

IATL FINAL REPORT

Project reference: **18-19/AF/Giusti**

Project Title: **Africa and the Making of Classical Literature – Diversifying the Western Classical Canon**

Grant recipient: **Dr Elena Giusti**

The purpose of this Grant has been to bring a number of external scholars, national and international, to contribute to my interdisciplinary module 'Africa and the Making of Classical Literature', which ran in 2018-2019 and is running again (without the support of IATL) in 2020-2021.

The module addresses the contribution of Africa, African people and people of African descent to the making of western classical literature and culture, as well as to the process of knowledge production in the discipline of Classics. A section of the module (coinciding with the lectures taking place in the second half of the Spring Term) is interdisciplinary with English, and covers the engagement with Graeco-Roman literature of public intellectuals (such as W.E.B. Du Bois) and African authors or authors of African descent (such as Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison). The module is also interdisciplinary with sociology (especially in relation to Critical Race Theory), with postcolonial and decolonial studies, and it is furthermore meant to encourage the students to reflect on the pedagogy and teaching of Classics world-wide.

Moreover, as students are made to reflect on the very concept of Classics and classical literature, they are also introduced to the newly emerging topic of 'global classicisms', and encouraged to compare the western concept of classics with classical texts from other parts of the world. This particular module treats the case of Africa, but it forms a pair with another module currently running in the faculty ('Ancient Global History', convened by Prof. M. Scott), which encourages them instead to compare the history of ancient Greece and Rome with that of China. From this perspective, one lecture in the module, happening in the summer term, covered the teaching and engagement with Western Classics in contemporary Ghana and the ways in which the teaching of Western Classics compares and differs from the discipline of African Classics.

The module was divided into three different but interconnected sections. We first explored representations of Africa and African people in Greek and Roman texts, with a special attention to how these texts constructed Africa as a series of 'imagined geographies' in the sense intended by Edward Said; we then moved on to look at ancient authors who were writing in Africa (from Hellenistic literature to Apuleius and Augustine), and we focussed especially on the ways in which they negotiated a dialogue between Greek/Roman and local African cultures (Egyptian, Berber). A final section of the module introduced students to the field of 'Black Classicism', or 'Africana Receptions of Ancient Greece and Rome'. Students read Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* with the question in mind on how these works changed the students' own perceptions of the canonical classical texts with which they engaged.

In 2018-2019 IATL allowed me to invite a number of lecturers to contribute to different aspects of the module. From within Warwick Classics, most of the module was taught by me, with two seminars delivered by Dr Theodora Hadjimichael, at the time a Fellow of the Warwick IAS and currently affiliated to the department of Classics in Birmingham.

As international lecturers, the module hosted lectures and seminars by:

- Dr Sarah Derbew (Harvard University) on Aeschylus' *Suppliants* in conversation with 19th century poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and 20th century novelist Ralph Ellison;
- Dr Matthew Rumbold on Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and his engagement with the western classical canon;
- Dr Mathias Hanses (Penn State) on W.E.B. Du Bois and his engagement with works by Cicero.
- Dr Tessa Roynon (Oxford) on Toni Morrison and the discipline of Black Classicism;
- Prof Patrice Rankine (Richmond) on Ralph Ellison and on the historical relation between white supremacy and the discipline of Classics;
- Michael Okyere Asante (Stellenbosch) on the teaching of western Classics in Ghana and the notion of an 'African Classics';
- Dr Sasha-Mae Eccleston (Brown) on Apuleius and on contemporary epic poetry post-9/11.

The guest lecturers offered public lectures and classroom discussions, attended by the students enrolled in the module and by students and colleagues from Classics and adjacent departments within the humanities. IATL also offered me the opportunity to photograph and interview three of them on the decolonization of Classics curricula and on the discipline of Black Classicism. The interviews can be found on the Warwick website:

- ['Decolonising Blackness, alongside the Classics Curriculum: A Conversation with Dr Sarah Derbew'](#)
- ['On Decompartmentalizing Black Classicism: A Conversation with Dr Tessa Roynon'](#)
- ['Classics, Black Classicism and the Portals of Disciplines: A Conversation with Prof Patrice Rankine'](#)

I was also recently invited to write a blog report on the module for the Cambridge School Classics Blog, under the title 'Centring Africa in Greek and Roman Literature, while Decolonising the Classics Classroom' (soon to be published).

The module's feedback reported in 2018-2019 had an unusually high student satisfaction rate (97%), which was especially commended by our Director of Education. Many students singled out the presence of guest lecturers, made possible by the IATL, as one of the highlights of the module.