical area. There are writers born in the middle of the Caribbean Sea who are not Caribbean in their writing; there are others born in New York who are.” Cf. also Davies “Writing Home” 59 and Brathwaite *Roots* 7 who states that exile is itself “a route toward a literary tradition” in the Caribbean.
necessary to ask why transnational authors should be compared to or distinguished from a standard of Caribbean literature which would be hard to define without these authors. This question is all the more acute since the works studied in the context of this project have shown that Caribbean authors based outside of the Caribbean display a sense of locality to the West Indies with regard to the settings of their works and the socio-political and cultural topics they address (to name only two aspects) that is not second to that of Caribbean-based West Indian authors.

Moreover, with regard to the representation of Caribbean people by transnational West Indian authors in the twenty-first century, I would like to invoke Hutchinson once more as he clarified his stance on the question of historical weightlessness of postcolonial emigrant authors, posed by critics such as Boehmer, in a 2017 interview:

I don’t see myself as a spokesperson. I am lucky to be a poet, to be someone who selfishly gathers the voices around him and plays with ways of registering those voices. To speak for someone is to think that they don’t have a voice. But there is a delight in speaking to people. And once you enter into speech, a distance, small or large, happens. A poet thrives off that kind of strangeness. Poetry makes you see or hear differently, as if for the first time. It results in questions, in wonderment. So, even when I use a ‘local’ reference, I hope that what I inspire in the reader is allowing her to see that reference in a new light, I hope that I have done some justice in making that image fresh. (Hutchinson in Majumdar, emphasis in original)

Previous remarks may appear to have drifted quite far away from the Classics but given the continuous undifferentiated use of the term ‘exile’ in literary criticism on the Caribbean, they are necessary for this exploration of exile, migration and related notions and classical references in postcolonial Caribbean literature, especially from a White, European perspective (as mine is). Moreover, the great number of different voices on exile in the Caribbean context once again highlights the significance such notions hold in West Indian culture and literature.

As I mentioned above, this significance is reflected in Caribbean classical receptions by transnational Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Firstly, it is because of the historically conditioned sensibility of Caribbean writers described by Brathwaite that the Classics offer a plethora of contact points of identification for them. Notions of journeying and exile occupy central positions in both Caribbean culture and classical literature, as Goodison also observed in our interview:

AS: But regarding notions of migration, home and outsiderness – are the Classics an inspiration for those kind of explorations in your poetry or Caribbean poetry more generally?
LG: Well yeah, there is quite a lot of wandering and travelling in the Classics. You know, you consider yourself always journeying so there are certainly parallels. The Rastafarians have co-opted the whole image of the ‘Children of Israel’, of being in exile in a strange land, of not being at home. That makes a lot of sense. (interview, Part II)

One example from recent Caribbean poetry of a contact point between Graeco-Roman literature and the *Odyssey* in particular and Caribbean history and experiences of migration more generally can be found in Minott’s previously mentioned poetry collection *Zion Roses*. In the poem “The Sea Will Claim Us All”, Minott refers to Odysseus’ wanderings as an ancient example of maritime journeys:

> Stones tossed from another shore, we rewrite our language into Creole.  
> Who hears tragedy in oceans, in shells, in sand, when our feet become fins?  
> We leave exposed cracks in contours of a continent; in the eclipse of Africa, colour-stains rain from wounded reefs. We get here, cure-all salt of the earth, travelling free like tragedy. I am but one fragment, washed-up on an eastern shore. Yet you sail west to find something of me; of Columbus & ‘horned monsters’. I dream a kinked soul, epicentre of an ocean’s quarrels. It’s no longer about Odysseus and shipwrecks – he has done his time on earth.  
> (“The Sea Will Claim Us All” 55)

While she employs a comparison between Caribbean people’s experience of the Middle Passage to Odysseus’ crossings of the Mediterranean, she rejects this analogy at the same time since Odysseus’ voyages do not stand comparison with the gruesome reality and implications of the Middle Passage.

Moreover, Minott uses this transformation process of negation (Bergemann et al. 52), in which she rejects the *Odyssey* as a contact point but in doing so constructs it as one, to give centre stage to Caribbean history and, thus, to recalibrate canons that traditionally prioritise the Classics and Western history over the local Caribbean one.

To provide another example, I would like to draw on Hutchinson once again. The blurb accurately describes his first collection of poetry *Far District* (2010) as a “transporting debut […] structured as the spiritual journey of a poet-speaker caught between two cultures”. It further emphasises that “[Hutchinson] captures the physical rhythms of his native Jamaica as well as the broader, metaphysical rhythms of distance
and displacement”. In her review of the collection, Bahamian playwright and poet Nicolette Bethel wrote:

This debut collection explores a familiar (for the Caribbean) tale of exodus and exile. Jamaica, for the poet, is a land of spirits and memories, a place frozen in time, and also a crossroads, a meeting place of the old world and the new, of the living and the dead, the desert and the drowned. To write, to be productive, the narrator must leave, and is only called back by death itself. […]

The ‘I’ in these poems becomes the archetypal Caribbean writer, the one who must leave his home to find it again, who must choose, at least in the beginning, between career-in-exile and invisibility-at-home, and who is perennially troubled by the decision. It is perhaps no accident, then, that mythologies — Caribbean, Biblical, African, classical — interweave in this book. (“Enigmas of Exile”)

Throughout the collection, it becomes clear that Hutchinson’s poetry does not only bridge geographic borders but also the separation of the present and the past, including the Caribbean’s colonial history but also reaching as far back as to ancient Greece and Rome. The titles of Hutchinson’s poems such as “New World Frescoes” (17–20), “A Small Pantheon” (24–25), “Walking with Atlas” (45), “Doris at the River” (47), “Icarus After” (54) or “Prometheus” (60) are an immediate testimony to the relevance of Greece and Rome to the Jamaican’s exploration of journeying and quest for identity in Far District. Moreover, the form of his poems in this volume leans toward the classical (for example, when they emulate Shakespearean sonnets) but is at the same time in places reminiscent of Walcott (when they loosely resemble the terza rima and are intermixed with Patwa). In this respect, Hutchinson’s collection also illustrates that the Classics are one of the past cultures Caribbean writers like to draw on to counterbalance their “definite feeling of having no past”, as Brathwaite put it.21

Other poems abounding in references to Graeco-Roman mythology in Far District, particularly relating to Troy and heroes’ journeys to the underworld as well as the journeys of the returning fleets of the Achaeans after the war, such as “The War Mule’s Account” (77–78) or “Night Field Pledge” (82–83) further attest to the aptitude of Greece and Rome to lend themselves to Caribbean contemplations of wandering and displacement:

The War Mule’s Account

Now, my business is to cart the dead
from both sides of the Scamander River.
No easy task going through the bustle; spearheads
whizzing my ears – but me, Balthus, I deliver.

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21 Cf. my discussion of the Classics as making up for a lack of evident ancient history in the Caribbean, chapter one 58ff.
My allegiance is to the shades, though I favour
braggadocious Aias (see, I was born behind the walls
now burning), and I like that cadaver-maker,
son of Thetis, the only man out there with balls.

But I hate those snooty black horses in armour,
plumed kingly, stamping fetlocks in the war horde –
those belly-up bastards adored like a good rumour
circling the battlefield, half-happy, half-bored
with the attention showered on them, even by the dying:
‘Bless, O gods, let winged Pegasus take me home,’
cried one pathetic brute as his soul came flying
off a bronze dagger that halved his helmet and dome.

I hate especially those so-called immortals,
dropping tears over cut-down Patroklos,
tossing long manes, but never lifting a morsel
of his to the funeral pyre. Man, I cuss
under the heft of Achaeans’ and Trojan’s weight
I take to the heap; I cuss the carrion kites
and cuss the baying mongrels in wait;
I cuss the long ten years of useless fight.

Yet I harness on, unnoticeable through ranks,
last witness of the city’s defeat by a wooden giant,
watching long boats set off on the defiant
Aegean, with loot and women, for distant
islands, not one ever saying ‘Thanks.’

(Far District 77–78)

Not only does Hutchinson liken the Caribbean Basin to the Aegean in this poem,
the speaker also relates to the Trojan War heroes’ journeys to the underworld as well as to
their return travels back across the Mediterranean after the war had finished. Perhaps the
speaker “watching long boats set off on the defiant Aegean” functions as a simile for
Jamaicans watching their countrymen leave and go into ‘exile’. Moreover, Hutchinson
addresses a theme that is very productive in Anglophone Caribbean literature of the
twenty-first century, as the works discussed in the first chapter showed: the epic notion of
what it means to be heroic. Other works that explore the epic concept of heroism include,
for instance, Robert Edison Sandiford’s *And Sometimes They Fly* (2013) as well as the
works of Jamaican Young Adult novelist Gwyneth Harold Davidson, whose novels such as
*Young Heroes of the Caribbean: Common Destiny* (2014) follow the lives of Caribbean
teenagers through a lens of classical myth and concepts of heroes.

Furthermore, Hutchinson’s debut poetry collection contains two indirect references
to the Classics, through the poetry of St. Lucian writer Derek Walcott and Jamaican writer
Francis Williams and their use of Latin in their poetry. Hutchinson’s “murmuring bones in
deep water” (“Bones Be Still” 16) are reminiscent of the speaking bones, the ossa (Greenwood “Middle Passages” 33ff.), in Walcott’s epic poem Omeros. The line “and he lives by driving his beasts under the sun” in Hutchinson’s poem “The Bauble-World” is a loose translation of the Latin line *flammiferos agitante suos sub sole jugales* from Francis Williams’ 1759 poem to George Haldane, governor of Jamaica at the time (see Gilmore 102–104 for the full original poem). Notably, both authors, Walcott and Williams, lived outside of the Caribbean, dividing their time between their native countries and the US or Britain respectively, and Hutchinson’s allusions to their uses of Latin underline the close connections between notions of journeying and classical references in Caribbean literature.

In a similar fashion, Pompeii (52f.) and the Aegean (26ff.) – as well as references to Venice and Cyprus (39) – are side by side to New York and, more importantly, the Caribbean in Hutchinson’s 2017 poetry collection *House of Lords and Commons*. Often, the lines between these places of Hutchinson’s journeys are blurred and the reader does not know whether Hutchinson is actually referring to a location in the Mediterranean or likening Jamaica to it:

> After Pompeii
> When the rivers sing in this country
> of drunk rivers, the ovens dance;
> the city’s heart splayed on that cobbled
> lane was transplanted from Pompeii,
> the Pompeii great rains fell coins
> *fullones* took and spun into silk,
> so we who walk in daylight are walking
> on the cries of a wild feast; […]
> *(House of Lords and Commons 52)*

This impression is further supported by comparisons of Jamaica to “Arcadia” in “Trouble on the Road Again” (54), a poem that is inspired by a Bob Marley track. Considering postcolonial political and economic dynamics and movements of postcolonial individuals to Western metropoles, such analogies are particularly interesting since they appear to draw parallels between modern centre-and-periphery configurations of London, New York or Toronto, cities with big Caribbean populations, and the Caribbean islands on the one hand to the ancient stylisation of Rome, the city of *negotium*, vs. the

\[\text{In line six of the poem (“fullones”), note also what appears to be a nod to a parody of the opening lines of the Aeneid, as found in a graffiti in Pompeii: “fullones ululamque cano, non arma virumque” (Minor 248f.). Once again, Hutchinson’s high degree of familiarity with Graeco-Roman literature and culture is evidenced.}\]
province, the place of *otium* and pastoral idyll that inspired the Arcadia of the Roman eclogues on the other hand. Such analogies are preceded in Caribbean literature in Kellman’s *Limestone* and Alexis’ *Pastoral* in the twenty-first century, as I showed in chapter one (76ff.), or in Walcott’s poetry, such as *Tiepolo’s Hound* (2000), where he writes about access to art in the colonies through Phaidon art books which during colonial times

[...] opened the gates of an empire
to applicants from its provinces and islands.
in the argument that the great works we admire
civilise and colonise us, they chain our hands
invisibly. Museums seen as magnetic prisons
for the gifted exile [...]  
(*Tiepolo’s Hound* 57)

but also in Barbadian author Kamau Brathwaite’s writings and Jamaican author John Figueroa’s poetry from the twentieth century, who both played with the Roman notion of ‘writing from the province’, as Greenwood observed (*Afro-Greeks* 18ff. and 236ff.).

Lastly, Indo-Caribbean, UK-based Vahni Capildeo is an example of a non-binary Caribbean writer who has repeatedly drawn on the Classics for explorations of migration and travelling, both themes that are central to their oeuvre, as the titles of their poetry collections suggest: *No Traveller Returns* (2003), *Undraining Sea* (2009), *Measures of Expatriation* (2016), *Venus as a Bear* (2018) and *Odyssey Calling* (2020). Not only does Capildeo come to terms with the cultural experience of displacement through the Indian Middle Passage, the dislocation from a majority experience and feelings of outsidership of their Indian ancestors after they had “voluntarily emigrated” to Trinidad as part of the indentured labour trade following the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean (Mehta 2ff.)

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23 For two fairly recent studies on Indo-Caribbean women writers and diasporic experiences see Mehta (2004) and Mahabir/Pirbhai (2013). I am not aware of any comprehensive works on classical reception in Indo-Caribbean writers (of all genders) of the twenty-first century but in light of Capildeo’s poetry and novels by Ingrid Persaud or Celeste Mohammed, to give only two further examples, this would be desirable. Persaud’s *Love After Love*, which I mention in the previous chapter, is reminiscent of Forbes’ *A Tall History of Sugar* in its rejection of religions such as Catholicism, Islam and Hinduism and draws on ancient pagan beliefs from classical antiquity as well as India, not least as a means of critique of homophobia in previously mentioned world religions (327, 340f., 386, 396f.). Moreover, Persaud’s depiction of Trinidad and New York, where protagonist Solo (the Latin meaning of his name is, not coincidentally, suited to its owner) migrates to, are reminiscent of Roman stereotypical depictions of Rome vs. the province, the place of *negotium* vs. *otium*, and perhaps it is not by chance that Solo’s portrayal of New York reads like Juvenal’s third satire on Rome, only in reverse (Solo is arriving, not leaving; 108f.). Mohammed’s *Pleasantview* (2021), on the other hand, is a novel in (interconnected) stories that depicts the events leading up to an attack on a Trini businessman and politician, in the chapter which Mohammed entitled “Ides of March” (and which is not the only noteworthy nod to Greece and Rome in the work).
but also their personal experience of migration (they relocated from Trinidad to the United Kingdom in 1991) in their poetry.

The Classics serve as contact points for all of these sentiments, for example in their poetry collection *Measures of Expatriation*. In this book, Capildeo “speak[s] of the complex alienation of the expatriate, and address[es] wider issues around identity in contemporary Western society”, as the blurb reads. Due to their personal experience of migration, Capildeo avoids “the easy depiction of a person as a neat, coherent whole” (ibid.) but instead delves deeper into what it means to be an “Expatriate./Exile./Migrant./Refugee.” (*Measures of Expatriation* 101), referring to the Classics throughout.

In the (almost) eponymous long poem “Five Measures of Expatriation” (93–103) that is divided into five sections, Capildeo inquires into various definitions of people living outside of their native country and in doing so encourages readers to rethink how we refer to border-crossing individuals (“Refugee. […] A path to fall off, a lorry underside to grip to. The arrival another unpacking. The station, built or unbuilt, ever inadequate, dark and cavernous.”, “Migrant: Migrant geese or some such was where I first heard the word” 101–102). While Capildeo highlights the difficulties connected to migration in this collection, they also make the point that it can be liberating and present new opportunities.

Throughout their exploration of the definitions of and associations with the terms expatriate, exile, migrant and refugee, the Trinidadian-born writer does not only use loose references to creatures from classical myth (“Trips home to Trinidad folded neatly into trips home to the UK. My aeroplane was a double-headed snake belting across the Atlantic.”, “Exile: Exile is Joseph. Exile is Moses. Exile is a boy or a man and sand and serpents.” 96 & 102) but also repeatedly Latin words (“Expatriation: my having had a patria, a fatherland, to leave, did not occur to me until I was forced to invent one”, “Refugio. A cavern. Mary and Joseph, straw in a rough box?”, “Exilio, esilio is one to call from mountain tops.” 95–102). This use of Latin mixed into the Standard English of Capildeo’s poetry is further accompanied by a reflection on language (“Language is my home, I say; not one particular language.” 101).

Similarly, in another poem from the same collection, “Far from Rome”, Capildeo examines the experience of travelling from one’s homeland through the lens of an unnamed Roman general:

Far from Rome
The blue dusk settles at a rate,
and fields can be forgotten
as they are; as-they-were appear
uppermost, lidded, swept smooth;
beneath, left still, kiln-fired
vessels belonging to him,
pleasing to his strong, torn hands –
so very much not in Rome,
this redeployed general.
The sea mixed in your eyes,
arrived at cruel decisions
yet stalling execution.
I would have sworn to die for you
sooner than try to live with you.
The swarms in my ears.
I swift your breath through mine.
A modern probe might take me
for less-than-human remains.
for nail-seed dirt and cumin.
I wouldn’t mind; being her,
and yours.

But not in this life – […]
Turn me to copper, one of you
gods he only temporized with:
melt me down then score me
the music for last things.

(Measures of Expatriation 81; indentation sic)

This general from Roman history and his lover seem to simultaneously be historical figures but also transplanted into Caribbean modernity in the sense that they serve as a canvas for Capildeo’s exploration of their own transnational movement and resulting emotions so that both coalesce. This process of assimilation (Bergemann et al. 48), this parallel between ancient figures’ journeys and displacements and modern Caribbean ones, thus perfectly illustrates the relevance of Greece and Rome to poetic explorations of migration in Capildeo’s poetry.

Capildeo’s poetry collection Measures of Expatriation also explores experiences of displacement and asylum from the perspective of Kassandra, the beautiful daughter of Trojan king Priamus and his wife Hecuba, who sought asylum at a statue of Athena when Ajax the Lesser attempted to rape her (Il. Pers.), one of the most frequently told stories in the Trojan cycle (New Pauly, s.v. “Cassandra”):

Kassandra #memoryandtrauma #livingilionstyle

[…] Like snakes licking out K.’s ears, men of power
seem caught up with her. More Twitter than other girls round her.
Your camera strikes. K.’s screwing up her eyes in a boat –
speaking for her sisterhood, but from that kind of family?
Why listen? She’s privilege. Complication. Must be spoilt. K.’s voice flares victim to her high-explosive hair; her thoughts dismissable; cuntly, if you’re a man, peripheral. Take sixty seconds to re-read each of the lines above. That took ten minutes: half as long as my death by stoning.

Athena, grey-eyed, justicer,
they’ve brought me back
as if each stone
broken for their roads
and the rare earths
mined for their devices
vocalized my far-flung blood,
but I have questions
for you, law-giver, spoiler:
also, plans to find
which women you move
in these greater days
of privilege and complication.
Holding on to you
was the safe zone
but the hero entered
held and raped me
in your precincts, justicer.

Why’d you let him do it?[…]

Does the burden of proof still fall on me, in modern courts? […]

(Measures of Expatriation 59; indentation sic)

In this poem, Capildeo alludes to an instance of metaphorical asylum in classical epic. The prose poem reads as critique of shaming of rape victims that, even though it follows ancient Kassandra’s story closely – it mentions Kassandra’s royal Trojan family background, Athena and the snakes who according to Graeco-Roman myth whispered in Kassandra’s ear and gave her her divination power –, feels timeless and like a modern story. Capildeo’s choice of Kassandra for the purpose of her criticism of the way (female) rape victims are treated by the press and public is therefore cunning since Kassandra’s ability to see the future makes her the perfect speaker for the poem to bridge the gap between classical antiquity and modern times. All of a sudden, Kassandra is transplanted into the modern world dealing with Twitter posts (line 5) yet still rooted in antiquity and foreseeing that “the burden of proof” will still fall on her “in modern courts” (line 33), making her story retain validity and relevance in the twenty-first century. In this regard, Capildeo’s Kassandra poem represents a poetic dealing with ancient asylum for feminist motives.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that the Classics have been central to Capildeo’s dealings with migration and displacement since they made their literary debut with No
Traveller Returns in 2003. Similar to their poems in Measures of Expatriation, in No Traveller Returns Capildeo also draws on the Latin language (“Lux Aeterna et Perpetua” 73ff. and 101) and comes to terms with autobiographical experiences of travelling and relocating through the perspectives of ancient men and women from Graeco-Roman culture: Theseus (90), Narcissus (93), Orpheus (95), Hades (97), Antigone (160ff.) and the patron saint of ‘spinsters’ Saint Munditia (163ff.):

[...] Look, the would-be travellers, they’re after culture. People hanging on to a mystique, they hail from the wrong area. Ticketed and quizzed like a load of illegal orange-pickers. Look at the faces, those london faces, it’s everyone you don’t think of, when you think of europe’s nations. It’s like going home. ‘Impossible to issue.’ Alien spouse. The wife’s denied. Mother and child, wait wait. Waiting to be allowed to love? The lucky ones are stamped, the lucky ones are charged. What fun. At the airport, I’ll start again. Places that don’t care a straw for their prayers. Let the journey begin.

(No Traveller Returns 164)

Capildeo’s remarks on the Christian martyr dating back to third-century Rome are interlinked with the author’s own personal experiences of moving from Trinidad to London, being the outsider in both countries and the struggle to apply for visas to visit other European countries – all issues related to migration which Capildeo returns to time and again in their later collections such as Odyssey Calling (2020).

However, Capildeo’s poetry is not only relevant due to their poetic exploration of exile, in which they repeatedly make use of the Classics, but it is also illustrative of how personal exile and the resulting change of environment affect Caribbean writers’ approach to the Classics more directly, as I will demonstrate next.
Personal ‘Exile’ and the Classics

Individual transnational movements of (aspiring) Caribbean writers affect their perception of and approach to the Classics. The status of being an exiled author inevitably implies a change of artistic influences and models as well as of audience and critical criteria (Nwoga passim), particularly for authors whose roots lie in the ‘Third World’ in a Eurocentric global literary market. As the authors questioned in my survey echoed, cultural and literary canons and their personal literary and cultural consumption determine their own literary production. Such canons, and the status that is attached to the Classics within them, vary between different regions, particularly between the former Caribbean colonies where the Classics were a central pillar of the colonial education system, and the UK, US or Canada – countries which the majority of Caribbean writers migrate to.

One obvious way in which personal migration impacts classical reception is the change of immediate classical influences an author is exposed to and directly or indirectly responds to in their writings. Vahni Capildeo’s poetry collection *Venus as a Bear* (2018) is a perfect example of a transnational West Indian poet responding to their environment and of how migration opens up new routes to the Classics. Many of the poems in the volume dwell on real places, objects or people that the poet encountered and I am particularly interested in the poems that directly respond to classical influences Capildeo was exposed to in the United Kingdom, the country they migrated to from Trinidad in 1991. Capildeo’s poems were stimulated by, to give just a few examples, the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, London (“Venus as a Bear: The Cabin Boy’s Prayer” 37), a bronze statue of Zeus (“Saying Yes to Zeus” 25) and a tapestry depicting Latona with her twins Diana and Apollo (“Latona And Her Children” 29) at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford as well as the Antonine Wall and artefacts on display at the Glaswegian Hunterian Museum in Scotland (“The Antonine Wall” 38–40), as the author explains (109–111). All of the poems are steeped in references to Roman history and myth, as the following excerpt from “The Antonine Wall” shows:

I. Rome’s North-Western Frontier: Invitation to a Civilisation

Imp. Caesar’s invitation to the ballista ball
by way of white lead acorn-shaped slingbolts arrives
via red-hot correspondence personally stamped,
launches like a no-shit eagle wreathing overhead;

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24 I am using the term ‘Third World’ in the Spivakian and Bhabhaian sense of referring to marginalised subjects originating from non-Western backgrounds (cf. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, *The Location of Culture* etc.).
promises ornate south-facing distance slabs, burnt wheat. Come on. For ages some of you've aped our style, pleading continuity in Ciceronian Latin taught at your good school in Wales. You look Celtic and sound dead. […]

(Venus as a Bear 38)

These poems are symptomatic of chains of transformation, of the author’s immediate engagements with classical antiquity outside of the Caribbean that are mediated by extra-Caribbean classical receptions - in the case of the mentioned poems British and European classical reception. Capildeo revisits British history and the role Rome has played in it, both through historical invasions of Britannia, such as by Caesar in the course of his Gallic Wars (cf. line 1), but also through the significance of the legacy of the Roman Empire, its culture and the Latin language in British society and education of the last centuries (“pleading continuity in Ciceronian Latin/taught at your good school in Wales”). At the same time however, these encounters with British classical reception inspire Capildeo’s West Indian dealings with the Classics. In this regard, these works can be distinguished from previously discussed poetic dealings with voyages and ‘exile’ that draw on the Classics since these poems do not necessarily deal with themes of travelling, rather their classical references are directly and perceptibly influenced by the author’s personal travels. As I mentioned before, the lines between what I refer to as poetic ‘exile’ and the Classics and personal ‘exile’ and the Classics are blurred. Nonetheless, Capildeo’s poems underline that it is crucial to specifically shine a light on how West Indian authors’ personal wanderings notably influence their approaches to and uses of the Classics.

I explained above that all Caribbean writers share a cultural sentiment and trauma of being in exile from Africa, which therefore renders ‘transnational’ writing a somewhat futile or meaningless category with regard to postcolonial Caribbean writers. However, for the reasons mentioned in this section, with regard to the study of classical references in Caribbean literature, the importance of location of authors is not trivial. As Gilroy asserts in the Black Atlantic, migration always creates complex cultural and political trajectories and hybridities (1–12). Thus, not only the Black Atlantic cultural experience of migration but personal migrations, too, have an effect on access to and perception of the Classics of West Indian writers. In addition to personal ‘exile’ opening up new routes of finding immediate artistic influences including classical ones, they also offer paths to different cultures of classical reception, in which different sets of values and connotations...
drastically different to those in the Caribbean are attached to ancient Greece and Rome, their art, literature and languages.

Especially if their emigration precedes their graduation from secondary school, personal translocations of West Indian writers can tremendously impact their relationship with classical antiquity. As I have shown in the previous chapters, classical school education impacts writers' perspective on and use of the Classics and therefore, whether an individual received their education inside or outside of the Caribbean will affect their approach to the Classics immensely. This was confirmed by McCallum in our interview in response to my question about literary traditions that influence Caribbean epic:

So if you are looking at Walcott’s generation, even a few after, the Caribbean is going to educate you in the Classics because it is a British system to this day, the model of education used in the Caribbean. Now, the canon has changed in terms of what is introduced to primary or high school students but the model for education is the same. [...] Of course I think it [Caribbean interest in and dealings with the epic genre] would be coming principally then out of the Graeco-Roman tradition because that was still being taught. But writers who go beyond that obviously are searching for other antecedents. So Brathwaite – you know, even in Walcott’s generation – he is looking for West African antecedents. He is deliberately looking for it. It is not being taught so you cannot say it is popular...[laughs]...I am not sure if either are popular anyway. But insofar as their being received traditions, the Graeco-Roman is still dominant, would be my guess, for a long time. (question eleven)

Moreover, dominant cultural discourses (aspiring) writers are exposed to, particularly during the formative years of school and university, in their country of residence seem to influence their perception and uses of the Classics.

My interviewee Shara McCallum, who left Jamaica aged 8 (The Gift of Music and Song 176), also stated when asked about her perception of the Classics and their links to British colonialism:

You know, I think my exposure to them because I am outside of the Caribbean reading them is to see them through a lens of Caribbean writers who are using them to oppose British colonialism. It is such a weird way that I come to it that I do not think I could also answer this definitively.

I see them as actually being used by writers to dismantle colonialism but, again, I am seeing them as a person outside the Caribbean reading them in the United States. (question eight)

In addition, asked whether classical references can have anti-imperialist effects later on, McCallum reasserted that she was only starting to “think through her own biases” and how she had “absorbed” the Classics as “something to be a part of” without dedicating too much thought to their colonial baggage as she received her secondary and
tertiary education and came of age in the US. In the US, education curricula were firstly free of relicts from colonial times that are taking decades to be removed from Caribbean curricula and secondly, the problematic history of the Classics as a British colonising tool in the West Indies did – for obvious reasons – not play as much of a role in US American cultural discourses as it clearly still does in the Caribbean (as my analysis above shows). In the US, the Classics did not form a central pillar of a (post-)colonial education curriculum the author would have been subjected to, which in turn shaped how McCallum regarded them, as she explained in our interview:

I had no idea where Greece was, you know? I could not have located it on a map, it was a place of the imagination. I did not understand this was even corresponding archaeologically with a real place when I was hearing these stories. They are figurative for me...but in their literal referencing of places and peoples and elevating of those over other stories that we could tell, I totally understand why they could weirdly, or maybe not weirdly but intentionally, promote Western civilisation above other civilisations. (question nine)

These statements by McCallum therefore evidence that personal wanderings and the concept of location are relevant to classical references in Caribbean poetry since they influence authors’ paths to and, consequently, dealings with ancient Greece and Rome.

As McCallum furthermore confirmed in my interview with her, her route to the Classics – that did not comprise as much exposure to their colonial connotations as it likely would have, had she been raised solely in the Caribbean – is one of the reasons why she has drawn on the Classics readily, frequently and in an unbiased manner in her poetry. The fact that she came to the Classics on her own terms, as she stated, is perhaps also why her main interest in them is directed towards certain less popular, less imperial aspects of the Classics such as marginalised female characters. In addition, many of her classical references are at the same time tools for her coming to terms with her own experience of migration, dislocation and the quest for a sense of belonging. The mermaid poems, which are numerous in McCallum’s oeuvre, are a perfect illustration of this, as I will show below. Similarly, her Penelope and Madwoman poems, both dominant tropes in her collections This Strange Land (2011) and Madwoman (2017) respectively, are representative of McCallum’s classical interests that centre around marginal figures and the notion of ‘exile’:

Penelope

Long ago I was the vision you needed,
image soldered in the mind’s furnace:
girl awaiting your arrival,
watching first light lacerate the sky.
You fancied the sea,
a playground for your dreams,
but storms have entered you
like sound enters the skin of a drum,
changing its course.
After years adrift, you return
wanting to know how I exist
apart from you and your myths.
Husband, I learned to bear rupture
by staring down dawn,
to weave as daybreak
split open my rib cage.
Tomorrow when you leave our bed,
the sea’s call already filling your ears,
you will find fishermen
hauling in nets, shimmering fistfuls
of fish with bloodied gills. Listen to me:
raise one flopping creature from the rest
to inspect the arc of its dying;
see how struggle inscribes itself on air.
Then say a prayer. Offer a blessing.
Acknowledge your power
To deliver from your palm
whatever life pulses there.
(This Strange Land 42–43)

This poem by McCallum and its classical exile allusion are immensely cunning: the Jamaican author turns to one of the best known travel and exile narratives from classical antiquity, Odysseus’ voyages, yet flips it on its head. The Jamaican shifts focus to Penelope and her feelings of ‘exile’ during her husband’s absence of twenty years and feelings of solitude on the one hand, even though or maybe because she is surrounded by her suitors. On the other hand, she draws attention to Penelope’s sense of displacement in her marriage upon the return of her estranged, unfaithful husband. McCallum’s feminist revisiting of the Odyssey is thus symbolic of her unique path to and use of the Classics, that is arguably at least in part conditioned by her emigration to the US.

As I mentioned, this unique approach of McCallum’s is also reflected in her Madwoman poems, especially “Madwoman Exiled” and “Madwoman as Rasta Medusa” (Madwoman 51–52). Madwoman, in McCallum’s poetry, is autobiographically inspired and responds to issues of race, gender and sexual assault as well as parent-child relationships. However, madwoman is also a central trope in an admittedly relatively small
corpus of twentieth-century Caribbean women’s writing, such as in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) or Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s *As the Sorcerer Said* (1982), which likely inspires McCallum’s poetry. In this female Caribbean canon, madwoman is also a metaphor for the damaged West Indian psyche (cf. O’Callaghan passim) and as such, related to notions of migration, exile and grief over the loss of people and places, which is reflected in McCallum’s poetry (McCallum in *The Gift of Music and Song* 174). Simultaneously, in McCallum’s works, madwoman is classically inspired with her appearance drawing on Medusa imagery (“This face, etch with wretchedness,/these dreads, writhing and hissing/misery”, “Madwoman as Rasta Medusa” *Madwoman* 52) and Graeco-Roman myth and history since madwoman “was/is also the women in my family and the women from history and myth who interest me most – women who won’t conform to what the societies and cultures they’ve inhabited throughout time expect or want them to be. Women who chafe against convention” (McCallum in *The Gift of Music and Song* 174).

In this respect, McCallum’s madwoman poems with their classical allusions are certainly anchored in the female Caribbean literary tradition. Moreover, they are representative of the shared exploration of aspects of gender and history that is typical of Caribbean women’s writing, as I demonstrated in chapter two. McCallum’s feminist dealings with ‘exile’ through a classically inspired madwoman reorder the narrative of history since they give voice to formerly marginalised female characters and themes. They also recalibrate global canons since McCallum treats classical materials as on a par with other literary traditions and inspirations, thus devaluing the Classics’ colonial and elitist connotations to an extent. In this respect, according to postcolonial theorist Gikandi, McCallum’s madwoman poems are illustrative of a central aspect of Caribbean exile discourse (58f.):

[... three aspects [...] are central to my discussion of the discourse of exile in the Caribbean: to resist colonial authority, the writer devalorizes European cultural ‘shrines’; his or her discourse then invites us to step outside a world of given meanings and identities; finally by establishing new semiotic and ideological connections between the colonizer and the colonized, the author sets out to reorder the narrative of history. (Gikandi 58)

McCallum’s poetry draws on the Classics and particularly its female figures to question Western historiography and literature and its modes of exclusion and silencing. It both devalorizes and reconfigures the Classics and Western canons as “European cultural shrines” and reinvents a Caribbean literary tradition through appropriation of the Classics (among other means).
As Gikandi argues (58ff.), it is the personal experience of ‘exile’ from the Caribbean, the critical distance it entails, that enables and drives West Indian authors to question (post-)colonial narratives and canons and set out on their “colonization in reverse”, to borrow the title of Jamaican writer Louise Bennett’s poem (*Jamaica Labrish*, 1966), which Gikandi draws on throughout his study. As McCallum herself confirmed, this observation certainly appears to hold true for the Jamaican-American writer. In this respect, McCallum’s feminist poetry illustrates the significance of exile, both as a personal experience as well as a theme, to contemporary Caribbean classical reception.

Furthermore, Gikandi identifies another central aspect of Caribbean exile discourse that is relevant to Caribbean classical reception. Gikandi maintains that since “questions of nation and culture are generated in exile, where the mythology of empire – especially the belief that the colonizer and the colonized share a common identity – is exposed by the harsh realities of race and nation”, “exile generates self-knowledge in the colonial situation” (56f.) for the transnational Caribbean author. Consequently, Caribbean ‘exile literature’ in particular is prone to being self-reflective and in addition often autobiographical, as we also saw in the case of Ishion Hutchinson’s poetry. It is thus germane to take into consideration that autobiographical exile literature has its roots in Graeco-Roman literature and specifically Ovid’s writings from Tomi (especially *Tristia* 4.10), one of the earliest known pieces of literature to reflect on the self and one’s identity and culture (Misch 295ff.; Fairweather passim). Ovid’s autobiographical exile literature serves as literary model for autobiographies to this day and is yet another way in which the Classics appeal to Caribbean writers as sources of inspiration. Bishop’s poem cycle on Ovid’s exile in *Snapshots from Istanbul* highlights that this early autobiographical literature is an important reference point for transnational postcolonial Caribbean authors.

Bishop’s collection opens with a poem entitled “Ovid in Exile”, which – not entirely coincidentally – simultaneously reads like the report of a West Indian author who relocated from Jamaica to New York, as Bishop did and where she has spent most of her adult life until her recent move to Florida, as she told me in our interview. The poem goes:

```
Ovid in Exile
Oh I repent!
I repent!
Emperor,
I long to come home.
It is cold here –
the wine turns to ice;
```
when I talk:
  an awful gray-blue smoke.
I am out among the barbarians.
I can hear them, even now,
  drawing closer and closer.
Years. It has been nine long years –
I am tired. Dispirited.
There are cracks in the walls.
And only these crude
writing instruments,
  this heavy stone tablet,
to keep an old man company.
(Snapshots from Istanbul 9, italicisation sic)

Bishop’s engagement with Ovid’s exile and autobiographical writings he produced in Tomi at the same time function as her own autobiographical writings about her experience of ‘exile’. It is historically correct that Bishop’s lyrical Ovid complains about the weather (cf. Ovid’s dramatic descriptions of the winter in Tomi, Ov. trist. 3.10.9–50), yet it is equally important as a contact point to Bishop’s personal experience of migration. When asked about her “making life” in the United States, she has repeatedly said that she particularly misses the Jamaican climate with its seasons, fruits, flowers and landscapes, which is also among the reasons why she eventually relocated from New York to Florida (cf. my interview with Bishop and the Gift of Music and Song 17). Thus, this poem highlights not only the relevance of Roman exile literature and its status as early autobiographical literature as inspiration for Caribbean exile discourse but interestingly, also some of the factual, tangible parallels between Ovid’s and Bishop’s experience, which provide yet more contact points. In a sense, Bishop’s allusions to Ovid are therefore exemplary of contemporary Anglophone Caribbean writers turning towards other, often past, cultures and particularly ancient Mediterranean civilisations to try to find themselves in these and establish a history and identity for themselves.

Other examples of Bishop employing classical references to exiles from Graeco-Roman history in order to explore her personal immigrant status through their perspective in the collection include “Ovid’s Plea”, in which particularly the last line resonates with anyone who has experienced a move to a foreign country, regardless of whether it was forced or voluntary:

Oh Augustus!
Augustus!
Do not send me out
among strangers!
Oh Augustus!
Augustus!
Do not send me away
from all that I have known!
(Snapshots from Istanbul 29, italicisation sic)

This theme of exploring personal experiences of ‘exile’ through those of ancient figures is perpetuated in the other Ovid poems in the collection (43–49, 65, 69) but also in Bishop’s poems which take a female ancient perspective on exile such as “Scribonia” (41) and “Julia” (42). These poems that shift the focus to Julia the Elder’s exile evidence Bishop’s high level of acquaintance with Roman history, as Julia and Ovid’s adultery is, among other theories, speculated to have been the cause for Ovid’s and her exile, as Bishop alludes to in “Ovid Answers His Critics” (65) and her critical poem about Augustus (49). Moreover, similar to McCallum’s Penelope and Madwoman poems, these works that give voice to usually neglected female Graeco-Roman experiences of and thoughts on exile not only unravel questions of Bishop’s own identity but read as feminist criticism of paternal societies and the roles of women in them, that is universal and not temporally or locally restricted to the classical period or Rome. In this regard, the displacement addressed in these poems that rewrite the gaps of Graeco-Roman myth and literature is twofold since both the physical exile of these women but also their metaphorical displacement are thematised:
Finally, the collection closes with yet another poem in which the reader cannot help but notice Bishop’s autobiographical voice shine through, not only when the speaker Ovid addresses the “insatiable need to write” but also remembers his father and ponders on what “he tried but ultimately ended up running/away from”. Bishop, who was estranged from her mother and grew up with her grandmother, has often spoken dearly of her father in interviews (e.g. The Gift of Music and Song 15) and pays attention to and treats him with tenderness throughout her poetry. Moreover, as Bishop revealed in our interview, she originally planned to become a medical doctor but “ran away” from this proposition and let art, both writing and painting, take over (“Let’s face it, you did this to yourself”):

Ovid’s Resolution

To live a life in exile is not so bad.
Once you have gotten used to the idea
that you will never see your land again,
will never see your people again,
will never go back home again.
Truthfully, the people here are not so bad.
Once you can bring yourself to look at them,
to actually speak to them, once you have gotten that taste
of longing outside your mouth.

Let's face it, you did this to yourself,
you and that cursed pen, that piece of papyrus paper,
and an insatiable need to write.

What was it that your father wanted for you?
(You were a good boy; for a while you tried to please him.)
What was it that you tried but ultimately ended up running
away from? And what was it, fate, oh double-handed fate,
that you finally came running into?

*(Snapshots from Istanbul 69, italicisation sic)*

In these poems, as in other ones I have previously mentioned, both personal ‘exile’
that makes unique, distinctly different paths to Graeco-Roman culture accessible to West
Indian poets as well as poetic engagement with ‘exile’ that is stimulated by classical
mythical, literary or historical models are relevant and flow into one another. Capildeo’s,
McCallum’s and Bishop’s poetry demonstrates that personal exile matters to and shapes
current-day Caribbean classical reception. On the one hand, because of the large number
of twenty-first century Caribbean writers who spend their lives outside of the Caribbean
yet define its literature, including Caribbean Classics. On the other hand, because the
distance from the Caribbean enables authors to take a different approach to history, both
the colonial history of the West Indies that has implications on its cultural narratives and
identities, but also Graeco-Roman history and its history of reception.

This critical distance brought about by exile also affects Caribbean poetic
explorations of the Classics in another way. After I had read multiple volumes of poetry
produced by Anglophone Antillean writers in the twenty-first century, it occurred to me
that no study on the theme of exile in Caribbean literature and its Graeco-Roman
influences would be complete without dedicating space to the mermaid. She is heavily
influenced by classical myth, symbolic of liminality and in-betweenness and regularly
lends herself to investigating emotions connected to migration and displacement in
Caribbean poetry, particularly by women writers, as I will conclude by showing in this last
part of this chapter.
‘Exile’ and the Mermaid

As could be seen in chapter two with Monique Roffey's Costa Book of the Year 2020-awarded novel *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, the mermaid has been and continues to be a central motif in Anglophone Caribbean fiction and poetry. This is not least because she is enshrined in Caribbean culture along with the ever-present communal experience of the Middle Passage since the mermaid is often portrayed as having accompanied the displaced people of Africa across the Atlantic Ocean (Calderaro 433). Such tales reflect the African influences of the mermaid, rooted in water spirits and divinities from Yoruba, Bini, Igbo and Babylonian myth, that continue to shape Caribbean representations of the mermaid to date. However, the mermaid as a literary figure is a product of influences from around the globe, with Graeco-Roman myth being a central reference, particularly sea and river nymphs as well as sirens, mythological women-headed bird creatures whose songs seduce sailors and make them forget their home. In classical myth, sirens are the companions of Persephone and are given wings by Demeter after Persephone’s abduction by Hades. Moreover, with their beautiful singing voices being one of their most defining features, as is for instance described in the *Odyssey* (book 12) or the *Argonautica* (book 4), sirens share some resemblance to the Muses, even though in contrast to them, the sirens are depicted as dangerous and destructive (Pollard passim). As I will show below, West Indian depictions of mermaids are equally ambiguous and reflect both nurturing and dreadful qualities that were ascribed to their Graeco-Roman predecessors.

In Caribbean poetry, the mermaid – in her various facets that include Calypso, Rivermumma or a siren – tends to appear more frequently in works by women writers. She is a central component of the oeuvre of Jamaican poets Jacqueline Bishop, Shara McCallum and Lorna Goodison, in which the hybrid creature regularly serves as metaphor for explorations of the themes of ‘exile’, belonging and identity. Thus, I will focus on these women writers in the final part of this chapter. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that male Caribbean writers equally employ the mermaid, for various purposes: Kei Miller uses her in his imperialism-critical poem “The Law Concerning Mermaids” (39), in which the mermaid represents an exotic outsider (racial ambiguity certainly plays a role) who is “regulated” by intrusive colonialists, just like the Caribbean people who continue to be under foreign influence (*A Light Song of Light*, 2010). Similarly, in “Trafalgar Square” (43) and “Song for a Ship’s Figurehead” (18), two of the poems in the collection *On the Coast*

(1972) by Trinidadian-born, yet transnational writer Wayne Brown, the mermaid is symbolic of racial frictions (as she also is in Roffey’s novel; cf. chapter two 142ff.) and simultaneously serves the purpose of critiquing European intellectualism and imperialism (“If I shared her history, Greek like the rest,/I’d share that foetid anchorage too” 43).

In all of the above mentioned male and female poets, however, and throughout Caribbean poetry, the mermaid is foremost representative of a sense of ‘exile’, of occupying a liminal position between the land and the sea, always displaced and “torn between duty and desire” (Calderaro 420). Thus, the mermaid is so apt to serve as metaphor for tensions between the local and the transnational, for (often autobiographically inspired) quests of belonging and identity. Therefore, due to her symbolical character in Caribbean culture and literature and her apparent classical influences, the mermaid needs to be given special attention in this study on poetic and personal ‘exile’ and their classical inspirations in contemporary Caribbean literature.

I would like to continue where the previous section left off, namely with poetry by Jamaican writer and visual artist Jacqueline Bishop. The mermaid is a recurring trope in Bishop’s visual art as well as poetic and fictional works, as her autobiographically inspired novel The River’s Song, in which a siren’s journey is mirrored in protagonist Gloria’s coming-of-age story, illustrates. However, it is Bishop’s poetry in particular in which the mermaid, or “Rivermuma”, first emerged and repeatedly resurfaces. The poem “Calling Me Back Home” from Bishop’s 2006 collection Fauna is typical of the woman writer’s depiction of the mermaid in a number of respects. Firstly, Bishop’s mermaid draws on classical imagery: she has a beautiful singing voice, which evokes resemblance to the Muses (note the dedication of the poem “for the muse”, Fauna 63, italics sic). Moreover, the mermaid of Bishop’s poetry makes passers-by forget their home or destination (“As for me/I do not walk by bushes/without hearing a woman’s voice singing,/pass a body of water and not see/a familiar shape/small and dark/calling me back home”, ibid. 65), which evidently appears to be inspired by sirens from classical myth. Furthermore, just like sirens in classical antiquity, Bishop’s mermaid is an ambiguous woman-animal hybrid creature with both intimidating, menacing, yet also nurturing, motherly qualities:

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26 Brown’s academic career, some of which he spent lecturing at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad, also brought him to Jamaica, the UK and US.

27 Wayne Brown is a West Indian writer of the twentieth century whose oeuvre deserves but still awaits scholarly attention in the field of Classics and colonialism. In On the Coast alone, there are, in addition to the mermaid poems, allusions to an African Hannibal marching elephants against Rome as well as biblical allusions in Noah (28ff.), to point out only some of the classical references in the collection.

213
(My Great Grandmother had warned me
not to walk alone in the bushes,
not to talk to strangers
– especially not women in the bushes –
and never to look into the water.) […]

I was afraid,
the dark and the deep
– a frightening feel
of falling –
she held me close,
my head against her bosom,
until we got to the bottom,
where she fed me roots and herbs
that made me sleep.

(Fauna 63–64)

In addition to sirens, river nymphs from Graeco-Roman antiquity seem to serve as further models for Bishop's mermaid, not solely because of her hybrid appearance and her association with a river, but also due to her association with dance, which is another typical characteristic of Graeco-Roman nymphs:

When she thought no one was looking
she removed the dress they had given her,
crawled naked into the river.
Men later insisted
they saw something silver in the sunlight
– looked like fish scales –
one even said it had grown a tail. […]

She stepped from behind
a tree,
small dark woman,
chain of teeth around her neck,
locked hair, webbed hands and feet.
She called me to the river's edge,
‘Come dance with your water self,’ she said,
standing in white mist near blue falls.

(Fauna 63)

In this respect, it is evident that while classical influences on the Caribbean mermaid are somewhat miscellaneous, they are nonetheless central to her depiction in twenty-first century poetry.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe in the previous quote that the mermaid is clearly a reflection of the author ("your water self"), a figure that lends herself to autobiographical explorations. In the case of Bishop, such autobiographical explorations are primarily concerned with issues of being a transnational Caribbean writer (as I mentioned previously, Bishop resides in the US) and the implications of migration for
one’s sense of belonging and identity. As Bishop explained in our interview, the mermaid is symbolic of exactly such questions:

So I have been on the track of this mermaid for a very long time because she was the first person... if you look in my collection *Fauna*, it is a poem to the muse and it is a mermaid. And it finally came to me, what the mermaid was all about, which is: she occupies the in-between space, which is the space of the exile, of the person in exile. She lives in water but she can also come up out of water. She occupies that liminal space, let’s put it that way. And so, there are multiple understandings of exile because you can be in Jamaica and feel alienated from the culture and be an exile as well. So maybe because of the ideas that we engage with as women writers, it puts us in exile, so that is to answer the question. (interview, Part II)

As Bishop herself pointed out, this sense of ‘exile’ and liminality has several nuances of meaning. On the one hand, the mermaid is symbolic of physical displacement and the resulting lack of a sense of belonging to a place, culture, environment or people, just as the transnational writer experiences in their chosen country but also their home country they have left behind.\(^{28}\) On the other hand, ‘exile’ for the transnational Caribbean woman writer such as Bishop also implies a sense of metaphorical displacement due to gender, of the kind that Trinidadian-turned-Canadian author NourbeSe explained with respect to Caribbean woman writers (cf. chapter two 105ff.). The mermaid is equally representative of such notions of liminality and outsidersness that result from gender and societal alienation, from the ideas women writers engage with that “put them in exile”, as Bishop describes it.

These observations are confirmed in Bishop’s most recent mermaid poems, “Sweetie Come Brush Mi” and particularly “Rivermuma Remembers Her Home and Her Mother”, both of which the author contributed to *Stand* magazine’s edition of Black women and women-identifying poets (January–March 2022). I am particularly interested in the latter poem as it encapsulates a sense of female ‘exile’, a solitude that is caused by societal roles of women as domestic figures who care for their children and get wronged by men, but also an attempt to break away from such roles:

*Rivermuma Remembers Her Home and Her Mother*

Late at night when she thought even I,
her eldest, the one who would always set-up and help her
was sleeping, Mam' would look around at all she had created,

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\(^{28}\) Note Bishop’s previously quoted statement from our interview: “ […] perhaps what I have become is like the mermaid, which is the outsider within wherever I go. I was born and I grew up in Jamaica but if I go there, I have lived so long outside of Jamaica that I am still the outsider within. Because I was born in Jamaica and spent my childhood there, I am forever marked by that and wherever I go, that makes me an outsider, too. So if I am an outsider within Jamaica, then I am an outsider within everywhere, right?”.
the walls lined with colorful newspaper. Some nights she would wander off, leaving the front door wide-open, to climb atop a smooth white stone in the middle of the river. She would pull out her hair, one plait at a time, all the while singing some song about lost love, a man who had wronged a woman. Reader, if people from afar came to hear her, if people from afar came to stare upon her, if people near and far became enchanted by her, this woman sitting and singing by herself, late at night, in the middle of the river, if people of her own sex, young and old, chose to wade out into the water to get closer and closer to her, this sad and lonely woman, who by then had learnt to tuck her tale beneath her, hide her gills to live and move about in the world of the other, you tell me: how can this be the fault of my mother?

(Stand 21)

These poems underline not only the autobiographical qualities of the mermaid in Bishop’s poetry but also her feminist qualities since the mermaid draws attention to women’s feelings of outsiderness, solitude and sadness, which are linked to gender expectations and often not addressed enough, just like the mermaid’s tale/tail, that has been tucked away, and just like her moving about in the world/world of the other, suggest. Sometimes, the mermaid of Bishop’s poetry not only problematises such female notions of ‘exile’ and tries to break free, but actively subverts gender roles, as I showed in chapter two (145) with regard to her poem “Sirens” in Snapshots from Istanbul.

Lorna Goodison’s poetic mermaid or river mumma is equally symbolic of ‘exile’ and displacement in ambivalent ways. As Lorna Goodison explained in my interview with her, the mermaid in her poetry is a product of classical mythology as well as other mermaid tales from around the globe. Like Bishop’s “Rivermuma”, Goodison’s poetic mermaid has followed her throughout her career as a poet, from her second collection of poetry published in 1986, I Am Becoming My Mother (“On Becoming a Mermaid”) to her 2005 collection Controlling the Silver, which includes the poems “River Mumma” and “River Mumma Wants Out”.

Both Bishop’s and Goodison’s mermaid poems are accompanied by numerous poems that focus attention on “making life” in foreign lands and have a tone of joy and excitement for opportunities but also sobriety, uncertainty and longing for what is being
left behind (e.g. her poem “Guernica”). The mermaid, this hybrid creature that fully
belongs neither on land nor in the sea, certainly supports such notions of displacement
brought about by migration in Goodison’s poetry. “On Becoming a Mermaid” sees the
violent transformation of a woman into a fish, her pain signified not least by the several
slashes that intersect the poem. Moreover, the poem makes it clear that there is no return
for the mermaid to being the woman she once was, just like there is no return for the
migrant author.

Moreover, both Goodison’s and Bishop’s mermaids display previously mentioned
motherly characteristics that bear resemblance to depictions of the sirens as handmaids
of Persephone. Especially in Goodison’s poem “River Mumma”, the mermaid is depicted
as a nursing, protective mother figure that will attend to anyone who needs to be cured or
needs help solving their problems:

[… we still bring her this serious crab bite case
who is in need of her specialist treatment
(hair of dog; water cure for bite of crab),
for maybe River Mumma medicine can cure her.

We bring a wedge of brown soap for cleansing,
a lost wedding ring found, to make payment.
Details of one fraudulent agreement we seek
to bleed indelible ink from, Mumma please come.

(Controlling the Silver 53)

But like Bishop’s mermaid, Goodison’s River Mumma wants more from life than being
confined to her role as a mother, as the poem that follows directly after, “River Mumma
Wants Out”, makes clear29:

[…] Mumma no longer wants to be guardian
of our waters. She wants to be Big Mumma,
dancehall queen of the greater Caribbean.

She no longer wants to dispense clean water
to baptize and cleanse (at least not gratis).

She does not give a damn about polluted
Kingston Harbour. She must expose her fish
torso, rock the dance fans, go on tour overseas,
go clubbing with P. Diddy, experience snow,
shop in those underground multiplex walls,
spending her strong dollars. […]

(Controlling the Silver 54)

29 Cf. the poem “The Mermaid” by McCallum (This Strange Land 31) for a similar depiction of the
mermaid as a mother who breaks free.
It can be seen that Goodison’s mermaid, too, is symbolic of displacement of women in society, of ‘exile’ as confinement to the societal role of being a mother and emotional rock of a family or community. In this regard, the mermaid not only lends herself to Caribbean poetry as a classical influence due to the centrality of the sea in both Graeco-Roman and Caribbean culture but also because, as I mentioned previously, female characters were given less attention in Graeco-Roman myth and literature and, thus, their stories are free to be rewritten, including for autobiographical and feminist Caribbean purposes.

Finally, this very idea of a mermaid that plays a secondary role in Greek myth but takes centre stage in Caribbean poetry is also represented in Shara McCallum’s sequence of mermaid and siren poems that form the last part of her debut poetry collection *The Water Between Us* (1999, pp. 67–85)\(^{30}\), particularly in the poem “Calypso”:

Dese days, I doh even bada combing out mi locks.  
Is dread I gone dread now.  
Mi nuh stay like dem oda ones, mi luv–  
wid mirra an comb,  
sunnin demself pon every rock,  
lookin man up and down de North Coast.  
Tourist season, dem cotch up demself whole time in Negril,  
waitin for some fool-fool American,  
wid belly white like fish,  
fi get lickle rum inna him system an jump in.  
An lawd you should see de grin.  
But man can stupid bad, nuh?  
I done learn mi lesson long ago  
when I was young and craven.  
Keep one Greek boy call Odysseus  
inna mi cave. Seven years  
him croonin in mi ear an him wife nuh see him face.  
The two a we was a sight fi envy. I thought  
I was goin die in Constant Spring at last  
till the day him come to me–  
as all men finally do–seyin him tired a play.  
Start talkin picknie an home an wife  
who can cook an clean. *Hmph.*  
Well yu done know how I stay arredi, mi love.  
I did pack up him bag and sen him back  
to dat oda woman same time.  
I hear from Mildred down de way  
dat de gal did tek him back, too;  
him tell her is farce I did farce him fi stay  
an she believe the fool. But lawd,

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\(^{30}\) These poems, just like McCallum’s other volumes of poetry, are full of classical references and deserve more scholarly attention in the future.
woman can also bline when she please.
Mi fren, I tell yu,
I is too ole for all dis bangarang.
I hear ova Trini way, young man is beatin steel drum,
meaking sweet rhyme an callin music by mi name.
Well, dat the only romance I goin give de time a day.
Hmph.

(The Water Between Us 75–76)

McCallum’s Calypso is a contemporary Jamaican Calypso with dreadlocks who has been transposed from Mediterranean antiquity and is in metaphorical ‘exile’ in the Caribbean. Firstly, it is important to note that as such, McCallum’s poetic mermaid is a means of coming to terms with her personal experience of migration, as the writer confirmed in our interview:

[...][L]ooking at it after having written those poems [i. e. the mermaid sequence in The Water Between Us], I could see I was working through a lot of issues of in-betweenness and of liminality. Certainly being a person who is from Jamaica but migrated, you know, in late childhood to the United States, I really have a very bifurcated experience of being Jamaican and American in that national context because I was not fully formed in either world. I spent almost the first decade of my life, a really formative period, in Jamaica and then I was transplanted – through a series of familial narratives that spurred this, that really had to do with geopolitical larger narratives of history. I then spent my coming-of-age decade in the United States. So I think of myself as being of two worlds, in that regard, and the mermaid certainly is. In the way that she is contextualised in my book and a lot of my writing, you know, she is looking back. She is looking back often on what is lost and what she kept with her and how she cannot quite make either of them work in either world. You know, legs are foreign to her and she is also foreign now to the sea. So I think that is the way into which my own interest in the question of exile comes about, through probably personal narrative.

(question one)

It could be argued that, in addition to the nymph Calypso therefore being a metaphor for liminality and exile in the poem, so is Odysseus. After all, he is washed ashore on the island of Ogygia having experienced a terrible storm and shipwreck at sea. Tempest and shipwreck are common tropes in Caribbean literature (Morrison “Shipwreck and Opportunity” 33ff.), not just of the twentieth century such as in George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul or Walcott, as McCallum’s poem illustrates. There are a number of parallels that can be drawn between the experience of migration and personal ‘exile’ and that of shipwreck: both experiences are arguably about the opportunities of another life and exploring one’s (new) identity (ibid. 17f.) but also the uncertainty of returning home, a
sense of being lost and the corresponding sentiments of hope and anxiety.\textsuperscript{31} Therefore, Odysseus' fate is certainly of interest to McCallum's exploration of exile, however, the Jamaican is deliberately capsizing power dynamics, giving the female character Calypso centre stage and assigning Odysseus to the sidelines.

Moreover, this Jamaican Calypso is not only autobiographical due to her experiences of migration, liminality and outsideness that she shares with the author but also due to their common reality of racial ambiguity. As explored in the preceding chapter, the mermaid functions as a symbol of challenging racialisation in Caribbean literature. McCallum's Calypso is not only a racially ambiguous character because of her fish and woman hybrid appearance but also due to her mixture of European influences inspired by the Mediterranean Calypso and her Jamaican features including her dark skin colour and dreadlocks. Thus, she represents not only a classical reference that serves the purpose of grasping and reworking personal experiences of ‘exile’ and migration in McCallum's poetry, but also personal experiences of metaphorical ‘exile’ and outsideness caused by appearance and racialisation (as well as personal experience of displacement due to being a woman, as I will show below). McCallum explained in my interview with her:

As much as anything, it occurs to me [in my mermaid poems] I am also working through being a mixed-race person. So not just a female who is from the Caribbean but a mixed-race female whose identity is not readily visible to people. So my father being a mixed-race Black Jamaican, my mother being Venezuelan, me and they carry ancestry that...what people see when they look at me is Europe, right? And of course that makes sense. Both of my grandmothers are from the UK, but my grandfathers, as it were, are from the Caribbean and Latin America. And where I am born and the world I am entering is fully made of that space but I am constantly rewritten in other people's imagination because what they see, makes them think, ‘Oh, she must be European', basically. And that means that the mermaid is a great way for me to deal with that because the history of who she is is not visibly present on her body, when she is migrated onto land. But then all of who she is that informs her is part of her history. (question one)

The mixture of Jamaican Patwa and Standard English that the Calypso of McCallum's poetry speaks underlines that she is not only a symbol of racial but also of linguistic hybridity. At the same time, her tongue is a clever nod to a characteristic of Calypso in the Odyssey, who is according to Homer “gifted with language” (Hom. Od. 12.449). Another resemblance to the Odyssey consists in the fact that, like Bishop’s and Goodison’s mermaids, McCallum’s Calypso is simultaneously characterised as caring and

\textsuperscript{31} The theme of shipwreck as another parallel between Graeco-Roman and Caribbean literature, not least due to the centrality of sea and seafaring (and the Middle Passage) in both cultures, offers more scholarly potential in the future.
motherly (in the *Odyssey* she is associated with “female” cultural activities that include singing, weaving and the hearth, *New Pauly* s.v. “Calypso”) yet scheming and dreadful (Hom. *Od*. 7.245ff.). Overall, McCallum’s Calypso therefore also reflects the author’s high level of acquaintance with Homer’s *Odyssey* and Graeco-Roman literature and myth more generally, which enables the Jamaican poet to revisit and retell Calypso’s story in an innovative, feminist way. Moreover, her knowledge of Graeco-Roman myth also allows McCallum to fully appropriate Calypso’s narrative into Caribbean culture. This appropriation of Graeco-Roman artefacts climaxes in McCallum’s poem in the metamorphosis of Calypso from the nymph that resides on Ogygia into the Jamaican mermaid and, finally, into the eponymous Caribbean music genre and major Caribbean song form, the calypso, that originated from “ova Trini way”.

However, what is equally remarkable about this Calypso is that she gets to tell her own story, rather than being a marginal character in that of “that Greek boy call Odysseus”. As McCallum stressed in our interview, the revisitation of marginal female characters of Graeco-Roman myth is a particularly appealing aspect of her engagement with antiquity, not least since it leaves plenty of room for creative appropriation:

I suppose all the myths are open to reinterpretation in every generation since they have been told and told and told, they are recontextualised. So there is not anything particularly about women’s perspectives that you would require in order to retell the story. For example, I mentioned Odysseus: you certainly could rewrite Odysseus’ story but that is less, I think, open to the imaginative possibility insofar as there is so much more attention given to that in the text itself. Whereas, if I am writing in Calypso’s voice, I can make up her entire backstory, you know? She is really a compelling figure to me to recast as a mermaid in the way I do, but her narrative is so marginal in terms of number of lines given to it, you know, in Ovid or whichever version you are looking at of the story, that I think it is not as if you cannot do it with the other major characters but there is a lot more room for making it up as you are writing. (question one)

McCallum’s Calypso is presented as significantly smarter and more understanding of politics and economy (take for example her critique of the tourist industry, in which she touches on racial and economic privilege) than in traditional versions of the myth including Homer’s. This allows McCallum’s Calypso to show that she had more power and influence in her relationship with Odysseus than she has been given credit for in the *Odyssey*. Her ‘new’ agency also grants Calypso the opportunity to reflect on Odysseus’ treatment of her in particular and the behaviour of men towards women in society more generally, including on how women participate in such “foolishness”. Thus, this Jamaican Calypso is not only feminist in the sense that she is an independent, smart woman who
“hmphs” at the idea of staying at home with child to cook and clean but also in the sense that she has her own voice (after all, the poem is a monologue by Calypso) which she uses to retell her own story and reflect on the status of women in society.

Conclusion

Overall, McCallum’s revisitation of the myth of Calypso is representative of what I have been trying to demonstrate throughout this study. Firstly, as McCallum herself stated in an interview, the Classics still matter in the twenty-first century:

The reason I revisit and retell these stories is I think they continue to shape our world and what we believe is possible or right and because these stories have always been open to interpretation it is the job of the storytellers (poets included) to reinterpret them for each new generation. I loved Greek myths from I first encountered them when I was about thirteen years old. The gods and goddesses of these tales were flawed and heroic, tragic and comic, all at once and in ways that struck a chord with me and seemed to delve into the truths of human nature. (McCallum in The Gift of Music and Song 178)

Secondly, despite, or at times because of, their connections to British imperialism and its imposed education system that was ignorant of local cultures, the Classics and their myths, literatures and cultural artefacts continue to be of particular relevance for West Indian authors in the twenty-first century, as my discussions of all works of fiction and poetry in this study have highlighted. McCallum’s poem “Calypso” illustrates some of the ways – such as for the purpose of anti-racist, anti-imperialist, feminist critique, but also for the exploration of cultural and personal experiences of ‘exile’ – in which the Classics continue to be used and of relevance to West Indian authors. Thirdly, West Indian authors persist in being central current-day agents of transformation in the reshaping of Graeco-Roman antiquity and its legacies. McCallum’s poem is certainly one among many pieces of twenty-first century Anglophone Caribbean literature that shape a regional, distinctive Caribbean tradition of reading and responding to the Graeco-Roman Classics. As such, McCallum’s “Calypso” poem is also a perfect representation of an important aspect of classical reception in twenty-first century Caribbean literature: the fact that classical influences are primarily relevant and interesting to Anglophone Caribbean authors as materials that can be wholly appropriated and used ‘on their own terms’, as materials that belong to them and in a manner that cancels out any debts to other cultures. In this way, classically inspired works such as McCallum’s mermaid poems serve the purpose of maintaining an independent local tradition of Graeco-Roman reception but also the
purpose of rewriting and establishing a local history and identity that upholds matters of anti-imperialism, anti-racism and feminism.
Conclusion

The Classics matter in the Anglophone Caribbean in the twenty-first century. They matter in the realm of literature, as the numerous, complex references to ancient Greece and Rome in the works discussed have shown. However, as these uses of the Classics in the analysed pieces of poetry and prose fiction have also highlighted, Greece and Rome equally matter beyond their meaning in writing. One the one hand, the colonial connotations of classical civilisations still bear weight in the twenty-first century Caribbean cultural context. The abolition of Classics teaching across much of the Anglophone Caribbean in recent decades is symptomatic of classical civilisations’ ties to British imperialism, as they are still reflected in Caribbean literature, and of decolonisation efforts in response to this relict of colonial education.

On the other hand, allusions to Graeco-Roman antiquity are employed in poems and novels – as one means in the vast West Indian cultural repertoire – in the service of anti-imperialism, anti-racism, feminism and, ultimately, for the establishment of an own, local history and identity in the still relatively young island nations of the Anglophone Caribbean. Ongoing changes in Caribbean culture, decolonisation efforts and postcolonial identity building, have meant that the use of Classics to express Caribbean sentiments in the region’s literature is increasingly characterised by fragmentation. Fragmented classical reception, in the sense of diasporic, cross-cultural, cross-Atlantic circulation as it is defined by Gilroy, is essential to a New Age classicism that goes beyond a “writing back” that responds to the clash of coloniser and colonised. This is crucial to the continuation of an independent, distinct Caribbean classical tradition that provides the framework for personal and cultural dealings with matters of exile and contemporary postcolonial realities including the ‘continuity of empires’, but also, among other aspects, gender or race. In the same effort, classical influences are hybridised with other cultural artefacts, be that in the case of the epic tradition that equally stresses its local West Indian and African roots in order to undermine and recalibrate cultural canons or in equitable depictions of a multifaceted antiquity that challenge imperialist civilisational narratives that are particularly characteristic of women’s writing.

While the engagement of Caribbean poets and novelists with Greece and Rome ranges from transformation processes of negation, ignorance, disjunction and creative destruction to processes of hybridisation and assimilation, the prerequisite for literary engagement with these cultures by Caribbean writers appears to be appropriation. The
Classics are treated as cultural assets that belong to Caribbean people as much as they belong to anyone else and Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century continue a distinctly Caribbean tradition of reading and responding to ancient Greece and Rome. This is important since, while the colonial history of Greek and Latin languages and civilisations in the Anglophone Caribbean is still acknowledged and cannot simply be forgotten, contemporary classical references nonetheless signal a ‘moving on’, a co-opting of imposed cultural goods for the purpose of cultural resistance and postcolonial critique.

The twenty-first century is still young and postcolonial Caribbean writers, including the ones discussed in this work, will continue to engage with ancient Greece and Rome. I hope to have drawn attention to a part of world literature that adds value and enriches classical reception studies, yet, to date, has received relatively little attention. There is plenty more light to be shed on classical reception in this area of extra-European, postcolonial literature, for example in the writings of Indo-Caribbean authors, and I am hopeful that future researchers will continue the conversation.
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Appendix
Contents:

A Transcript of the *Epic Voices* Discussion between Glissant and Walcott at Poets House

B Excerpt from the Annual Report of the Barbados Education Department, 1935

C Completed Survey Questionnaire Marlene NourbeSe Philip

D Completed Survey Questionnaire Ishion Hutchinson

E Completed Survey Questionnaire Winsome Monica Minott

F Completed Survey Questionnaire Robert Edison Sandiford

G Completed Survey Questionnaire Diana McCaulay

H Transcript Interview Jacqueline Bishop

I Transcript Interview Lorna Goodison

J Transcript Interview Shara McCallum
DW: The question was, how did either of us find the form for the poem? Why did the particular poem take such a shape?

EG: I was following the idea of finding a new...The poem starts with the dream of Columbus and he tries to find a new world, what he calls a new world. But this one was there. It was nothing new for him, so that the poem came with two parts: one is the man of the discovery and one is the man who was there before the discovery. And then the third part. And this third part is the man from Africa, who was brought to this new world, the so-called new world. So that this poem has as many parts as there were conceptions of this world, that means three, and as many parts as there were ways to travel to this world, that means by dream, by imagination, that means really and that means by the Middle Passage. That means three, so the poem has six parts.

DW: Were you asking more about the shape, structure?

EG: Ah the structure...or the style. It was what I can call an epic style. It is not a realist style and not...I wrote this poem [...] should write the poem if he had been interested in Black and Negroes' affairs. That is my answer.

DW: I remembered writing couplets about some section of...I know you will be interested in the particular structure of the thing, shape, right? I did not know I was going to write in
those three-line stanzas. I did not know I was going to do it in rhyme. It is hard to know how these things begin but vaguely I remember there was a lot of rain in St. Lucia, that is one thing. I would not have picked a form...uhm, I do not know how these things happen. And a friend of mine had died. These I remember as being sort of for some reason sources of the idea of working on this thing. Eventually I knew I did not want a four-line stanza because that looked very threatening with boredom. I think if you had these slabs of four lines, you know, to me the reader had a responsibility that I did not want to give the reader, that is you had to undertake four lines. [audience laughter] Couplets were not alright because to me the couplet is too epigrammatical, especially if you are rhyming. It implies completion that is not possible I think in a narrative. It implies a completion of knowledge on the part of the narrator that cannot be presumed I think. I mean Pope does it in song but Pope came up from a really assured society and people were reading it at a certain kind of pace. So the only alternative between two and four is three. [audience laughter] And then I came across this wonderful discovery: some guy called Alighieri had done that and I said “Ooh.” [audience laughter] Also the difficult thing I think was or the more relaxed thing was to do it in these three-line stanzas but also not to do it in pentameter because that is also very threatening. I mean, it is too martial. And so I thought the hexameter and the three-line...thing would be better. Gives you more space to do ordinary things like somebody going to the john as well as a big battle. The hexameter I think gives you more room to do very ordinary things as well as larger things.

[inaudible question]

DW: I think that they...uhm...obviously nobody in their right mind would undertake a 325-page poem so, you know [audience giggles]. I mean, I did not know it was going to be that long, you know. But since it had structurally the shape of a novel, then it had to have, you know...it just grew. Or even a mural that has left big spaces in it. But I did not want to do anything in the suite section because I think the suite...uhm...in a way is kind of a cop-out because it leaves spaces that have to be filled...by the reader. And I mean, besides, the symphonic structure of suites is so lyrical, right, that it gives too much privilege to the writer. Uhm, you know, you can just move from one thing to the other. And I also did not want to do any collage. I just wanted to...I wanted to be able to make somebody get up and, you know, go to the bathroom and come back as well as fight a battle, you know, I mean... [audience laughter] So that is really fictional, it is really novelistic and...the first time I read it, somebody said, “I thought you were going to read poetry”. I felt good about that because it sounded like prose, you know, better...I think it
is better than to hear, you know, “I am listening to poetry”, than uhm...somebody to be disappointed if it is not poetry, it was verse, which is good. But the fact it was not poetry felt good.

[inaudible question]

EG: If you...uhm, when I am thinking about the prodigious story of Western culture and roots, I am looking at the Mediterranean Sea. And the Mediterranean Sea is concentrating. [...] And it is not by chance that around the Mediterranean Sea, all the monotheist religions were done. Almost the most, the greatest...Hebraism, Islam, Christianity. Because this sea is the sea of one. It is the sea of concentration on yourself. And the Caribbean is the contrary. It is the sea of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and also multiethnicism. And I think this is something we have to preserve and to improve, maybe more than political or something else aspects. [...] And an epic voice from the Caribbean has something in common and something different with and from Omeros.

[inaudible question]

DW: I think one of the difficulties about being as an ex- or current or lapsed colonial [audience laughter] is the comparison that one hears. I do not object to the parallel that he [W. B. Yeats] is and I do not object particularly to the parallel with Ireland. But what I am saying is, it is always very difficult to have to begin to explain oneself in terms of a reference to some preceding experience. The Irish experience is very Irish because the Irish experience is very different to the Caribbean experience. This is one country, one nation that is still occupied in one territory. Caribbean experience and experience of several empires – four, five empires, right, four or five different languages in that territory of which the land mass is very small. And the real land mass of the Caribbean is not the land but the sea. That is the Caribbean; the Caribbean is not the land, the Caribbean is the water. And however that relationship is between the presence of the huge body of water and the land, that is a presence. I do not think the sea has that width in terms of Ireland, which is an island still, sure, but all the wars that happened in Ireland happened on the land. Our battles were fought on land, sure, but the Caribbean was an arena of naval battle. And besides, I think in each case, if you take the particular attributes – and empires do have attributes although people do not like to hear you say that – all vices, the Portuguese and the French and the Dutch and the Spanish and whoever else were there, whatever they have left, they have left distinctly, within each particular islands. I mean, for instance, my island is rarely just an ident of Martinique or vice versa. St. Lucia is rarely Martinique, it is not really Barbados and it is not Antigua. And therefore you have to look
on those levels of what is a colonial experience. A colonial experience is not a distinctive...it is a very, very subtle something, it is a very ordinary... The experience – I do not want to go too long into politics – but the Martinique experience: when we were in St. Lucia – and this has to do with colonialism – when we were in St. Lucia, we were told often, you know, Martinique has given us an example of French liberalality. That Martinique was a department of France and Martinique was really France and you people are still colonies, alright? So things went on, and the British islands got independence – which technically speaking we can still call independence. The tragedy of France towards places like Algeria and Martinique in terms of saying, yes you are metropolitan etc etc, is we are behind the actual political development of the British-speaking Caribbean, as everybody knows. And so that irony is turned around on itself in terms of Martinique. The first colony I ever encountered, colonial...the colonial presence, to my shock and horror, was when I went to Martinique and saw White gendarmes in Martinique. And I just saw them two years ago in Saint Martin. And I am amazed at the audacity and suicidal, you know, conviction of France that it will still have White policemen armed in these countries and expect people to, you know, not to...I mean it is really a shock to come from a situation in which the constable in the British colony was someone who you could tease and who obeyed you and then to go to Martinique as a grown person and to encounter the presence of these police, it is quite a shock. And then to be told that that country is really a department of France, well, it is ironic and silly for us to look at it that way. And yeah, you know, thirty, forty years ago Martinique was given...all the French départements were given as example of French generosity in terms of a constitution. So all these ironies are much more different than, say, there is a single Irish situation which may be Catholic, Protestant or English-Irish.

[inaudible audience question]

EG: We learned the French language in a so ‘respectuous’ and mechanic way that I had to liberate myself and some people from my country from this kind of French writing education. I had to violate the French language, I did it. I tried to do it. And today, young Creolophone writers in Martinique are writing: if we are able to write in Creole, it is because people like Glissant liberated us, both from our fear in the French language and our fear out of the Creole language. And I have the feeling that the work I tried to do in the French language was a good help for this kind of approach. Now I am writing in Creole but maybe it will be a surprise, okay? [...] But I have something to say: I have been a militant of Creole language for a long time. I teach in Creole language in an institution I
founded in Martinique, Institut Martiniquais d’études. I teach, for example, for young people from Dominique (Dominica) when a storm, a cyclone put out all things in Dominique. And I teach in Creole for young people from Dominica in Martinique. But I always said to my friends and comrades: “We have not to defend the Creole language on a monolingualist basis.” The Englishmen, the Frenchmen teach us for Martinique that French language was the only language in the world. For the Anglophone islands, that English language was the only language in the world and so on. And we have…we must not inherit these laws. I defend Creole but I defend Creole because if Creole vanished, it is a part of human imaginary that vanished. That is my reason to defend Creole. And I do not defend Creole because it is MY MOTHER TONGUE; I do not think that is a good reason. Also because, today, a writer, even if he speaks in Creole or English or in French or in Spanish or Papiamento, writes with the imagination of all the languages of the world. And if one of these languages vanishes – and we know that in Africa today one or two languages vanishes per year – it is a great part of human imaginary that will die. So when I write in French, I do not write in French like a Frenchman; I write in French with…in presence of all the languages of the world. Even if it is a language spoken by 10 people in a place I do not know but I have to imagine this language, too. That is my answer. [applause]

DW: I think any responsible writer, you know, in our time would automatically agree with Édouard because you turn on the TV and there is a whole world, so how can you stay in one language mentally? The thing specifically, however, about Creole is… a writer gets, you know, a writer reads a lot, a writer gets more educated daily; and more humble hopefully. There is no point pretending that your intelligence and language of your intelligence is a language of saying to me. But when I think, I think in Creole. If you can define the rhythm of your thought and the vocabulary of your thought – I would imagine that when I think, I think in English. Now what kind of English? I know I think in West Indian and I possibly think very precisely in St. Lucian because I am thinking in a melody. The melody of my thought is what counts, not the vocabulary of my thought or not the language of my thought really. If that melody is true, then you are as true to where you are from as anywhere else, no matter how large your vocabulary. So that Faulkner is an American writer because he has…even if he has a big vocabulary and so is Hemingway, who had a monosyllabic, mainly, vocabulary. It is whether the melody… [audience laughter] No, I am not saying that in a negative way. I am just saying I am taking two writers: one with a, you know, what Hemingway called the ten-dollar words. Both Faulkner and Hemingway himself writing, trying to write like Gertrude Stein as sparsely as
possible in monosyllables. On the other hand, there is another really guilty thing in these
still and that is that very often I remember taking a quatrain, a very tight quatrain, and
translating it into French Creole, that is Patois Creole, and getting tremendously excited
because not only was it rhyming – and to find the rhyme in a language I was not working
in and that has not been used was absolutely staggering. I mean, I do not know what it is
like, to compare it to. Not only has it not happened but because of the rhymes, there were
new metaphors made by the rhymes, by the rhymes in the French Creole. So that
probably scared me because I was encountering something that was absolutely, you
know, frightening and exciting. But then as I progressed, I began to realise that – this is
the irony – that the more one was trying to be true to the – let us just call it a dialect
because it is not, let us just say the Creole, let us just call it Creole – I tried at the
beginning of this book after doing some work…and then I thought, let me try the whole
thing with the rhymes and terza rima, let me do it in French Creole! Well it came up, there
were several problems: one is, the more I did it, the more theatrical it became. In other
words, it became...here is a native French language that turned literary on me and
became an exercise when I put it on the page. And therefore I said, no, you know, you are
being patriotic because that is not true. You do not really want to do this poem except
you want to take it as a responsibility to something. Now that is the thing Édouard was
talking about, you know, about my mother tongue, you know. And then of course people
have said in reviews already: “Why didn’t you write it in your own dialect?” I do not
imagine that the same thing would be true of Dante and De vulgari and Divina Commedia
or whatever. Because I am sure that this language is closer to Latin than French is to
English, okay? Absolutely. So it is not like a dialect into Italian or into Roman or into Latin.
We are talking about Italian, right? Whether it is Roman or whether it is De vulgari, okay?
So there you got two languages going on. The only thing that I found...that I find
infuriatingly – very infuriating – is I think – and I do not know if you lot would agree: I do
not find any reason for what I consider to be the vandalism of taking the delicacy of
French Creole and having the professors and the passionate political linguists saying that
you have to write in this kind of Tarzan orthography in which you know K-O-...I mean the
ugliest possible-looking language, that I refuse to copy because it just looks too cruel. If
you spell...if you say “de l’eau”, okay, it really is “of water”. Now nothing in...there is
nothing in French Creole that is degraded. Because the French were the worst speakers
of Latin in history. They needed two demonstratives, three demonstratives to say one
Latin word, okay? Whereas the French Creole language only needs one or two to say the
French word. I mean the redundancy of the French language in terms of trying to speak
Ro…speak Latin is obvious, right? Because any French word would have “by there, over there, over there”, you know, for “somewhere”, for one word. But then of course the academy will tell you “You can’t, this is barbarous tongue”. But that happens all the time. And what I found very, very ugly was if I – I was not trying to be elegant – but “de l’eau” is not very different in pronunciation to “del’eau” which is a French…which is the French Patois for water, “del’eau”, or how the French would pronounce it. Maybe a bit more resembling “oeu” or something, right? And I have a friend in St. Lucia, who [...] He says in French we know there’s no ‘r’. And he gets very angry; he says because if you go into the country, French Patois does pronounce the ‘r’. [...] I do not do the French ‘r’ because it sounds affected because I speak English. But the nuances and elegances of genuine Creole are there. And finally, I mean, the real excitement I think lay in looking at Villon, for instance, and realising these are French Creole words, you know, or Charles D’Orleans, people like that. They have a vigour, you know, the strength of the argot that is there in Villon is the same thing that we have in Chaucer or whatever. But to me it was dishonesty, eventually an irony that I had been wanting to do this poem to find out that it was turning theatrical on me. And since my inner voice was not really consistently French Creole – not that the language could not handle nuances of subtleties, right? Or that there were no words for that, that is just imperialism to say that. I just felt I could not go on because it was turning into another kind of mask, into a responsibility and, arguably, into a dishonesty. I do not think it is true of a short lyric poem; it certainly is not true of the theatre. But in terms of the kind of poem that I was working on it just was not right. And I think whatever period a writer is writing in, whatever undertaking he has in a particular book, he does not have a responsibility to anyone, whether it is due to race or the current patriotism or the current thing of academia or whatever it is. It is just, the work has to be what it is. If it finds its own voice, then that is what it is. I think the real thing is, I think, there is a distinction. I mean, if you read Césaire’s Cahier – I used to read it as if it were French. The reason why it unlocked itself to me that I began to hear it as a French Patois poem and I saw that that happened; I said: “Oh my god, this is a French Creole poem, it is not a French poem.” Although the language and vocabulary are in magnificent French but if you hear it for what it is, suddenly it becomes a magnificent French Creole poem without any, you know, Tarzan-looking, you know “kokokoka”, fake African kind of orthography.

[inaudible audience question]
DW: Uhm, there is concerning epigrammatic...[audience laughter]. Not a pun, sorry. All epics are really juvenile basically because they are really adventure stories and adventure is a juvenile experience really. So that...uhm, they are also, they are full of an enthusiasm, right, which is... Édouard calls 'errantry' and 'the quest' and stuff like that. So it is really like boys’ stories, no matter what they are. And they are told in the way that boys’ stories are told, they began around an evening fire to the excitement of mainly man, okay? The other thing is that – I am not putting it on the form – I am simply saying that adventure is an aspect of epic. And adventure in a very physical sense. By that definition we call something ‘epic’. Genocide is epic, in scale. Starvation is epic. Alright? Being hungry is lyric. [laughter] But the subjects of epic have to do with huge tracts of subject like devastation, war, stuff like that, right? In the Caribbean, simply on the required scale of measurement, we have had enough to earn the idea of epic, we have had enough genocide and we have had enough, you know, war and stuff like that. Now if this is the stuff of epic, then it is the stuff of adventure and so on, fine, okay? So we have an epic. You had a massacre? You can write about a massacre, right? Somebody fought this, you had...whatever. You had slavery? Epic subject. Okay? So many million over the bottom of the ocean? Epic subject, okay? All the Indians gone? Epic subject, fine. The difference is that when these things are written, generally they are written with some idea of a manifest destiny for the hero. In other words, the hero sets out and the hero goes through lots of problems and quests and stuff; eventually the hero gets somewhere and they have a founding of the new hope, the new order, a new Rome, a new whatever. Okay? Alright. Uhm, the Caribbean cannot presume to have that kind of destiny; so therefore that is one way it falls short of having an epic hero because it means that the epic hero would have to leave somewhere like Martinique, set out and conquer America, okay? Possible, okay. [chuckles] [...] Anyway, uhm. [audience laughter] So the one idea, the destiny of the hero, is not something the Caribbean is interested in, that is the point. It is not because it is powerless that it is not interested in it. It is because what has evolved in the Caribbean is a society that does not need an epic. It does not need an epic in the same way that it does not need the heroes. It has been through all of that, right? And has not been through it and defeated since. The triumph of the Caribbean is a very physical triumph because of people who came – everybody knows this – the specimens that survive, whether they were Indians or whether they were Africans particularly, the physical specimens that survived the Middle Passage and the long trips from wherever, are, you know, physically superb specimens, otherwise they would have collapsed, okay? So there we have already physically, if you want, something approaching a master race, easily. Because who wants
to do that, who wants to say that? Who wants to say, you know, that the African who was put in a hold and was how many months, you know, in the ship and the chains and the, you know, whatever and landed on the shores here were the physical specimen of astounding – uhm, what you call this – survivors. But who wants to claim that? Who wants to glorify that? Or be Aryan or be African, you know? The Caribbean has gone beyond that kind of juvenilia, I think. Well, you may not agree.

[inaudible question]

DW: Well, let me finish. Let me just finish what I am saying. I am saying that – we are talking about what is given to us as a coda, the terms of reference of what an epic poem contains, alright? And I am saying that if you use those, all the requirements for the supply of calling a thing an epic, all of these things are there. I am saying that the idea of one emblematic hero for the Caribbean, not taken out of history and certainly with no idea of an imperial conquest, is not part of the Caribbean experience nor is it the wish of the Caribbean experience, as it was the wish of the British or Roman Empire to have such a figure.

And the final thing I have to say is that any Caribbean writer simply from the scale of history and the width of the experience of the past, of history, and also the immensity of the real ocean that that writer is on, is immediately undertaking every morning—no matter how small the poem—is making and undertaking in a geographical space that is the equivalent of a quest in terms of the space of the sea. And therefore when I dismiss or do not entertain the idea of the poem being called an epic it is because I do not want it referred to in terms of comparing as if I was trying to ennoble anything Caribbean. It is not...it would be presumptuous and insulting of me to try to ennoble the Caribbean people. And therefore to say you have written a poem that makes these people, finally, something heroic is insulting to them.

EG: Let me say something before you all...uhm, I cannot understand why we think of epic in terms of heroic or noble. For me, the epic voice is not heroic or noble; I disagree with Derek [Walcott] on this point. You can have...uhm, for example: if you are saying, speaking of Western cultures, the greatest epics are based not on victory but on defeat, or on [...] trickery. The Greek epic drew on trickery, not on victory. [...] La Chanson de Roland is a defeat. They were defeated by the Arabs and they made an epic poem of it. The sagas, the Icelandic sagas, are always recounting death and destruction and defeat and abandonment etc. That is why I said that epic is fundamentally errantry and not dogmatism. I cannot imagine epic as noble or as victory. And when I think about the Civil
War in the States: who created epic from this war? The vanquished, the people from the South. Real epic like Faulkner or false epic like Gone With the Wind. The people who won the war did not need the epic, because they won. And epic is not victory. You agree with that? And American movies did not create epic from the Second World War, which they won, but they tried to make epic about the Vietnam War, which they lost. They tried to make false epic; but epic with Rambo and all these kinds of films because they lost this war and they tried to recuperate from this war by epic. The Second World War they won, and made commentaries and so on; and they tried to [...].

[inaudible question]

DW: Can I just finish one point? I think we are getting a little bit confused here. There is a difference between an epic poem and what we in common agreement call...if we call a novel a novel and a poem a poem, then we are calling something an epic, okay? Just to go by something. Whitman has not written an epic, right? Because it is not a continuous narrative. We are going by that definition: it has no single hero, except it is Walt Whitman, and therefore you can have an epic voice and not have an epic; that is what Whitman is, okay? So when I use the word epic in that definition, I am going by all the givens one expects of an epic and of an adventurous story. Now whether that hero does it by cunning, the attributes of a hero in an epic are the attributes of a hero. The hero may survive by cunning like Odysseus or like Anancy or whatever. But the figure remains emblematic and heroic regardless. And that figure is emblematic of a particular race.

[inaudible comment from audience]

EG: Religious or not, The Iliad or The Odyssey or ancient Testaments or Koran or Icelandic sagas or Mahabarata, et cetera, are all books of errantry and not of dogmatism. And that dogmatism is gone after with the use people do with these books, but they are books of errantry and [...] uncertainty. That means that the root of identity needs to pass through uncertainty and errantry to... You can see this in the tragedy of the Greeks. Oedipus cannot see for the first time the truth in him. He must go step by step to this fatality. And my conclusion about thinking about the roots of identity processes in Western cultures is first these processes needed a kind of opaqueness, I call it opacité, translating from French, opacité. A kind of opaqueness, the purpose of which was to oppose and reject the other, and to have some ecran (screen) between this identity and the other. In Western cultures there is no myth, no great myth, that includes the other. All the myths are 'out for myself'. Yes, there are myths [that include the other] but not at the roots of Western culture. I think what we need today is not an epic for ‘my identity’ or ‘your identity’ or ‘his
identity’. We need an epic for the fragile and dying identity of earth and mankind. This is the identity we have to look at. And I can realise this identity through my identity. I do not have to abandon, to renounce my identity to realise this ‘mankind’s identity’, which is dying [...], a l’agonie…agonising… We have to fight for this…women’s and men’s identity which is agonising but not abstractly, not universally, through my identity. So that I think that we need an epic voice – but not an epic voice with the opaqueness opposing to the other – with a new kind of opaqueness or opacité; because I think that one of the great, great, great menace…threats of this time is that everybody has to understand the other, to live with him, or to accept him or to permit him, to be with him. And I will claim for me and for you and for all the right to opaqueness and opacité. You can be what you are and I do not need to understand that or to reduce you to a transparency to live with you or love you or accept you.

I think that will be, must be – for my conception of epic – the rules: that my identity is not a root identity but a relation identity and my opaqueness should be accepted by you and your opaqueness by me.

[inaudible question]

EG: You are obliged to create epic because in the world today the drama of the relationship between cultures, between people, between...rich countries and poorer countries, between cultures, between people, between men and women, between all kinds – these conflicts do not permit genre littéraire (a literary genre). You cannot do it with roman (novel), you cannot do it with [...] [inaudible comment from audience]. Yeah but this epic can be with novel, with poetry, with everything, with cry, with overall performance. But it must be an epic voice. And I tried to tell you what differences I see between this kind of epic, our epic, and the great, the Latin epic.
B: Excerpt from the Annual Report of the Barbados Education Department, 1935

This document was kindly provided by the Shilstone Memorial Library, Barbados Museum and Historical Society, St. Ann’s Garrison, Bridgetown, Barbados. It is an excerpt from the 1935 education curriculum for Barbadian children studying for Cambridge School certificates, including their Latin curriculum.
Curriculum of Work at the Combermere School 1934–35.

FORM VI.


FORM V.

Cambridge Junior Local—Subjects.

FORMS VI AND V TOGETHER.

Latin—Vergil Aeneid Book II.
   Composition. North and Hillard.
   Passages for Practice. Bennett.
   Grammar. Schilling.
   Composition. Renny.
French—Matriculation Reader. Ferret.
   Unseen.

English—Shakespeare. Merchant of Venice.
   Matriculation course. Low and Briggs.
   Composition. Précis Writing.

Book-keeping—Elementary. Fieldhouse.

Mathematics—Arithmetic. Layng—Complete Course.
   Algebra. Hall's. Part I—VI.
   Geometry. Hall and Stevens. Parts I—VI.

VI ALONE.

Latin—Livy V. 1—23.

English—Selections from Coleridge.
   The Fortunes of Nigel.
Scripture—The Life and Teaching of Christ.
French—Composition for Middle Forms. Dulamal and Minssen.

Hygiene.

French Unseen—Junior Book II. Longland.

FORM IV.

   Translation. Caesar De Bello Gallico I.
   Composition. North and Hillard to Indirect Questions.

   Translation. Balshaw. 1—30.

   Translation. Ferret 1—30.
   Composition. Unseen.
   Examination Papers to Junior Standard.
Arithmetic—Layng I and II. Fractions, Decimals, Profit and Loss, Unitary Method.
   Stocks, Practice, Square Root, Volumes.

Algebra—Hall's to Quadratic Equations.

Geometry—Hall and Stevens' Books 1—IV. Riders.

   Merchant of Venice.

Scripture—St. Matthew's Gospel.
Hygiene.

Book-keeping—Elementary. Fieldhouse.

COMMERCIAL CLASS.


Arithmetic—Layng’s Parts I and II. Practice, Decimals, Interest to Stocks and Shares.

FORM III.


Geography—Longman’s Book II. North America, British Isles, Physical, West Indies.

Mathematics—Arithmetic. Layng’s Parts I and II to Profit and Loss.

Algebra—Hall’s Parts I and II to Simple Equations. Geometry. Hall and Steven’s to Theorem 12.

Short-hand—Pitman’s New Era to Chapter xv.

FORM II.


Geography—Stamp’s. Physical, Asia and especially India and China.

History—Pageant of History—Ikin, from the beginning of Civilization to “Reformers and Liberators.”


FORM IA.


Translation. Huit Contes.
Arithmetic—Layng’s. Part I to Vulgar Fractions.

FORM IB AND IB SPECIAL.

Latin—Kennedy’s Primer. Nouns, 5 Declensions, Adjectives, Verb, Sum, 4 Conjugations Active and Passive.
Exercises. Hillard and Botting to 69.
Arithmetic—Layng’s Part I to Compound Rules.
English—Scripture. Reading from O. and N. Testament.
History. Britannia History Reader.
Grammar. The Young Writer by N. Clay. Part I.
Picture Composition. Book I. Lewis Marsh.
Recitation. Heatley’s Ballads—Selections.
 Dictation, Spelling. Transcription.
Copy. Vere Foster.

PREPARATORY.

Latin—Kennedy’s Shorter Primer. 1st 3 declensions, 4 Conjugations. Indicative Mood.
Exercises Hillard and Botting 1—30.
Avoir, être, flatter, punir, Recevoir, Vendra.
Arithmetic—Layng’s Part I to Compound Long Division.
History. Britannia Reader to Edward III.
Geography. The West Indies. (O. Walcott) General Geography of the World.
Reading. Alice in Wonderland. Snow Queen.
Tales from a Wonder Book.
Copy. Vere Foster.
Dictation. Transcription.
Curriculum of Work at the Christ Church Boys’ Foundation School
1934-35.

FORM V.
Cambridge School Certificate Syllabus.

Prose and Composition. North and Hillard.
Translation—Aeneid II.

Macmillan’s Progressive French Reader II year. G. F. Fasnacht.

English—Matriculation English Course. Nesfield.
Shakespeare. ‘The Merchant of Venice.’
Selections from Coleridge.
The Fortunes of Nigel. Scott.

The Life and Teaching of Christ. Raven.


Mathematics—Arithmetic. Layng.
Algebra. Baker and Bourne.
A School Geometry. Hall and Stevens.
Trigonometry. Hall and Knight.

FORM IV.
Junior Cambridge Syllabus.

Prose and Composition. North and Hillard.
Translation—Cæsar Book 7.

Macmillan’s Progressive French Reader II year. G. F. Fasnacht.


Shakespeare—The Merchant of Venice.


Mathematics—Arithmetic. Layng.
Algebra. Baker and Bourne.
A School Geometry. Hall and Stevens.

FORM III.

Declension of Nouns, Adjectives, Pronouns.
Conjugation of Regular and Irregular Verbs, Syntax.
Prose and Composition. North and Hillard, Exs. 1—60.


and Pages 82—115.

Outlines of Composition. J. C. Nesfield, Whole Book.


Exercises in spelling and dictation (Middle Forms) Relfe Bros. Pieces 1—28.


Mathematics—Arithmetic. Layng. Book 1 and book 2 to Ex. 44.


FORM II.

Latin—Revised Latin Primer by Kennedy. All declensions of Nouns, Adjectives and
Pronouns, Comparison of Adjectives and Adverbs, Numerals 1—100, and
Conjugations Active and Passive including Irregular Verbs, Pieces 1—18.
Elementary Translation by Hillard and Botting. Exercises 1—72.

Elementary Exercises by Hillard and Botting.
French—Macmillan’s Progressive French Reader. 1st year, Whole Book.
Macmillan’s Progressive French Course. 1st year, Pieces 1—13.
English Grammar—By Mr. P. A. Goodman. Whole Book, including Analysis and Parsing, the structure and correction of Sentences.
English—Tales from Shakespeare by Charles and Mary Lamb. Whole Book.
Composition and Reproduction weekly.
Arithmetic—Layng’s Arithmetic. From Exercise 16—33, and Decimals.
Algebra—Elementary Algebra by Baker and Bourne. Exercise 1—9, (a) and (k) problems.
Geometry—By H. S. Hall and F. H. Stevens. Theorems 1—12, and Riders.
Geography of the West Indies by H. Holder and O. Walcott. Whole book.

FORM I.

Latin Exercises—Hillard and Botting. Exercises 1—49.
French Grammar and Exercises—Macmillan’s Progressive French Course. 1st year Lessons 1—35.
French Translation—French without Tears, Book 2, Lessons 1—46.
English Grammar—General, Including Parsing and Analysis of Simple Sentences.

Latin Grammar—Keeney’s Revised Latin Grammar. The five Declensions of Nouns.
Declension and Comparison of Adjectives. The Four Regular Conjugations of Verbs in the Active.
Latin Exercises—Hillard and Botting. Exercises 1—49.
French Grammar and Exercises—Macmillan’s Progressive French Course. 1st year Lessons 1—35.
French Translation—French without Tears, Book 2, Lessons 1—46.
English Grammar—General, Including Parsing and Analysis of Simple Sentences.

Dictionary—Lexicon Latinus. For Preliminary Forms.
The Whole.

Geography—Geography of the World by H. Holder and Walcott. The whole.

Scripture—The Gospel of St. Mark.

Arithmetic—Layng’s Part I. Subtraction of Fractions.
Algebra—Baker and Bourne. Exercises 1—44.
Geometry—Exercises in Practical and Experimental Geometry by Hall and Stevens to Construction of Triangles.
Copy—Vere Foster. No. 7.

PREPARATORY.

Tables—All on back of exercise book.

English Grammar—Douglas’ Initiatory Grammar Pages 1—35.
Reading—Graphic Reader—Book 2. Whole book.

Dictionary—Twice weekly from Graphic Reader.
Copy—Vere Foster, No. 5. Four time weekly.
Catechism—"A Simple Explanation of the Catechism" by Mrs. J. D. Francis Pages 1—60.

Scripture—Precept upon Precept. Chapters 1—50.


1. I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. [Please comment why / why not.]

   - Strongly disagree
   - Quite disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Quite agree
   - Strongly agree

   Comments:
   I would draw on them as I would any other source like calypso for instance.

2. I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. [Indicate in what ways they are / aren't.]

   - Strongly disagree
   - Quite disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Quite agree
   - Strongly agree

   Comments:
   They are not an inspiration. They can be a source.
3. What are your first three associations with the Classics?

War
European culture
History - European

4. What are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?

Re-writing them
How applicable are they?
Questioning their role in my life at present

5. The Classics carry colonial connotations. [Why / Why not?]

<table>
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Comments:
Their dissemination was a part of the colonial project — past and colonial education.

6. In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics (multiple answers possible)? [Please specify as much as possible.]

- School: Latin / Ancient Greek lessons
- Caribbean literature
- Theatre / plays / opera etc.
- Music
- School: other lessons
- University
- Non-Caribbean literature: fiction, poetry etc.
- TV / film
- Religion
- Non-Caribbean literature: non-fiction
- Museums
- Other
7. I was taught Latin and / or Ancient Greek and / or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean. [Please briefly describe the image of the Classics you perceived.]

Comments:
I studied Latin at high school and also studied the Greek myths.

8. Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

Comments:
The stories were interesting, but I didn't realize how they were a part of a necessary part of the colonial project.

9. Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

Comments:
Colonialism—The British or European colonialism was not only about destroying the cultures of the people they colonized, replacing it with what was suitable to British culture.
10. Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words / phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect.

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11. The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures / epic traditions?

<table>
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<th>Comments:</th>
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<td>The epic genre is relevant to the Caribbean because despite their position in the world today they were at the centre of epic achievements and events ... the culture.</td>
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</table>

12. Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

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Also, have epics although we often forget them. The Ramayana, which we never talk about, the epic of Sundaata Jivam Kali.
Further comment:

Yes, there are some geographical similarities but their historical realities are very different. The Melanesian Archipelago is comprised of islands whose populations were so violently enslaved and interbred that the idea of a racial hierarchy that is still at work today is... their geographical similarities do have some bearing on lived experiences—for example, the idea and sea fishing would have some bearing and impact about beyond that.

Thank you very much for your participation!
SURVEY “THE RECEPTION OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY IN ANGLOPHONE POSTCOLONIAL CARIBBEAN LITERATURE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY” AS PART OF A PhD RESEARCH PROJECT AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Please answer each of the following questions by marking X on the scale from STRONGLY DISAGREE to STRONGLY AGREE AND, where appropriate, share your thoughts in the text box provided.

Please note that this survey uses the term “Classics” to refer to ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (including their politics, culture, literature etc.) as well as the academic discipline studying these. This term is used for the sake of simplicity and clarity; however, the author is aware of its problematic nature.

1. I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. [Please comment why / why not.]

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Comments: It is relevant insofar as reading is a vital part of my writing practice.

2. I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. [Indicate in what ways they are / aren’t.]

<table>
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Comments: I would take some qualms with “inspiration” in this context, for I do not read the Classics for inspiration. Reading it, however, whether I’m conscious of it or not, does affect certain sensibilities of my writing.
3. **What are your first three associations with the Classics?**

I cannot list three associations as such, but those associations generally have to do with narrative, the delight and challenge posed by the stories that make up the Classics.

4. **What are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?**

Again, I cannot list three associations, but again my primary interest is narrative.

5. **The Classics carry colonial connotations. [Why / Why not?]**

<table>
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Comments: As with the Bible before, during, and after the colonial period, the Classics has been a convenient tool colonisers use to justify colonisation as a necessary step in the myth of Western civilisation.

6. **In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics (multiple answers possible)? [Please specify as much as possible.]**

- school: Latin / Ancient Greek lessons
- school: other lessons
- X university
- X Caribbean literature
- X non-Caribbean literature: fiction, poetry etc.
- X non-Caribbean literature: non-fiction
- theatre / plays / opera etc.
- TV / film
- museums
7. I was taught Latin and/or Ancient Greek and/or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean. [Please briefly describe the image of the Classics you perceived.]

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Comments: 

8. Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. [State why you think so / don’t think so.]

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Comments: It is well documented that the colonisers made the Classics part of their colonising tool.
9. Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

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Comments: I think Classical references are just references, allusion by itself does not bring about „anti-imperial effect“.

10. Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words / phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect.

<table>
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Comments: Since that depends on the writing at hand, the matter is too complex to say one way or the other.

11. The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures / epic traditions?

Comments: Its popularity is certainly rooted in the lingering colonial style of education but the impulse comes out of the region’s natural storytelling background, which is the surviving instincts of oral cultures from Africa that predate European colonisation.
12. Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

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Further comments: My opinion is quite ambivalent. It is clear that the major elemental reality of the sea forces a similar mode of survival between these archipelagoes. That said, the march of history is quite different and so there are drastically different cultural resemblances that separate and give these regions their unique features. I see that march of history as central to the work of Walcott and Glissant, too.

Thank you very much for your participation!
E: Completed Survey Questionnaire

Winsome Monica Minott

Survey “The Reception of Roman Antiquity in Anglophone Postcolonial Caribbean Literature of the Twenty-First Century” as part of a PhD Research Project at University College London

Please answer each of the following questions by marking X on the scale from STRONGLY DISAGREE to STRONGLY AGREE AND, where appropriate, share your thoughts in the text box provided.

Please note that this survey uses the term “Classics” to refer to ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (including their politics, culture, literature etc.) as well as the academic discipline studying these. This term is used for the sake of simplicity and clarity; however, the author is aware of its problematic nature.

1. I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. [Please comment why / why not.]

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   Comments:
   As I write, the context of my work being a place for inspiration.

2. I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. [Indicate in what ways they are / aren’t.]

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   Comments:
   Enhances -- not inspires.
3. What are your first three associations with the Classics?


4. What are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?


5. The Classics carry colonial connotations. [Why / Why not?]

   Strongly disagree    Quite disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Quite agree    Strongly agree

   

   Changes:


6. In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics (multiple answers possible)? [Please specify as much as possible.]

   - school: Latin / Ancient Greek lessons
   - Caribbean literature
   - theatre / plays / opera etc.
   - music
   - school: other lessons
   - non-Caribbean literature: fiction, poetry etc.
   - TV / film
   - religion
   - university
   - non-Caribbean literature: non-fiction
   - museums
   - other
7. I was taught Latin and/or Ancient Greek and/or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean. [Please briefly describe the image of the Classics you perceived.]

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8. Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

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9. Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

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</table>
10. Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words / phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect.

Strongly disagree  Quite disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Quite agree  Strongly agree

11. The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures / epic traditions?

Comments:

12. Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

Strongly disagree  Quite disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Quite agree  Strongly agree
1) I believe a writer’s output is influenced by what he or she consumes: plays, movies, books, magazines and more. The intersection where imagination, memory, personhood and self, meet, -- is the space where new works unfold. Growing up, I was never seen without a book. I met some of ‘the classics’ in re-storied form early in life; these stories continue to be a ‘natural reserve,’ that I call upon in many instances to complicate an idea. I believe complicating a poem adds depth and hopefully will challenge readers. Infusing Greek mythology, is one way to complicate a poem, so yes, there is a continuing relevance of the “classics” in my poetry.

2) I am often provoked by reading an article or a book that reports on a continuing injustice. Injustice transports me back in time to the history of how our people arrived in the Caribbean via trafficking by sea. I ask myself and others, “how can we move on without addressing: beatings, rapes, bodies, bones on the sea floor, and sharks following ships?” When I hear of trouble on land or at sea, my thoughts drift to slavery and The Odyssey. Yes, the Classics continue to inspire my writings, directly and indirectly.

3) First 3 associations with the classics

   Fables:
   --Jason and The Golden Fleece
   ---Troy and the Wooden Horse
4) Reading a more easily read, annotated version of Odyssey; -- Reading the poetry of Derek Walcott and reading Kamau Brathwaite; -- Reading the poetry of Lorna Goodison, and Shara McCallum

5) “Classics” carry colonial connotations?

In a general sense “the classics” underscore domination, and the mis-allocation of scarce resources. Scarcity often results in continuing disenfranchisement of ‘persons without power.’ In Caribbean islands, with limited resources, there is a challenge to provide easy access to books required in many subject areas, not only the classics.

Elitist character of the Classics: As an individual who benefitted more easily from available books, plays, movies, I never thought of it then as having colonial connotations, no more than having access to a bible. In other words the information was more important that the bearer of the information. I was eager to read not considering the many who had no access.

6) At Mavisville Prep school the teachers read several stories that were based on Greek Classics. I was reminded by my sister that her introduction to Latin was at the said school. I never did Latin. My early significant encounters with The Classics happened during my primary education, later enhanced by reading books, and watching TV.
7) I never thought of the many stories that brought mystery and magic, as ‘the Classics.’ They were just fanciful stories, some a very frightening. However, it was one way to leave behind the routineness of a day and to be transported to another time and place. Stories allowed me to experience, the sun on my back while discovering new worlds, other times to suffer shipwreck. It was that innate will to survive, (like many ancestors) that kept my fingers turning pages. In other words I immersed myself in the lives of select characters.

8) Growing up in Jamaica in the seventies and eighties we had a British education, complicated by the nonsense of “Hey diddle diddle…the cow jump over the moon.” I consider many English myths and fables as an appropriation of the “Classics.” Our exposure to Shakespeare, taught in all high schools in Jamaica came through our British structured education. Nevertheless, they took away our mother tongue, our African stories and gave us standard English. I am one with Kamau Brathwaite who wants to hear the roar of the winds and the sea in each sentence. How can we tread softly with words when we have endured so much as a people? Derek Walcott, a little while past mid-career acknowledged that “what may be the bad grammar … can be stronger than grammatical correctness.” I say “we talk Jamaican, a little bit of this and a little bit of that,” nothing to worry bout.
9) I draw reference to “Why Telemachus Sells Broom,” in Zion Roses. Here Odysseus’ son has been transported over many centuries and many lives. He appears now as a “original rasta and broom seller.” The hope is for readers who do not know the original Telemachus, to seek him out, also for readers who do not know a Jamaican Rasta man and his cultural proclivities, should likewise seek knowledge. The ultimate is for cross pollination. What I have said in the abovementioned lines (in this paragraph) may be considered as having an anti-imperialist effect, but I defer to readers and critics to so determine.

10) The use of Latin or Greek words / phrases in Anglophone Caribbean Literature, may or may not have an anti-imperialist effect. The question is very general and the answer is dependent on many factors (including but not limited to) the context in which it was used; who will hear; and who will read what was written, e.g., when Walcott named his central character “Omeros,” Homer’s name in modern Greek, it may be construed as intending to have an anti-imperialist impact. Yet, we cannot always assume that this is so with Walcott’s referencing of the Classics. On the other hand should Kamau Brathwaite infuse Greek or Latin words, without hesitating I would say it was his intention to generate an anti-imperialist effect.

11) /

12) I have read as much, i.e, that the Caribbean islands bear geographic similarities to the Mediterranean Archipelagoes, but I wish to add nothing more at this time, having not studied the geography of the specified areas.
Please answer each of the following questions by marking X on the scale from STRONGLY DISAGREE to STRONGLY AGREE AND, where appropriate, share your thoughts in the text box provided.

Please note that this survey uses the term “Classics” to refer to ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (including their politics, culture, literature etc.) as well as the academic discipline studying these. This term is used for the sake of simplicity and clarity; however, the author is aware of its problematic nature.

1. I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. [Please comment why / why not.]

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Comments: I reference superheroes in my novel ASTF, directly and indirectly. Many have their origin in or take inspiration from, again directly or indirectly, Greek and Roman myths. I even mention Poseidon/Neptune rising from an angry sea.

2. I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. [Indicate in what ways they are / aren’t.]

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Comments: It is hard to escape the myths upon which we’ve been weaned. Of course, they are not my only inspiration, and how much of these stories were actually culled from African myths, from Ethiopia or Egypt?
3. What are your first three associations with the Classics?

Not sure exactly what you mean by that, but maybe Marvel Comics’ Hercules, Submariner, or DC Comics characters like Wonder Woman, Shazam, Aquaman, and other characters named after mythological creatures or actual historical figures. Certainly TV shows that referenced them, like certain Star Trek episodes. Then the planets, learning that the names were for Roman gods. Later, there would be references in the literature I studied at university and in courses on Classical mythology.

4. What are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?

The Broken Trident (Barbados’ flag), A House for Mr Biswas (a novel by Naipaul I greatly admire, it does remind me of the Greek myth of Sisyphus), George Lammings’ preoccupation with Caliban from in The Tempest, which seems to me Classical in nature with its preoccupation with mystical power, rulers, witches, and sprites…and control of others; notions that might can make right.

5. The Classics carry colonial connotations. [Why / Why not?]

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Comments: They are, on the surface, the myths of the colonial “masters.” They represent much of their thinking and philosophy and fears…. But they are universal in nature, as universal as Aesop’s fables or Anansi stories. They can be spun to anyone’s purpose.

6. In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics (multiple answers possible)? [Please specify as much as possible.]

- school: Latin / Ancient Greek lessons
- school: other lessons
- university
- Caribbean literature
- non-Caribbean literature: fiction, poetry etc.
- non-Caribbean literature: non-fiction
- theatre / plays / opera etc.
- TV / film
- museums
- music
- religion
- other
Comments: Others in the form of discussions with friends, family; music in terms of songs that reference mythological characters but also superheroes like Superman; religion would be comparative: someone likening Zeus to God, for instance.

7. I was taught Latin and / or Ancient Greek and / or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean. [Please briefly describe the image of the Classics you perceived.]

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Comments: N/A—educated in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

8. Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. [State why you think so / don't think so.]

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Comments: I would think that by and large this is where they would have been passed on down, through the British colonial education system, first. Especially when Latin and Greek were on the curriculum, or one was studying the “first” great works of Western literature and the like.

9. Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons. [State why you think so / don't think so.]
Comments: The Classics can and often have been subverted by writers/artists. As I mentioned above, if used “rightly,” these stories can instruct and empower anyone. Beyond that, they are more than what they seem in themselves—something not everyone who uses them accepts. I’m no scholar or expert in the area, but just because the versions we often reference (say, with white people who sound British) are the best known to us doesn’t mean they are the original versions, the only versions, or that they came solely from people who were not of colour.

10. Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words / phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an antiimperialist effect.

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Comments: See my answer to 9. It all depends on how the words are used and in what context. A character may use a Latin phrase to show how “superior” he is because of his colonial upbringing; another may use the same phrase to show how it has lost its power in the present age.

11. The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures / epic traditions?

Comments: Hm. I think its popularity has to do with what our writers have been taught is “important” work, a “big” book, what will guarantee you are “remembered.” There is also a desire to compete with and challenge and outdo other writers in other territories, particularly the British, who have written epics…. Again, we go for or go after what we know. For sure, epics from other cultures, such as various Indian, African and Middle Eastern, slipped into the mix (e.g., The Arabian Nights)…. But even in answering this I wonder: What is an epic work? Epic in what sense? How is it being defined here, and how would the average critic or reader define it? Epic might mean Game of Thrones or Omeros or The Handmaid’s Tale or The Godfather or Fall on Your Knees or any number of anime…or something just as significant yet by way of a more intimate, individual,
everyday scenario, like *The Chocolate War*, *Things Fall Apart*, *The Remains of the Day*, a remarkable number of Alice Munro short stories....

12. Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

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Further comments: It’s entirely possible and most likely, but I’ve never looked into it. What I can say is that people who live on or near similar bodies of water (seas, lakes, rivers, salt versus fresh, etc.) share similar habits, traits, lifestyles, practices, and myths....

Thank you very much for your participation!
Please answer each of the following questions by marking X on the scale from STRONGLY DISAGREE to STRONGLY AGREE AND, where appropriate, share your thoughts in the text box provided.

Please note that this survey uses the term “Classics” to refer to ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (including their politics, culture, literature etc.) as well as the academic discipline studying these. This term is used for the sake of simplicity and clarity; however, the author is aware of its problematic nature.

1. I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. [Please comment why / why not.]

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Comments: I’m not very educated in the classics

2. I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. [Indicate in what ways they are / aren’t.]

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Comments: See above
3. **What are your first three associations with the Classics?**

Maybe The Odyssey? Derek Walcott’s poetry. I don’t have any others.

4. **What are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?**

Derek Walcott’s poetry

5. **The Classics carry colonial connotations. [Why / Why not?]**

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Comments: I don’t know

6. **In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics (multiple answers possible)? [Please specify as much as possible.]**

- school: Latin / Ancient Greek lessons
- school: other lessons
- university
- Caribbean literature
- non-Caribbean literature: fiction, poetry etc.
- non-Caribbean literature: non-fiction
- theatre / plays / opera etc.
- TV / film
- museums
7. I was taught Latin and/or Ancient Greek and/or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean. [Please briefly describe the image of the Classics you perceived.]

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Comments: Can't remember, really. I think we did Greek and Roman myths in school.

8. Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. [State why you think so / don’t think so.]

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Comments: Yes. Probably most strongly with the theft of antiquities.
9. Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons. [State why you think so / don’t think so.]

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Comments:

10. Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words / phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect.

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Comments: 

11. The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures / epic traditions?

Comments: I don’t know
12. Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

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Further comments:

Thank you very much for your participation!
H: Transcript Interview Jacqueline Bishop

Transcript: An Interview with Jacqueline Bishop

Date and Location: 13th April 2022, online (Zoom)

Interviewer: Annemarie Schunke

Abbreviations:
JB = Jacqueline Bishop
AS = Annemarie Schunke

The first part of the interview is based on the questionnaire I designed (cf. chapter two). The second part of the interview focusses on Jacqueline Bishop’s poetry collection Snapshots from Istanbul (2009).

Part I: Questionnaire

AS: I am going to start by asking you questions from the questionnaire. Question number one: I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. Please comment why/why not.

JB: Yeah, I agree with that. I quite agree with that for a few reasons. Number one: When I was growing up in the Caribbean, somehow for some strange reason, I had access to the Classics, particularly Greek Classics, as quite a young child. And I remember going to Carib Theatre and watching these Greek myths play out on the screen. And I guess they kind of stayed with me and I started to make up my own parts within these myths and stories because I quite liked the characters and the stories. I quite like what was happening even though I grew up in a system of “There is only one God and He is a jealous God” and all of that... I liked the many gods and the confusion and chaos they caused. I liked the narratives. And it is interesting because I do not think that the issues that they were talking about have changed much since; those issues are enduring.

AS: That is really interesting. Would you say it was Greek drama in particular that was prominent in the Caribbean? I am asking because in African contexts for example, there has been a significantly greater focus on the reception of Greek drama than of other aspects of Graeco-Roman civilisation.

JB: Yes, I quite agree that it was the dramas that came to me as a child and that endured. I do not remember Aristotle or anything like that until I got to college, but that was in the US. That was not introduced to me in Jamaica at all. And Sappho – who is a poet who I admire but who is also interesting to me as a woman who is voicing women’s issues and
issues of sexuality, female-to-female pleasure – I had heard almost nothing of growing up in Jamaica. For me, she is very important because she…it is almost like speaking out of the void for me, with her. I had heard nothing about her, growing up in the Caribbean. And nothing about her in…I discovered Sappho on my own.

AS: Moving on to question number two: I consider the classics an inspiration to my writing.

JB: Well, I think it is strongly agree or you would not be interviewing me, right? [chuckles]

AS: [chuckles] I guess. In which ways are they an inspiration, would you say?

JB: Well, I wrote a whole book about them, right? Snapshots from Istanbul. And I feel like, I will go back to them again and again. I have been thinking a lot about Sappho, in terms of – not so much her sexuality, though that is part of it – but in terms of the ways in which…again, that whole business of speaking out of the void.

And I am fascinated – fascinated – by the women in those tragedies, in these dramas and in these stories. I remember when I had to teach Medea and one student threw away the thing because he said: “How could she? How could she? How could she kill her children?!”, you know? I found that remarkable. People would just get into such a temper and I thought, what power! All these centuries later! And I remember my sister-in-law saying to me, “No, no. Let him go, let him win! Let him do, just keep the children!”

And I think, number one, I would like to have people react to my work like this, you know? And number two, I like the idea of having dialogue with people across generations. So yes, I could see that I could…it is an inspiration that I would like to go back to at some point.

AS: Would you say the Classics also serve as inspiration for feminist ideas?

JB: It could be. But I am not sure if Medea is a feminist.

AS: I was also wondering about this because of what you said about Sappho; this thought came to mind.

JB: Of course, Sappho and all of them… I am taken with the idea for example– The one I really…oh, I cannot remember her name. Calypso! I like the story of Calypso. But the one I really love is the one who is knitting all day long, and unravelling her work, and knitting and unravelling…Oh my gosh, I cannot remember her name. Is it Persephone who is always knitting and unravelling?

AS: I think you mean Penelope, Odysseus’ wife.
JB: Yeah, yeah. So yeah.

AS: Okay, let us move on to question number three. What are your first three associations with the Classics?

JB: Drama. Enduring. And mythological.

AS: And what are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?

JB: Of course I think, naturally, of Derek Walcott and his *Omeros*. But I must confess upfront, I have not read it. Just seems really long. And my second association is with those fantastic poems that Shara McCallum has written about the character of Calypso, you know? I do not know if you have my latest book *The Gift of Music and Song: Interviews with Jamaican Women Writers* – do you have that?

AS: Yes, I do.

JB: There is an interview with Shara McCallum in it, where she talks specifically about how she uses Classics in the postcolonial context of Caribbean literature.

Then there is a fairly new poet, I do not know her as well. Her name is Monica Minott. She is Jamaican and she does the Jamaican version of these Classics as well. So these are my associations of the Classics in the context of the postcolonial Caribbean.

AS: Can I ask, why “enduring”?

JB: Because they have lasted all this time.

AS: Yeah, okay. Question number five: The Classics carry colonial connotations. Would you agree with that?

JB: Not for me. I mean, I can understand how they could carry colonial connotations for, certainly, Europeans. If I were Turkish, I would certainly believe that they carry colonial connotations, for example. But from where I stand, in the Caribbean, they function as stories for me to emulate and stories for me to fashion my own stories in conversation with.

AS: That is really interesting. Reading works and commentary by Caribbean authors from the twentieth century, it seems to me that the colonial connotations of the Classics were a lot stronger then, because the Classics were first really taught in the Anglophone Caribbean by the British colonisers.

JB: Well, let me explain something to you. When I was in high school in Jamaica, the education system that I went to high school in in Jamaica, had a heavy dose of Caribbean
literature, in addition to English literature and British literature and American literature. So I had the benefit, perhaps, of age, of there never being a time when I did not know there was a Caribbean literature and not knowing that there were Caribbean writers. And so the literature for me was not... I have never said this to anyone before, I am going to make a confession to you. I thought that literature and art was going to be my thing, a private thing. And my professional life was going to be a medical doctor. And as much as we had literature and art in high school, it was never presented as a professional thing. It was more part of a civilising mission if you will, you know? This is what a cultured individual, a cultured young woman – she can sew, she can paint, she can sing, you know, this kind of thing. And in literature, Caribbean literature was incorporated. So while I was writing and doing my little drawings and whatnot, that was for Jacqueline. And what Jacqueline was going to be as a professional was a medical doctor. Now, the fact of the matter is, I was pretty horrible at the sciences. Pretty horrible. And I persisted at this.

The end result of all of this – which has to do with your question, finally – is that I ended up majoring in the sciences, not the arts, right? And I always felt, damn, what a wasted opportunity. I always thought this was a wasted opportunity. But now as I am thinking about it and your questions, I am thinking perhaps it is not, right? Perhaps it was not so much of a wasted opportunity because I was not force-fed a British tradition and whatnot in literature. So consequently, when I started to develop as a writer and an artist and as a thinker, it was largely through my own resources and reading, which was overwhelmingly Caribbean. So I never felt ‘less than’ in that area.

AS: Okay, question number six. In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics?

JB: Uhm, TV/film. That is the only one.

AS: Any films in particular?

JB: Well, it all came through TV/film, right? I would watch these Greek dramas unfolding at Carib Theatre, for example. So they were fused, TV, film, drama, theatre, plays – they were fused.

AS: Okay. Question number seven: I was taught Latin and/or ancient Greek and/or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean.

JB: Strongly disagree.

AS: Question number eight: Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism.
JB: For me, I would have to strongly disagree. For the reasons I told you before.

AS: Question number nine: Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons.

JB: I think so. I agree! I mean, again, when I would teach literature and I would teach Medea – I remember Medea in particular, but any one of those Greek tragedies –, students would get so involved. It was not classical or Greek anymore. It was people they knew. They could see themselves in it. They could see people they knew. They could see stories they knew. And that is the power of these Classics. I could get students to write, based on these Classics, and write about things that they knew.

AS: Do you think that the Classics ‘open up new audiences’ for Caribbean writers? Walcott talks about how his literature was more recognised by European audiences because he used classical references, which European readers knew and could identify with. He talks about how those references, at least from the perspective of a Western audience, lifted his writing to a level that was ‘on a par’ with European writing. Even though this is obviously problematic but would you agree with that?

JB: You know, I have to confess that the question of audience is always a confounding one for me because I am so involved with my work as a writer that I never think of the audience. And you and the research that you are doing is a perfect example. When I got your e-mail – and I have to confess, it is going to sound a little grandee or stuff – I am just so busy at this moment that I try not to say yes to too many things; but I said yes to you because I did not realise that my work was being read in a classical context, even though I had read the Classics. So I did not know you were my audience. So the question of audience is always quite confounding for me because I did not know you were my audience. Thus, I feel like I cannot answer this question because I am always surprised, when someone writes to me and I am like “Ah, I have an audience there too”. A Polish person wrote to me and he said, “I’m translating some of your poems. I got the permission from your publisher” and I said, “Ha! Okay. You think these poems would speak to a Polish audience”. There you go. He said, ”I’d love to do the entire collection”, I said, “Go ahead!”. So I do not know how to answer your question is what I am trying to say. Because I did not know there was such a classical...I did not know there was you, Annemarie. [chuckles]

AS: Yeah, I completely understand. Okay, question number ten: Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words/phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect.
JB: It could. But I would have to disagree with this, for the simple fact that, speaking as a Jamaican: In fact, I think of a huge debate that was going on on Facebook about a Jamaican folk song. [Sings:] Sammy plant piece a corn down a gully. And it was “piece a corn” and it was a many different iterations and they were trying to figure out what the hell he was saying, what the folk song originally said. So I do not think it is poss–, I am probably messing up your thing here...

AS: Not at all.

JB: But Jamaicans take terms and words and make them their own all the time.

AS: Okay. So, question number eleven: The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures/epic traditions?

JB: Hm. Another question I am not sure I can answer.

AS: No problem, I am aware the question is quite specific. I asked this question with classical epic but also other epic traditions, such as African epic or Eastern epic like the epic of Gilgamesh, in mind.

JB: Yeah, I cannot answer that one.

AS: No problem. Okay, moving on to the last question: Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

JB: I think I would have to know the Mediterranean archipelagoes a bit more. What seems to me, just anecdotally, is that the sense of being island-ed, you know, the sense of being an island and the sense of...the spot of land surrounded by all this water, is important to both. The sense of having to negotiate with the water, with the ocean. Looking at visual art for example, at what is created visually from the Caribbean, the landscape plays such an important role, even in the objects that are created. So if you look at Caribbean jewellery for example, a lot of it is in dialogue with the ocean. Or look at our diet, a lot of it, too, is in dialogue with the ocean. I think there are similar things with the Mediterranean. Lastly, I think that – I am just trying to think of the Mediterranean spaces that I have been in, Morocco, Egypt, some European countries, Turkey – what I think might be different between Mediterranean and Caribbean archipelagic spaces is that, when you are an island, you are forced to make sense of your reality in and of yourself.
So, to Caribbean eyes, there is a more uniform European identity, whereas in these archipelagic spaces, people have to make their own gods. Let us put it that way. And that is what these two spaces might have in common.

Part II: Snapshots from Istanbul

AS: I would like to start by asking you some questions about Ovid & the exile theme in Snapshots from Istanbul. It seems that the (ancient) idea of exile is something Caribbean writers and Caribbean women writers can identify with and make use of quite a lot. I am thinking of your poems but e.g. also Roffey’s The Mermaid of Black Conch, in which exile is a common theme throughout the novel. Why do you think the idea of exile appeals to Caribbean writers and do you think this is inspired by classical authors such as Ovid/ancient figures who were exiled?

JB: Excellent question! And I tell you something, the next issue of Stand, I think you should get it! Stand comes out of the University of Leeds and I have two poems in it. The next issue is an issue of Black women poets, Black being Afro-Caribbean, Afro-American, Black British, transgender Black women and African women. I have two poems in it and the cover is one of my paintings so I am really excited about this.

You brought up Monique Roffey, who is a dear, dear friend of mine, and I love that book, her mermaid book. And I think you will find in my book of interviews that the mermaid – which goes by different names, in Jamaica it is the Rivermumma – is someone I have been on the track of for a while. And in this Stand issue, I have two mermaid poems and my next collection is built largely around this mermaid. And another poet who is doing this, is Grace Nichols, she is from Guayana.

AS: Yeah, I have contacted her agent as well.

JB: Okay. And she said, “Jacqueline, the mermaid is very prevalent”. Now, I am getting to answer your question. So I have been on the track of this mermaid for a very long time because she was the first person… if you look in my collection Fauna, it is a poem to the muse and it is a mermaid. And it finally came to me, what the mermaid was all about, which is: she occupies the in-between space, which is the space of the exile, of the person in exile. She lives in water but she can also come up out of water. She occupies that liminal space, let’s put it that way. And so, there are multiple understandings of exile because you can be in Jamaica and feel alienated from the culture and be an exile as
well. So maybe because of the ideas that we engage with as women writers, it puts us in exile, so that is to answer the question.

AS: That is really interesting. NourbeSe Philip’s remarks on displacement in A Genealogy of Resistance and her definition of displacement essentially resembles what you just said, that it is not necessarily a question of place.

JB: Mhmm, exactly.

AS: Okay, another question regarding Ovid and his exile literature: Ovid’s exile literature is considered some of the first autobiographical literature that we know of and it seems your poems in Snapshots from Istanbul are autobiographically inspired, too, so I was wondering if there is a connection?

JB: It is so funny you should ask me that. This morning as I was trying to get breakfast and I am involved in several projects, I realised that perhaps what I have become is like the mermaid, which is the outsider within wherever I go. I was born and I grew up in Jamaica but if I go there, I have lived so long outside of Jamaica that I am still the outsider within. Because I was born in Jamaica and spent my childhood there, I am forever marked by that and wherever I go, that makes me an outsider, too. So if I am an outsider within Jamaica, then I am an outsider within everywhere, right?

AS: Yeah, I see. I also wanted to ask you about the Julia and Scribonia poems and this relates to what we talked about earlier, whether Classics can inspire feminist writing. These are two women who were sent into exile on Pandateria (or Julia was sent there and Scribonia went with her) and I thought to read feminist critique in these poems, of gender roles in society? So is it fair to say that you used those ancient women for the purpose of feminist critique?

JB: Yes, I think that is very fair. How that book Snapshots from Istanbul came about, was I had gone to Istanbul – I will keep quiet as to whether I had that fantastic love affair [chuckles] – and a lot of those poems came from multiple trips to Istanbul. So I kept going back for a reason [chuckles] and when things kind of unfolded and unravelled and I was in my apartment in New York trying to absorb all that had gone right or wrong in Istanbul, I was watching on PBS a documentary on Augustus and then I became fascinated by the women, that were the sidelines, you know, the one-liners in this grand narrative, and started reading about them. And I thought, this is fantastic. And so little is known about these women, so, so, so little. At first I was frustrated that so little was known about these
women, right? But then they became the conduit for all sorts of ideas that I wanted to talk about. So yeah, I accept the reading that it is feminist, yes, I do.

AS: And maybe the fact that relatively little is known or written about these women leaves more room for creativity…?

JB: That is right. Absolutely.

AS: I would like to ask you about your poem “Pomegranate” as well. In it, you mention the goddess Hera and Medea. Why these two ancient women in particular?

JB: Because of their associations with fruits, vegetables, plant life, which is what Caribbean women are associated with and pictured with on postcards and whatnot. I find that fascinating.

AS: I had not thought of that, that is actually fascinating.

JB: Yeah. If you look at those postcards, that is what we associate Caribbean women with all the time. I actually started to see myself a lot in these women. It was never ever a question of racial difference – this sounds so very crazy. I am very interested in women’s stories and the difficulties I had with piecing together these women’s life stories is exactly the difficulties I have trying to piece together enslaved women’s stories. It was so similar to me. And these women’s associations with fruits and vegetables was exactly what was going on in the Caribbean. I actually should write a whole set of poems around this. It became— it was obvious to me.

AS: I have got one last question relating to your Augustus poems. In one of them, you use the line “Do as I say, do not do as I do”, and I was wondering whether there was some criticism of modern politicians and country leaders in this?

JB: Erm, it was not…at the time, Donald Trump was not the president but is that not what he is essentially saying?

AS: Mhmm. We have a similar case in the UK...

JB: [chuckles] Right. So, no, I did not think of that, of specific people. I was thinking of it more masculine and feminine. All the things that are put onto women, oftentimes by other women, too. Misogyny is perpetuated a lot by other women. I should actually go back and do a second collection, just on the women.

AS: Thank you so much for your time.
I: Transcript Interview Lorna Goodison

Transcript: An Interview with Lorna Goodison

Date and Location: 6th May 2022, online (Zoom)

Interviewer: Annemarie Schunke

Abbreviations:

LG = Lorna Goodison
AS = Annemarie Schunke

The first part of the interview is based on the questionnaire I designed (cf. chapter two). The second part of the interview focusses on Lorna Goodison's poetry.

Part I: Questionnaire

AS: Question number one, I consider the Classics relevant to my writing – would you agree with this statement and why or why not?

LG: I do not know. Or can I answer it this way: I am not sure I am going to be able to answer your question like that. What I would say is that I do believe that every now and again I as a writer have to check in with a text like the King James Bible or Jamaican folklore or any texts which have informed and form my voice. So I guess you could say yes, I believe that it is important and relevant, yes.

AS: Okay, question number two, I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. Again, would you agree and if so, in which ways are they an inspiration?

LG: I would say yes.

AS: Would you say they are an inspiration in the sense that texts authors consume stimulate their writing?

LG: Yeah, like I said, I know some texts have helped shape and form my voice, like almost every Caribbean writer or also the King James Bible or, you know, the Book of Common Prayer. And there are several other things that you read that you know helped to make you into a writer.

AS: What are your first three associations with the Classics?

LG: Okay, I like this one! My mother was a dressmaker and actually, the first word I ever learned to read was ‘Singer’ on her sewing machine. Literally sitting at her feet when she was sewing, you would play with her instruments of her trade and she had threads. And
there was and I think there may still be a thread called ‘Atlas’ and Atlas thread, on the logo, has a drawing of Atlas kneeling with the world on his back. My mother told me the story of Atlas when I asked her about the thread. So that is my very first one and that is my favourite one.

What else would I say? The Greek myths I think have pervaded everybody’s culture. You would hear an adult referring to a very dirty cleaning task as “Augean stables”. Also, you have popular songs like “Venus”; when I was growing up there was a song called “Venus” by Frankie Avalon and it actually says in the song “Venus, goddess of love that you are”. So it is kind of in the air. But also when I was born, there was a programme on the radio called the “Birthday Club” in the afternoons and you would hear recordings of the myths. So from very early on, when I was about four or five, I knew the story of Diana or Atalanta and the golden apples, those two in particular. I became acquainted with a number of the Greek myths from hearing that radio programme as a child. So that is three associations, there are probably others but that is three. [chuckles]

AS: Okay great. This is really interesting. But moving on to the next question: What are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature?

LG: Well if you read Derek Walcott at all…I started reading him when I was a teenager. He is very immersed, he is marinated in the Greek myths. You cannot get around it; almost every poem of his has some sort of reference to Greek and Roman mythology. But let me tell you this: When I went to high school in Jamaica at the age of eleven or twelve, first year we were exposed not to Greek and Roman myths but to the Norse myths. I went into the classroom and there was a lady, she was our history teacher, and we had a class in the great Norse myths. So you became acquainted with Thor, Odin…[chuckles] And then we got into trouble because when she told us about his [sc. Odin's] wife Frigg, sometimes called Frigga, which to us teenage children is a bad word and we all just collapsed in laughter [chuckles]. We got punished because they said it was un-ladylike and we had dirty minds..but yeah, someone called Frigg or Frigga, we thought that was very funny [laughs].

All during high school, especially first, second, third form, I remember we had a woman who we used to do something called ‘dictation’ with and a lot of the stories were the Greek myths, like Theseus’ task of getting the sandals and sword from under the stone.

AS: Next question, the classics carry colonial connotations – would you agree with this statement?
LG: Sure they do. Course. I mean, I am sure they were the food and drink of the colonialists. Some of it is just so crazy when you read it in the light of modern day or reality, it was always about some people arresting power from other people and, you know, capturing and killing and subduing and tricking, lots of trickery. So yeah, I think they were a help and aid in that colonial project.

AS: You have already mentioned a few of them but in which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics?

LG: Caribbean literature, theatre, some music, non-Caribbean literature, TV/film, radio…I would say all of them [listed in the questionnaire] except I went to art school.

AS: Does that mean you did not have Latin or ancient Greek lessons?

LG: I did, I did Latin.

AS: So was art school a kind of special secondary school?

LG: Yes, it was. You drew from plasters and torsos of Greek and Roman statues.

AS: Okay, question number seven is very similar to what we just discussed: I was taught Latin and/or ancient Greek and/or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean.

LG: I was taught basic Latin and about the myths.

AS: And what image of the Classics did you perceive in those lessons if you can remember?

LG: Well, put it this way: we were never taught any African myths. We were taught very few, if any Jamaican or Caribbean myths...So it was just assumed that those myths were it. They were the final word, there was no other myths really, it was just those. At least that was what we were taught to believe.

AS: Okay, Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. Do you agree and why or why not?

LG: I guess, yeah. Sure. In the sense that if you are taught that there is one way to be and everybody that is not that way or has not been educated or brought up that way...does not count.

AS: Classical references in Caribbean literature have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons. Could you please state if you think so and why or why not?
LG: Well, one of the beautiful things I think about resistance, the strong resistance many enslaved people would put up to slavery and colonialism and imperialism all over the world is that we tend to co-opt many of the images and the things that we were given and turn it back and push back. You know, I always liked the fact that a lot of enslaved people with Greek and Roman names, I think they probably drew the spirit of those people [who they were named after]. If you were named Theseus or after some great Greek warrior, you have probably drawn some warrior strength from that. Or if you are called Juno or Venus, you probably think “I am pretty fine, I am nice”.

For example, I have been doing a lot of work on the *Divine Comedy* and there is a lot of interesting work that has been done on how much Dante has become a figurehead of... people read it, assimilated it and then took him on as a sort of anti-colonial or anti-imperialist fighter against oppression. So, you know, the colonialists and imperialists can mean one thing but what really, actually happens can look quite different.

AS: You like to use a mixture of Standard English and Jamaican speech in your poetry. In an interview with Jacqueline Bishop you said this is because you “want your poetry to resonate with Jamaican ears but still be accessible to non-Jamaicans” (*Gift of Music and Song* 82). Based on that, I was wondering whether you could say a little bit about the use of Latin and ancient Greek words in Caribbean poetry. Do you think given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin and Greek words in Anglophone Caribbean poetry can have anti-imperialist effects?

LG: Yeah. you can joke about it. You make it into– I think, again, I go back to Derek Walcott. He does that all the time in a lot of his poems: he will use some kind of Greek and Roman quotation and then he will sort of twist it phonetically or misspell it or he will have somebody push back or laugh at it.

AS: So that would be almost like ridiculing the British colonial education as a form of resistance?

LG: Yeah, absolutely.

AS: Question eleven: The epic genre is popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures or epic traditions?

LG: I think probably both but certainly, the evidence that I see from reading it, would be that it is heavily influenced by the Graeco-Roman tradition.
AS: Question twelve, several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

LG: Too many people whom I respect have said that, including Rex Nettleford, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. He was head of the [Jamaican National] Dance Theatre Company and he was a Renaissance man, multi-hyphenate I think you could say, and a philosopher and thinker. And he strongly believed that. So I will say, too many people whose opinion I really respect say that so I am sure there is some truth in it.

Part II: Lorna Goodison’s Poetry

AS: I am interested in the themes of ‘exile’ and migration in Caribbean literature and its relevance in classical allusions in Caribbean poetry. I understand that you have been dividing your time between Jamaica, the US and Canada for a significant period of time. Reading your poem “Making Life” from Controlling the Silver, I suppose your answer to whether you are an exile would be “no”? Ishion Hutchinson and Jacqueline Bishop, among other Caribbean writers, also reject the term. Why?

LG: I live in Hawthorn Bay, British Columbia. I retired from the University of Michigan about four or five years ago. I was living in the United States and going back and forth but I have been living in Canada for over 20 years. But it is a lot of dividing, back and forth, between places, yeah.

So you are asking: would I consider myself an exile?

AS: Yes.

LG: No. I have been asked this question before and I said at the time, to call yourself an exile when you can get on a plane and be back home in a couple of hours…I can get on a plane and be back in Kingston in the space of a few hours, nobody is stopping me, politically or in whatever way. What I am saying is, you are poisoning the wells if you use a term like ‘exile’ to describe people who simply work somewhere else or have a home somewhere else and go back and forth.

I felt very strongly about this when I was first asked about it because at the time, Wole Soyinka was in exile because Abacha was going to kill him. I mean, I am not joking, he
was going to end his life, so Wole was forced to flee from Nigeria. He went to different places and actually spent quite a bit of time in Jamaica. I was thinking I do not have the right to say I am an exile in the same way that he does. There are now going to be lots of people from Ukraine who are in exile or people from all over the world, from the African continent or people who are having to flee from various oppressive regimes – I am something else, they are exiles.

AS: I completely understand. I asked you because I noticed that the term still gets thrown around in literary criticism on the Caribbean..

LG: Yes and that is complete rubbish! It is presumptuous and it is not right.

AS: But regarding notions of migration, home and outsidersness – are the Classics an inspiration for those kind of explorations in your poetry or Caribbean poetry more generally?

LG: Well yeah, there is quite a lot of wandering and travelling in the Classics. You know, you consider yourself always journeying so there are certainly parallels. The Rastafarians have co-opted the whole image of the ‘Children of Israel’, of being in exile in a strange land, of not being at home. That makes a lot of sense.

AS: Okay, next I have a question specifically on “On Becoming a Mermaid” in I Am Becoming My Mother and your two River Mumma poems ("River Mumma" and “River Mumma Wants Out”) in Controlling the Silver. It occurred to me that the mermaid sometimes represents in-betweenness in Caribbean poetry. So I was wondering whether it is fair to say that she is at least in part inspired by Graeco-Roman myth? And what is the significance of the mermaid to explorations of home and exile, which run through your poetry oeuvre?

LG: It is and it is not, you know. You think about the sirens and they were half women, half sea creatures. I must say, though, there is a poem that really...it is “The Forsaken Merman” by Matthew Arnold. I read that poem when I was very young and it is a very powerful poem about a merman who is married to a mortal. I really like that poem and I think it brought the idea home to me of someone who is half human and half sea creature and has married someone who is mortal. She has gone back to land and he is with the children and has come to the shore and is just trying to call her back. I tear up thinking about it; I think there is something about that poem that may have started to inform the way I think about mermaids. I usually come to those things by images. In my mind there is
the image of this small girl, this poor mer-creature trying to call the mortal back; it has stayed with me for a long time.

AS: Regarding your poem “The Mulatta as Penelope” from I Am Becoming My Mother: Penelope seems to be a figure that resonates with Caribbean women writers. Jacqueline Bishop and Shara McCallum both confirmed this impression and you too refer to Penelope in your poetry. This is a double question: Why is the figure Penelope interesting to you and why do you think it resonates with other Caribbean women writers? You said in your interview with Jacqueline regarding female perspectives and voices in writing: “The half that has never been told is now loudly demanding to be told.” Is this part of the appeal of Penelope?

LG: I do not know, it is a good story. I mean, that is a very old poem of mine and I just liked the story, it is a great story. I liked the fact that I was giving voice to Penelope from a Caribbean perspective, she was not a European Penelope. Although it does not really say so, I did not think of her as the Penelope who is sitting at home and just knitting or making her art and then undoing it at night and putting up with the suitors. This Penelope in my poem was a new mother and so she was putting all her love and energy into the child and did not worry about him [sc. Odysseus] being gone.

AS: Okay, I only have one more question. Jamaican fruits and flowers stand out in your poetry, sometimes in connection with representations or descriptions of women. I was wondering whether there is a connection to classical representations of women with fruit or plants as symbols of fertility there?

LG: Yeah. I anthropomorphise a lot. My first collection [Tamarind Season] – which I am now referring to as my urtext [chuckles] and it is true, almost everything I have written I can find some beginning in that book for. I did not even realise it but I did not look at that book for many, many years because I think usually you do not want to look at your early work. But recently I have been looking at it and there is absolutely everything I have written since then which I can sense some, even the smallest seed from which an idea began for in that book.

Regarding your question, I mean I was painting and I wrote a lot of it when I was at art school so it is just full of painting images and colours and techniques. But also history, it mentions James Baldwin right on the first page, whose work has influenced me all these years and continues to do so.
Sorry, I am wandering far away from your question. Yeah, I suppose you could say that. I mean, it is called *Tamarind Season* and I certainly anthropomorphise a lot of fruit and plants. Tamarind season in Jamaica refers to a season of hardship, a time when a lot of plants do not bear fruit. The tamarind bears all the time, even when other plants do not bear.

AS: And is that inspired by classical imagery?

LG: Well, it could well be. I would not discard the idea that it is. For example, in that book I refer to mandrake, which is a plant that has human characteristics, if you break it, it bleeds. A plant you find in the *Divine Comedy*, both of the suicides are mandrakes. And that was in my first book, so yeah.

AS: Thank you very much for your time and insights.
The interview is based on the questionnaire I designed (cf. chapter two).

AS: Okay, perhaps we can jump straight into the first question: I consider the Classics relevant to my writing. Would you agree with that and why or why not?

SM: Yeah, I would agree. I would say that since my first book of poems, I have been rewriting various fragments. So as with a number of women writers from the Caribbean, in that book I am interested in Calypso particularly – there is a poem that I write in her voice –, Persephone, in that book erm...I am trying to think of others. I mean, I am interested in myth generally and in representations of women in myth and particularly, like, reconstituting those myths in the contemporary Caribbean. So I would have to say, you know, it is a strong influence in my work. Some of it does come out of Caribbean writers, who are preceding me, but some of it comes out of other Anglophone writers outside of the Caribbean, who were models in my work as well for doing this kind of rewriting of myths.

AS: Mhmm. Can I ask why women in particular? Would you say that the Classics serve as an inspiration for feminist writing?

SM: Yeah. I mean, for me, it is often giving voice to Caribbean women through these myths, rewriting them in that context. But the emphasis is on women insofar as I have always loved these stories. From when I was exposed to them as a teenager, they made a lot of sense to me in terms of archetypal rendering of human foibles and...just fascinating, I loved it. But it struck me, I think, kind of unconsciously, Annemarie, that the women do not really have a huge role in these myths. They are often secondary or tertiary characters. The men are always the heroes; whether it is Odysseus and Penelope is sat home waiting for him. So I think I sort of began to investigate it, just through the fact that much of my poetry is giving voice to those perspectives of women and Caribbean
experiences that are not seen in Anglophone literature as readily as male perspectives and, you know, perspectives of people from the ‘centre of the empire’.

So yeah, I think there is a lot of feminist perspective there. But I think there is also a sort of ‘post’-colonial – ‘post’ in quotes – but ‘post’-colonial perspective in the sense of, you know, these are my inheritance so I am going to write through them, back to them, rewrite them, you know. To make it that they can give habitation to the kind of people I am descended from.

AS: Mhmm. And perhaps this underrepresentation of women in classical as well as Anglophone literature of later eras leaves more room for creativity?

SM: It certainly does. I mean, I suppose all the myths are open to reinterpretation in every generation since they have been told and told and told, they are recontextualised. So there is not anything particularly about women’s perspectives that you would require in order to retell the story. For example, I mentioned Odysseus: you certainly could rewrite Odysseus’ story but that is less, I think, open to the imaginative possibility insofar as there is so much more attention given to that in the text itself. Whereas, if I am writing in Calypso’s voice, I can make up her entire backstory, you know? She is really a compelling figure to me to recast as a mermaid in the way I do, but her narrative is so marginal in terms of number of lines given to it, you know, in Ovid or whichever version you are looking at of the story, that I think it is not as if you cannot do it with the other major characters but there is a lot more room for making it up as you are writing.

AS: Speaking of mermaids, that actually leads me to another question because it occurred to me that the theme of exile in particular seems to be one that resonates especially with Caribbean women writers and the mermaid seems to inhabit that in-between space. Jacqueline and I spoke about that as well. So is the concept of exile relevant to you in your writing?

SM: Yeah, I mean, absolutely. I wrote the mermaid poems – it is a long sequence, it is the fourth section of my first book. And I was in my early twenties, this is a lifetime ago, you know. Mum was 50 and I wrote them before I was 25. The book came out in 1999, to give you some perspective. Why do I say that? Erm, yeah, looking at it after having written those poems, I could see I was working through a lot of issues of in-betweenness and of liminality. Certainly being a person who is from Jamaica but migrated, you know, in late childhood to the United States, I really have a very bifurcated experience of being Jamaican and American in that national context because I was not fully formed in either world. I spent almost the first decade of my life, a really formative period, in Jamaica and
then I was transplanted – through a series of familial narratives that spurred this, that really had to do with geopolitical larger narratives of history. I then spent my coming-of-age decade in the United States. So I think of myself as being of two worlds, in that regard, and the mermaid certainly is. In the way that she is contextualised in my book and a lot of my writing, you know, she is looking back. She is looking back often on what is lost and what she kept with her and how she cannot quite make either of them work in either world. You know, legs are foreign to her and she is also foreign now to the sea. So I think that is the way into which my own interest in the question of exile comes about, through probably personal narrative. In that case, inflecting the experience. And that would be very different to Jacqueline, who left, you know, when she was a teenager fully formed in Jamaica. So I point that out to say that all exile experiences are not the same and the term exile has political dimensions to it that are not actually true in my case or Jacqueline’s case. If you are comparing it to somebody who is writing out of a Tibetan experience for example or Palestinian experience. My country exists, it is just that it feels as if I cannot go back there, right? And that is a different kind of exile. So I am just suggesting that yes, I would absolutely embrace that and I see the mermaid as that. As much as anything, it occurs to me I am also working through being a mixed-race person. So not just a female who is from the Caribbean but a mixed-race female whose identity is not readily visible to people. So my father being a mixed-race Black Jamaican, my mother being Venezuelan, me and they carry ancestry that…what people see when they look at me is Europe, right? And of course that makes sense. Both of my grandmothers are from the UK, but my grandfathers, as it were, are from the Caribbean and Latin America. And where I am born and the world I am entering is fully made of that space but I am constantly rewritten in other people’s imagination because what they see, makes them think, “Oh, she must be European”, basically. And that means that the mermaid is a great way for me to deal with that because the history of who she is is not visibly present on her body, when she is migrated onto land. But then all of who she is that informs her is part of her history. So I would say – again, I did not think of these things on the front and, Annemarie, which is why I told you, I was so young when I wrote my first book and when I wrote those poems. Like many writers, just writing out of a sort of reaching for understanding. And that remains true even to this day. You know, it is after having written that we can have this kind of a conversation, where I can say, “Yeah, I can see how I am working through these issues”. But at the time, you know, I am thinking about just finding my way to the poem, even word by word, line by line. Driven by music and syntax as much as these arguments about exile and race.
AS: Interesting. Some of the things you say actually remind me a lot of NourbeSe Philip’s essays in *Genealogy of Resistance*.

SM: Yeah, surprisingly I read *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* before I wrote my first book.

AS: Oh okay. [both chuckle]

SM: She’s a huge influence on me. Huge influence.

AS: Mhmm, okay. Moving one to question number two: I consider the Classics an inspiration to my writing. And if so, in which ways are they an inspiration or not?

SM: Well, of course I would agree again with this because the thing is, I think of – as much as I mentioned my personal narrative – I think I am writing also about other texts that I love and have read. So, you know, everything I am as a writer, as much as it is product of my lived, worldly experience, it is hugely a product of my imaginative life. Maybe as much as not more sometimes. So the self that exists in these poems is in relation to every poem and story I have ever read and loved, right? And that is absolutely the case with the Classics. As I said, I came to them when I was 13 or 14 years old, so I have a long history of reading these stories and finding resonances in them before I thought I was going to be a writer. I did not imagine myself a writer at that age, I was always a reader. And so, that is my relationship even still to not just the Classics, as is your question here, but older texts. You know, these are the oldest texts that I engage with, are the Classics, but even romantic poetry that I read before I was going to be... British romantic poetry, that I read before I was going to be a writer, was marking me, really. So if you mean inspired and spurring, then yes, I am inspired by these texts, for sure.

AS: Okay, next question: What are your first three associations with the Classics?

SM: Hm, that is a very interesting question. They are all so very personal but I would say, I think being in middle school in the United States, reading them and seeing in them characters making a lot more sense to me than some of the interpretations of God that would present God in a singular form as altogether good. So that is my first association, is connecting with some of the Pantheon of the Roman and Greek – Greek first, then Rome – gods and goddesses, that felt much truer in their anthropomorphic behaviour. And certainly in the Hebrew and Christian tradition of text, I see commonalities. So I do not know what that says, that is an association with how we come to understand divinity through these texts. I would continue to say that even as I continue to...that probably
shaped my belief, too, in turn, with my rejection of the kind of literal truth – the stories that I grew up with. I was raised as a Rastafarian and so, by that age, I had already rejected any literal view of these old texts. And I think I just associated all of them in the same space, Annemarie. These gods seemed clearly human. They seemed a whole lot like the adults that I had witnessed in my life, and I found that fascinating. But not in any literal sense, it was more like a way to understand human behaviour than it was a way for me to understand concepts of divinity. But I was aware that these were things that the ancient people believed in as literally as some of the members of my Rasta church in Jamaica or, like, people I know still, who believe in Jesus Christ as a literal manifestation of God. I understood that. So I think it was also a way for me to unpack metaphor. You know, again, just beginning to understand the separation between the parts. Right? The figure that is made by the scripting of something that represents something else, a symbol that represents. So I wonder if those were three that I have given you but erm, those are my associations with the Classics.

I suppose later, when I come back to them as a writer, now I am beginning to associate them with writers whose work means a lot to me as a poet. Certainly coming out of the Caribbean tradition, I would say NourbeSe Philip. Also, Derek Walcott is inescapable to me at that point. Even though her work I actually read first and it spoke to me more, I came to admire Walcott's work because you cannot be a Caribbean poet and not in some way, I think, wrestle with the legacy that– the shadow he casts. And his engagement with Classics is interesting for me to observe. It is very masculine, I suppose, is what I would say about it. Like much of Walcott’s work and many of his inheritors, the tradition feels entirely masculine to me and is really not admitting the feminine or the female in a way that I would want to be admitted. It is kind of an ambivalent relationship that I have to the Classics, to Walcott. Whereas with NourbeSe Philip, I can fully embrace that viewpoint, particularly of a woman of colour from the Caribbean refracting these stories.

So that is maybe what I can give you for now. I do not have a negative association with the Classics and I will say that. I understand that they come to represent for some people, you know, a tradition that is decentring of Black experience, of colonial experience. I suppose I am of the tribe who think all of this is fair game. Like, this is all mine, as a writer because I am the product of that kind of history and it is in my DNA, literally. So I do not know that I do not see those critiques, of course I can see them, but I do not choose to limit myself as a poet to that which originates only in Africa, for example.
AS: Yeah. Okay, I think you have already partly answered this next question but what are your first three associations with the Classics in the context of postcolonialism and postcolonial Caribbean literature specifically.

SM: Well, definitely, as we have been talking about, NourbeSe Philip and Walcott are the two that come to mind. I do not know if I have a third writer that I can say I associate as strongly. But that is to do with the sort of ‘accident’ of my reading habits in my twenties, being in the United States, really only beginning to understand the notion of coloniality or that there was a body of work that I could perhaps belong to. I was really shaped equally in a global tradition of Anglophone poets, meaning I would say Eavan Boland, an Irish poet, was just – in terms of dealing with the Classics...You know, there were those writers from the Caribbean but they were not models for me. I would say actually it was the Irish poet, who is also dealing with postcolonialism..

AS: Yeah, I was going to say that the Irish experience was of course a colonial one as well and as such comparable to the Caribbean experience in some regards..?

SM: Right? But I was recognising in her work postcoloniality in the Irish setting, Classics and feminist rereadings of these texts...Absolutely, I would say, outside of the Caribbean, would be another early association.

AS: Interesting. Again, we have already touched on that but: The Classics carry colonial connotations. Would you agree with that?

SM: Yeah, I mean, of course. And I am more and more open to hearing out the arguments about the need to decentre the Classics in our curriculum because I see things change, culture changes. So the degree to which younger poets I work with in particular are interested in the Classics is interesting to me to know.

They carry also...not just colonial in the sense of the history of English colonialism or Western civilisation, really, since we are not English, but they are a product of the English literature we read, you know? Or should I say the English writers who we read still are products of this thought – that might be a more accurate way to put it. But I will say that they carry also for many people, erm, they carry a sense of hierarchy and privilege. They carry a sense of, like, you need to be erudite, you need to have been learned, you know. I did not learn to read Latin in high school, that was not part of my curriculum, but I was still taught the Classics in their English language translation. So, you know, very few people will go on to study the Classics in their original, myself included. I have not studied the Classics in their original, it is always translation for me. And it is scattershot, it is not
my course to study. I never took a course in the Classics for example, so it is always... always feel like I am dilettantish. You know, I know Classics scholars and I listen to them and I think, I do not engage like this. You know, I engage like a poet would, basically very happenstance, very picking and choosing what is interesting to me and leaving the rest. I am not a scholar of the Classics, right. But they do carry that sense that the only way to engage with them is through very learned ways. And that is not my way so that is perhaps why I do not carry that baggage.

AS: Yeah, there is definitely that connotation of the Classics.

SM: Right? But I did not come to them in that way so I do not have that connotation to begin with but I certainly understand where it comes about. And I would say if I were in the field of Classics that would be a problem for me to contend with, in the same way that English has had to contend with, you know, the British canon – as a discipline –, or philosophy is really contending with this issue and dealing with it. But it is not my battle, not my fight. [chuckles]

AS: Fair enough. [both chuckle]

SM: Sorry, it seems it might be yours, Annemarie. [laughs] I do not want to put it off for other people to fight about but I have other ones. And mainly when I teach and when I write, I choose liberally what I am interested in and I choose to maintain that prerogative of a writer.

AS: Okay, next question: In which contexts were your first significant encounters with the Classics?

SM: So it would be Caribbean literature, theatre, probably music but only in a backhanded way, school: other [non-Greek and Latin] lessons, non-Caribbean literature, as we have discussed. Trying to think about TV and film...I do not know. Religion, yes. University, yes. Erm museums, yes. Everything except for the Latin and ancient Greek lessons, I would say, I had some exposure. I do not know about significant but I would say early exposure, so in that way significant. Because what you are exposed to when you are young, I think impacts you and stays with you because for the first time you are seeing this iteration of how something is done.

AS: Mhmm. And when you say theatre, are there any plays in particular that you are thinking of?

SM: Erm probably reading them, so I did not get to see them performed, but I would have read, maybe, I think Antigone. I was in performance theatre in high school and so we read
some of these plays as examples in those contexts. This is all going back to my high school. I went to a public school where I was just extremely fortunate that art was a big part of...what the curriculum has allowed us to experience. But Antigone I think we read, erm, maybe Medea. Or I certainly read some of these on my own by the time I was in graduate school. I do not remember seeing a play earlier on, that would be later, that I would come to plays as something to watch.

AS: Okay, question number seven: I was taught Latin and/or ancient Greek and/or about classical civilisations at school in the Caribbean. You have already answered that in part, I think..

SM: So because I left when I was just finishing primary school, I do not remember honestly. I honestly did not go to school very much when I was a child, for various family reasons I missed a lot of school until I came to the US. So I do not remember what was taught and was not taught.

AS: Okay. Let's move on to question number eight: Classics in the Caribbean context are linked to British colonialism. And why or why not?

SM: You know, I think my exposure to them because I am outside of the Caribbean reading them is to see them through a lens of Caribbean writers who are using them to oppose British colonialism. It is such a weird way that I come to it that I do not think I could also answer this definitively. I see them as actually being used by writers to dismantle colonialism but, again, I am seeing them as a person outside the Caribbean reading them in the United States.

AS: Mhmm, I see. Okay, question number nine: Classical references in Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect and contribute to recalibrating global cultural canons.

SM: This is perhaps the argument I was saying to you that now I hear being made where I am the most curious about thinking through my own biases, like how I just absorbed it as something for me to be part of. It was just part of the fields of myths that I loved and stories that I never thought about very hard...and it was not the only ones that I loved or knew...by the way, also the Anansi stories, which come out of the West African tradition. And I think I just always thought of myth quite pluralistically because of the context in which I was always receiving it. But I can see this argument, even though it is not one that I see as the only way that these references work and they certainly did not work that way for me...like, I had no idea where Greece was, you know? I could not have located it on a
map, it was a place of the imagination. I did not understand this was even corresponding archaeologically with a real place when I was hearing these stories. They are figurative for me...but in their literal referencing of places and peoples and elevating of those over other stories that we could tell, I totally understand why they could weirdly, or maybe not weirdly but intentionally, promote Western civilisation above other civilisations.

AS: It is interesting that you should say that, I have a question on epic later on which ties in exactly with what you just said. But firstly, question number ten: Given the imperial connotations of the English language in postcolonial contexts, the use of Latin & Greek (words/phrases) in Anglophone Caribbean literature can have an anti-imperialist effect.

SM: Yeah, so one of the ways in which this has come about recently is me just trying to think through the language that I have inherited, even the fact that so much of the use of poetics is Greek. The word ‘ekphrasis’ for example, which is a form of...I mean, you know what it is, I can tell by you nodding.

AS: Yeah.

SM: So I am not going to define it but I am curious about the fact that by using it to describe something, that that is in a way constituting as, like, the origin of all things we could have used to describe. We could have chosen another language to describe the act of disruption and so on. But I say this one in particular because the word ‘ekphrasis’ and the notion of it is not actually located in ancient Greece, it is actually coming out of eighteenth-century British poetry and being used to define something that is located in...erm, its first iteration being in Greek text, do you see what I am saying? It is not actually original to those texts, it is the eighteenth-century British colonial enterprise, absolutely colonial enterprise, that is looking for an antecedent. And where is it going for that antecedent? So that is an example to me of a way in which, yes, the language we use can have an imperialist effect. I have answered it in reverse of your question, you are asking, “Can it be anti-imperialist?”. I would say, what I can see is how it can be imperialist just by virtue of us sourcing language that way. When you use it though and you are using ekphrasis to anti-imperialist effect, you are in effect going beyond the etymology of the word at that point. So it could be then that the word itself is locating imperialist arguments but the use of, not the word or phrase, but the use of the form could become anti-imperialist.

AS: It is really interesting that you are saying that, also from a civilisational point of view – I am thinking for example of Bernal’s civilisational narrative – that the Classics were in exchange with African, semitic and other cultures and influenced by those. And what you
are saying is completely true, I think, that this image of the Classics that has been held by many for a long time of ‘white antiquity’ and so on is a product of European scholarship of the last few centuries.

SM: Yeah.

AS: That is a nice transition to my next question. Question number eleven: The epic genre is very popular with Anglophone Caribbean writers of the twenty-first century. Would you attribute the popularity of the genre to its Graeco-Roman tradition or its tradition in other cultures (or both) and, if the latter, which other cultures/epic traditions?

SM: I would imagine it depends on the generation of Caribbean writers you are looking at. So if you are looking at Walcott's generation, even a few after, the Caribbean is going to educate you in the Classics because it is a British system to this day, the model of education used in the Caribbean. Now, the canon has changed in terms of what is introduced to primary or high school students but the model for education is the same. And certainly, if you were with my grandparents’ generation, you know, it is hard sometimes for people who were born...to remember that the world did not start spinning when they stepped on the globe. So I have to say to my students, “My grandparents were British citizens, regardless of whether my grandmothers were born in the UK, both of them, and migrated. But also my mother was born, and my father, into the British Empire.” So why even mention that? Of course I think it would be coming principally then out of the Graeco-Roman tradition because that was still being taught. But writers who go beyond that obviously are searching for other antecedents. So Brathwaite – you know, even in Walcott’s generation – he is looking for West African antecedents. He is deliberately looking for it. It is not being taught so you cannot say it is popular...[laughs]...I am not sure if either are popular anyway. But insofar as they are being received traditions, the Graeco-Roman is still dominant, would be my guess, for a long time.

After a certain point, with colonial and anti-colonial discourses coming about inside of the Caribbean and the 50s and 60s going on, there are writers who are very much reconstituting epic traditions, principally I would say in West African culture. So it is a hard one to answer in abstraction, I think.

AS: Yeah it is, although what you just mentioned about a reconstitution of the African epic tradition in Caribbean literature is definitely something I observed in my analysis of contemporary Caribbean dealings with epic. And I also completely agree with the point you made about British education curricula and that is part of the reason why I decided to focus on writers of the twenty-first century because education curricula obviously do not
change over night but I am interested in exploring particularly postcolonial generations of writers, on whom the colonial influence may not have borne as heavily.

SM: Mhmm, yeah.

AS: Okay, that brings us to the last question: Several Caribbean writers, including Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, have suggested that the Caribbean and (ancient) Mediterranean archipelagoes share many cultural resemblances due to their geographical similarities. What is your opinion on this?

SM: Well, I do not know...probably, I was influenced by them because I know both of their writing, especially Édouard Glissant's créolité, it influenced me as a young person a lot, like in my twenties, again, when I am reading those writers.

I would say that I agree because there is something about the spatial construction that leads to cultural iterations. And temperature as well [chuckles]. So having not actually spent time in the Mediterranean myself but knowing about Greece for example from a friend of mine – a poet I know who loves Greece so much and has spent so much time there – and when she describes it or when I read about Greece – I never visited, I have only visited Italy and Rome and can see some of this – but Greece seems even more like this to me. In terms of the way the islands are, the earth, physically, spatially constructed, and how that creates silos of experience for cultures. But then you see repetitions across the archipelago. So I would agree, with my limited knowledge of it firsthand that I used to say for example, when I read the poem “Calypso” a lot, I would say to people, “Why is Calypso now in Jamaica?” [laughs]. And she is, you know, clearly twentieth century, or I suppose I could tip her into the twenty-first century [chuckles]. She is a Jamaican woman in that century speaking and I was like, well, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, same difference. You know, it is to joke: same difference, like you have these islands and recurring patterns of culture across islands. So I would say that is true.

The one reason I suppose I am hesitating to say it is quite so simple is that the Caribbean is so marked not just by spatial histories, but as much as anything else it is the history of slavery. And that is absent in the Mediterranean, at least in terms of my understanding of slavery in the classical world, it is very different to transatlantic slavery. So even though slavery is an ongoing phenomenon, including in the classical world, one could have admittance to the citizenry or the dominant culture through that form of slavery in a way that does not exist in the transatlantic world. So I feel like that is where my hesitation comes from with saying you can overlay them precisely. Perhaps that is also where I find
when you overlay them, that is when it can become a really anti-imperialist and postcolonial endeavour.

AS: Mhmm. And coming back to what you said about religion earlier, about monotheistic vs polytheistic systems, a comparison that has been made between the Caribbean and the Mediterranean is that culturally, the Caribbean has a focus on plurality, whereas the Mediterranean is more focussed on ‘the one’, and that that arises from the regions’ geographies. Would you agree with that?

SM: Sure! And this comes out of a not so much Jamaican – because Jamaicans really are monotheistic, you have many different kinds of Christianity in Jamaica and you have some presence of Judaism but the dominant faith in Jamaica is Christianity. Having said that, I think a better example to me would be somewhere like Cuba because when Catholicism gets overlaid onto African deity systems of Yoruba, you get Santeria, which is much more pluralistic than syncretic. You do see syncretism with African belief, with Pocomania or Myal traditions, Obeah in Jamaica but it gets sort of pushed into the monotheistic model faster. So yes, I agree that it is more pluralistic because people are entertaining multiple belief systems at once. And I see it even in Jamaica insofar as Jamaicans will believe in duppies and in Obeah at the same time as we will be like really devout Protestants in whatever sect. Protestant faith has huge sway on Jamaican culture.

But I mention Cuba because I know a lot of Cuban writing and I feel somehow Roman Catholicism as opposed to Protestantism is one that entertains more readily a pantheon because of its emphasis on saints, because of the importance of Mary – a figure that gets erased, like the female figure in Protestant belief is so squashed compared to the role of the female in Catholicism [laughs]. Trinidad is a hugely Catholic space so it is going to have more naturally…also, it is Hindu. You have some Anglophone countries where the presence of Hindu belief is so strong that it is going to, to me, in a sense lend itself better to the multiplicity of gods. But Jamaica shares a lot more with fundamentalist evangelical Christianity, which is rabid in its belief that there is one God, one way. At least, Jamaicans still have Obeah, another West African practice – I say “at least” because to me, the problem of monotheism is imperialism [laughs]. Once you believe there is one God, one way, it generally does not end well.

AS: I totally see what you mean and lots of comparisons like that have been made, not just of monotheism and imperialism but also for example the exploitation of nature and animals and imperialism.
SM: Yeah, I do feel grateful that my own…and Rasta belief is pretty strong in Jamaica but so much less than the evangelical forms of Christianity, that really are the dominant ones in Jamaica. Sot it is not mine, it is not my faith, but I know that that is a huge force. That is why I keep answering the question pushing totally against the notion that it can always be that. My own upbringing was that my grandmother was Catholic, my grandfather was Anglican and Jewish and my parents were Rastafarian, in terms of the house I grew up in, I had a really pluralistic upbringing [laughs].

AS: Thank you very much for your time and insights.