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Mapping a Chronopelago: The Temporal Ecologies of Caribbean Women's Writing

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Mapping a Chronopelago: The Temporal Ecologies of Caribbean Women's Writing

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M.Phil, Trinity College Dublin, 2013
B.A, Ithaca College, 2007

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

Mapping a Chronopelago: The Temporal Ecologies of Caribbean Women's Writing

By: Julian H. Currents

This dissertation, "Mapping a Chronopelago: The Temporal Ecologies of Caribbean Women's Writing," proposes an interdisciplinary investigation of a series of biomimetic signifiers—living objects acting metaphorically—that reveal a unique relationship between time, space, and identity in women's literature from across the Caribbean region. Often excluded from canonical analysis, these contemporary women's texts offer some of the most radical representations of destabilized linear time, reflecting a temporally bound circum-Caribbean identity that I refer to as the *chronopelago*. In recognition of the distinct ways in which these biomimetic signifiers—mangroves, conch shells, the shallows, and the intertidal zone—react to or actively prompt destabilized time, I argue that not only do these texts reveal a unique understanding of nonlinear time, but they illustrate holistic responses to such destabilization. Responding explicitly to our current historical context of anthropogenic climate change, this series of chronopelagic readings provides a compelling set of directions for navigating the disrupted temporal state in which we currently find ourselves.

Expanding out of the burgeoning field of critical ocean studies with a necessary emphasis on Black feminist thought and postcolonial critique, "Mapping the Chronopelago" focuses on the multivalent metaphorical nuances of the ocean as it appears in Caribbean literatures—both deeply symbolic and historically situated. Shallow, active, ecologically lush, and increasingly vulnerable, Caribbean waters operate in these texts both as metaphor and framework, signposting important moments of temporal disruption while impacting the narrative's structure itself. Understanding the Caribbean as a site of ongoing social and political resistance, chronopelagic literatures privilege the temporal knowledges and narratives of Caribbean women, critique the ongoing violences of white Western imperial expansion, and call into question current methodologies for responding to the climate crisis.

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I dedicate this project to anyone who was born on an island,
and to anyone who finds themselves back there in dreams.

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Images

Introduction: Turning from the Terrestrial

> Fish, amphibian, and reptile, warm-blooded bird and mammal—
> each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements
> sodium, potassium, and calcium
> are combined in almost the same proportions as in sea water.
>
> Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*

What can coastal plant life tell us about intimacy and impermanence? What can a seashell reveal about kinship and communication? How might a dark cave refuse to surrender daylight, even after the setting of the sun? And maybe most importantly, how is it possible to await the footsteps of one's own arrival? The answers to these questions betray the need for a unique methodology for assessing the invaluable symbolic presence of landscape in Caribbean literature. In pursuit of such an assessment, one that produces as few exclusions as possible, that relies on and celebrates conflict and multiplicities, that extends and embraces beyond histories, shores, and languages, I propose a parallel, complementary methodology for imagining a circum-Caribbean identity: one based on intimate interactions with symbolic temporal ecologies. To this end, I will be engaging a term I have coined here to describe this exact concept: the *chronopelago*. A conceptual reimagining of our preexisting definition of the term *archipelago*—a collection of islands understood as a singular conceptual unit—a chronopelagic reading proposes that the twenty-eight island nations and roughly seven thousand separate islands that we understand as *the Caribbean*, may be symbolically united not only by their shared geography and colonial history, but also by a shared temporal identity grounded in what Guyanese poet Grace Nichols might call a "stream of conscious landscape" (Nichols, *Startling the Flying Fish* 59).

In her 2022 monograph[1], Andrea Davis engages the literary tropes of horizon, sea, and sound to identify important reciprocal relationships that undermine the authority of the nation-state by privileging their non-hierarchical structures. By evoking these tropes, Davis constructs a diaspora-centric poetics that celebrates expansive notions of relation. Expanding on Michelle M. Wright's call for such a poetics, Davis describes her own project as,

> seeking to move beyond a Middle Passage epistemology in at least three ways: by recentering the voices and histories of women; by recognizing diasporic Blackness's multiple intersection in the circum-Caribbean; and by considering Caribbean people's complex relationship to the sea and land in order to theorize diasporic mobility both in relationship to and in excess of the geographic and political boundaries of the planation as a site of subjugation. (Davis, *Horizon* 78)

Truth be told, while this text was published after much my dissertation was already written, and while I would have done anything to have had her text as a guide when I began, Davis's monograph reaffirmed many facets of my work. In much the same way that Andrea Davis engages metaphorical horizons, seas, and sounds, I present a series of ecologically-focused close readings on the biomimetic signifiers of mangroves, conch shells, shallow waters, and the intertidal zone. Where Davis engages these readings to critique the power of the nation-state and its multi-valent violences, however, I am invested in how relationships to these signifiers betray experiences of disrupted time. Symbolic temporal ecologies appear in literatures from multiple nations, languages, cultures, and colonial histories across the Caribbean. Each features in its own chapter as my dissertation unfolds, and all four conceptual objects or spaces propose a different diasporic, postcolonial lived experience of nonlinear time. To this end, my first chapter, entitled *Mangled Time: Rhizomes and Reanimation*, launches a temporal exploration of the mangrove, as the concept of the mangrove as a uniquely Caribbean rhizome has been established.[2] Applying

[1] *Horizon, Sea, Sound: Caribbean and African Women's Cultural Critiques of Nation* (Northwestern: 2022).
[2] Keja L. Valens, for example, defends this regionally specific perspective in the introduction of her text, *Desire Between Women in Caribbean Literature.* Her own perspectives draw broadly from the works of Édouard Glissant.

this theoretical framework to a reading of Maryse Condé's 1989 novel, *Crossing the Mangrove,* functions as a tangible, material first step in what becomes an increasingly abstract mapping project. My second chapter, *Combing the Beach for a Conch Shell Poetics,* primarily engages Tiphanie Yanique and Edwidge Danticat, and addresses the conch shell, relying on the first chapter's association between object and theory to push further into an exploration of the animal/object and implied notions of time space, kinship therein. Chapter three, *Waiting Through the Shallows,* departs somewhat from readings of a single object and investigates the productive interactions between oceanic water and light found in the shallows through readings of additional texts by Edwidge Danticat, as well as poetry by Marion Bethel and Celia A. Sorhaindo. And what begins with a material reading of the relationship between object—the mangrove—and theory—rhizomatic time—ends in a fourth, more abstract chapter mapping the relationship between time, space, and identity: an exploration of the tidal zone and the metaphorical possibilities of a crashing wave. This last chapter is titled, *"Wind and Shore are my close companions": Intertidal Temporalities*, and focuses on works by Merle Collins, Nalo Hopkinson, and Grace Nichols.

The theoretical foundation for this project is broad in scope, relying on an interdisciplinary combination of ecocriticism, marine studies, postcolonial theory, Black feminist thought, and Caribbean literary and cultural theory. In answering the more metaphorical questions posed above, I also attempt to provide clarity regarding some more direct queries: what can the "natural landscape" in Caribbean literature tell us about its authors' lived experience of time and space? What can this shared transnational temporal understanding reveal about a parallel, supplementary, circum-Caribbean identity? Can this kind of reading expand our current understandings of identity, incorporating assumptions—rather than exceptions—of the

nonbinary, the queer, or the erotic? Most importantly, I wonder if this fluid, vulnerable, intimate understanding of nonlinear time can be engaged now, as the exponential spatial and temporal shifts of anthropogenic climate change advance around us. By assessing the multivalent significances of these symbolic ecologies in Caribbean women's writing, [3] I aim to reveal the uniquely diasporic temporal identity shared across a circum-Caribbean imaginary—a chronopelago. I align my work with the assertions of standpoint theory[4] and deliberately focus on women-identifying and queer/nonbinary authors and their inherently political, postcolonial, racial, gendered, and sexed storytelling. It is only by prioritizing the narratives of some of the most critically dispossessed voices that we may bear witness to the most necessarily embodied narrative cultural productions. By expanding on the radical politics of Glissant, Frantz Fanon, and Kamau Brathwaite with contemporary theorists such as Michelle M. Wright, Kaiama L. Glover, Saidiya Hartman, Keja Valens, Christina Sharpe, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, and Jessica Hernandez, among others, I argue that the Caribbean inhabits a chronopelagic identity that can be recognized through ecologically holistic readings of the region's literature.

Conducting close readings of late 20th and 21st century Anglophone Caribbean women's literature, with occasional readings of Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean literature in translation, this dissertation celebrates novelists and poets of Guadeloupean, Haitian, St. Thomian, Cuban, Jamaican, Bahamian, Dominican, Grenadian, and Guyanese descent. The primary authors I address—Maryse Condé, Tiphanie Yanique, Edwidge Danticat, Marion Bethel,

[3] In my investigation, I will be referring to aspects of the "natural" landscape, by which I mean, features present in a landscape that are not constructed by humans: the flora, fauna, land, water, and atmosphere. The idea of what is natural, or "of nature," will be taken up early in my dissertation to redirect debates on biological determinism and the ways in which the term "natural" is socially politicized in terms of gender, for instance.

[4] A sociological theory which argues that authority on a subject is rooted in an individuals' knowledge and lived experience of that subject, and that marginalized lived experiences allow for a more heightened awareness of the power dichotomy in which they are socially situated than those who are not marginalized. For more, see Patricia Hill Collins's monograph, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge: 1990).

Celia A. Sorhaindo, Merle Collins, Nalo Hopkinson, and Grace Nichols—are all still living, and many are still publishing work and teaching to this day. This focus on contemporary work is a deliberate choice on my part, as time is a core concept in this project. The texts I read critically—Condé's *Crossing the Mangrove* (1989), Yanique's *Land of Love and* Drowning (2014), Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), Collins's *Lady in a Boat* (1999) *Hopkinson's Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and *Midnight Robber* (2000), and Nichols's *Startling the Flying Fish* (2005)—all have publication dates aligned with or falling after the launch of the World Wide Web in 1989. As unrelated as this temporal marker might seem when reflecting on the natural world, it is impossible to discuss postcolonial literature of the long 21st century[5] without acknowledging the ways in which the launch of the internet permanently and abruptly shifted how the world understands time, space, human intimacy, and abstraction *from* nature.

These deeply contemporary texts betray a shifting understanding of our relationship with the world around us, but they also function as a commodity themselves. Considering the way in which "literary study gained enormous cultural strength through its development in a period of territorial expansion and conquest,"[6] it is vital to refocus the goals of contemporary literary analysis to be resisting the original colonial goals of the field. By deliberately elevating recently published texts by authors who would not have been included in any early colonial curriculum, I aim to renegotiate the bounds of a field largely born out of imperial violence. Along similar

[5] The "long 21st century" is a coy term I engage here to reinforce the idea, in the vein of Ilya Ehrenburg's "long 19th century," that the conceptually arbitrary delineations of century markers can be expanded slightly to reflect important historical moments that impact that period of time more significantly. Here I suggest that much like the long 19th century "begins" in 1789 with the French Revolution, this current era is most significantly impacted and contextualized by the advent of the internet.

[6] "My argument is that literary study gained enormous cultural strength through its development in a period of territorial expansion and conquest, and that the subsequent institutionalization of the discipline in England itself took on a shape and an ideological content developed in the colonial context" (Viswanathan 2).

lines, it is likewise to ignore the myriad ways in which digital ecologies mimic and reaffirm the oppressive and racist power structures we've historically constructed in real life—a phenomenon commonly known as digital redlining. Considering the aims of new materialism which acknowledge our immediate environments as deeply influential over our subjecthood, I too acknowledge this new temporal era and celebrate the first texts to emerge from it by engaging literature published since the internet's arrival. If we are to understand the Caribbean authentically in its historical context as a site of exploitation, commodification, and violence, celebrating Caribbean self-expression from women's voices in the age of the internet provides a renewed understanding of self-representation in the digital age—even if the texts themselves are set elsewhen.

The methodology for this project is less than strictly conventional, as I provide literary criticism alongside, and in communication with, a larger imaginary of landscape, cultural production, and artifact. While my work will be grounded in close readings of literature supported by critical theory, due to the somewhat abstract gesture of expanding on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *chronotope*, or "time space," I incorporate additional readings of visual art and cultural practices as well. Through these readings, I examine the multiple ways in which these facets of landscape manifest as material symbols in artistic and cultural production as well. The conch shell, for instance, appears not only as a narrative device in Caribbean literature, but as a symbol in well-known visual art such as Albert Mangonès's sculpture, *Le Marron Inconnu*; in Caribbean cultural practices, such as laying a conch shell on a loved one's grave; and even in contemporary popular culture as a Carnival-rallying instrument in Machel Montano's 2020 music video for his dance track, *Conch Shell.* My goal in these kinds of expansive readings is to ground my literary interpretations in a larger network of cultural significance, to draw

conclusions not based solely in metaphors fixed to a page, but to interpret the object in question as a multifaceted signifier of cultural meaning beyond the bounds of textual production.

In a further turn from the traditional, I also support my critical literary readings with original and inherited[7] works of art and photography in order to draw attention to what I will call a *para-archive*.[8] Here, I align my work with Saidiya Hartman's practice of "critical fabulation," where the purpose of incorporating this para-archive is to "illuminate the contested character of history, narrative, event, and fact, to topple the hierarchy of discourse, and to engulf authorized speech in the clash of voices" (Hartman 12). I engage the prefix "para" here in the way the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it—"analogous or parallel to, but separate from or going beyond, what is denoted by the root word." In this sense, the para-archive I construct here represents and communicates with an already existing but underacknowledged network of meanings and knowledges that span across the geographical region. This para-archive of cultural production runs parallel to the already acknowledged canon of Caribbean literature, evolving beyond its predominant engagement with heteronormative cisgender men's publications and traditionally valued modes of cultural production. Proposing an investigation into this para-archive demands an expansion of the Caribbean literary canon by celebrating critically underrepresented texts that have a strong grounding in this parallel cultural archive, engulfing authorized speech in a clash of voices.

[7] The first chapter of this dissertation, for instance, incorporates photographs my father took in the late 1980s.
[8] Not unlike Monique Allewaert's engagement with her investigation of *parahumanity*, which seeks to challenge the "hierarchal organization of life-forms that was common to colonial anthropologies and natural histories" (Allewaert 86), the term *para-archive* places this reading in "horizontal relation" to the pre-existing archive, "without conflating them" (86).

My first chapter introduces my investigation of chronopelagic ecologies by reading for an already critically accepted and acknowledged signifier of non-hierarchical, "nonexclusive intersections, intertwinings, and deviations" (Valens 7)—the rhizome—in Condé's novel, *Crossing the Mangrove.* Originally theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the rhizome is a conceptual metaphor I will be engaging by following in the tradition of Caribbean literary theorists and authors—Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Condé, Valens, and Tinsley—who have refocused this rhizomatic analysis to examine the key role the mangrove plays in the conversation about Caribbean identity. Valens specifically engages the rhizomatic mangrove[9] to examine the ways in which the mangrove functions as a specifically Caribbean rhizome that allows for a heightened focus on "the particulars of stories and lives related in specific geographic and historical conditions" (Valens 4). Her introduction, *The Epistemology of the Mangrove* plays on Eve Kokofsky Sedgewick's critical investigation of the spatial imagery of the queer closet[10] and advocates for the mangrove as a similarly engaged metaphor "through which to represent and analyze how desire and sexuality, knowledge and meaning, identification and belonging interact" (Valens 8). In order to emphasize the time-space of Caribbean literature in which "identification occurs through multiple vectors" (Valens 7), where Glissant's notion of opacity has critical salience, I expand on Tinsley's criticism of Sedgewick in which she suggests that the cartographies of contemporary queer analyses "stay out of springs or swamps" and "rely on standard metaphors of interior and exterior space" (Tinsley 25) by advocating for the mangrove not only as a spatial metaphor for non-heteronormative desire, but as a biomimetic signifier of uniquely Caribbean temporal knowledges. In other words, if gender is a colonial

[9] In her text, *Desire Between Women in Caribbean Literature.*
[10] *Epistemology of the Closet* (UC Press: 1990).

construct, as María Lugones argues,[11] and Tinsley's mangrove is the Caribbean embodiment of a rhizomatic, anticolonial desire, the mangrove itself is a signifier of disrupted colonial temporality.

In regard to the mangrove, the "oft-mentioned but underdeveloped metaphoric model for the Caribbean" (Valens 10), I rely on this interpretation of the tangled plant as a signifier for anticolonial time-space in order to perform a nuanced reading of Condé's 1989 novel. Though Valens and Tinsley engage this metaphor in the realm of queer theory, I will be "reading the mangrove" in its creative capacities to convey the distinctively mapped temporality in Condé's novel and her ability to "grow" a world through a series of eulogies—to create many lives from one death. The mangrove here, "endlessly in motion and infinitely adaptable, responsive to multiple orders and conditions" (Valens 4) functions as a living model for this atemporal narrative. As the insular but diverse Guadeloupean community collectively remembers the already dead protagonist Francis Sancher at his wake, his still-living memory becomes the nexus through which their community performs the necessary symbolic, symbiotic work of re-membering themselves. [12] If "water is an element which remembers the dead" (DeLoughrey, *Heavy Waters* 704), Condé's uncrossable mangrove drops the reader directly into that element, challenging what it really means to "end."

My second chapter, *Combing the Beach for a Conch Shell Poetics*, departs from rhizomatic politics to examine the ways in which the figure of the conch shell appears across a Caribbean imaginary—from Haiti to St. Thomas and beyond. Beginning with Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Tiphanie Yanique's *Land of Love and Drowning* and

[11] Lugones states that the system of gender we see in place today is "organized around the axes of coloniality and modernity" (Lugones 189).
[12] I mean here, specifically, the type of "work" (Sharpe 10) that Christina Sharpe discusses in chapter one of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.

ending with some shorter supplemental readings of poetry by Reina María Rodríguez, Marion Bethel, and Safiya Sinclair, my goal in this chapter is to identify conch shells in their plural capacities as biomimetic signifiers of a nonlinear temporality, of alternative methods of knowing and communicating and loving, and as living embodiments of a Caribbean para-archive.

Kaiama L. Glover's 2010 publication, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon*, reengages the Haitian Spiralist aesthetic of the mid 1960s in order to call attention to what Deborah Jensen identifies as a "biomimetic movement" (Jensen 135). In other words, Glover's text responds to the natural symbolic aspects of the spiral in order to construct arguments about Haitian literature's place in a postcolonial canon. The Spiralism movement, a literary and artistic protest aesthetic that raged against the autocratic Duvalier regime in Haiti in the 1960s and 1970s, was informed by the symbolic implications of the spiral itself—inherently incomplete, eternally in motion, denying any sort of comfortable dialectic between origin and destination. The spiral, as a symbol, confronts linear temporalities and cohesive, static notions of space. The concept Jensen identifies as a biomimetic movement—the relationship between living symbol and aesthetic significance—I plan to engage as a method of literary analysis of a biomimetic signifier: the conch. Frequently invoked across the Caribbean artistic landscape, the conch shell is a ritually engaged symbol for the Caribbean rejection of Western spatiotemporal logics, rife with tensions and internal conflicts.

The conch, both creature and commodity, is a living animal; its shell sells as a keepsake for tourists and its meat is a source of protein. Not unlike the mangrove, it is at once erotic, expansive, corporeally fixed yet symbolically unbound, embodying so many of the contradictions often located in the postcolonial Caribbean imaginary. Its fortified exterior defends a vulnerable interior against external possession and definition. Growing outwardly in a

spiral pattern, the conch shell never leaves behind its original shell, but constructs new protective material as it expands, similarly denying any simple mediation between origin and conclusion. If the Caribbean can be seen, Antonio Benítez-Rojo suggests, "as a loosely-bounded figure combining the straight lines and curves, let's say, a spiral galaxy tending outward—to the universe—that bends and folds over its own history, its own inwardness" (Benítez-Rojo 36), one might easily posit the conch shell as the embodiment of this combination of straight lines and curves, seeking actively to "confront" and "deny [the] linear structure" of Western time (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 145) on which, Glissant suggests in *Caribbean Discourse*, European literatures rely.

In my third chapter, *Waiting Through the Shallows*, I depart somewhat from existing Caribbean critical theory to focus on a combination of Michelle M. Wright's engagement with lay physics and diasporic time, coupled with Elizabeth DeLoughrey's investigation of metaphorical light. As Wright notes, "a linear progress narrative struggles to be diasporic, because the notion of return suggests a reversal of the progressive direction from the narrative's origin to the present day/era" (Wright 73). Here I focus on a renegotiation of our understanding of Bakhtin's chronotope: if the astronomically normative movement of the sun rising in the East and setting in the West is intrinsic to the understanding of a linear historical narrative progression, any interference with this trajectory would metaphorically presume a departure from a linear progress narrative. In this sense, atypical manifestations of light in a literary setting inherently betray the possible existence of a diasporic temporality. The primary texts I will be examining in this chapter are Danticat's novels, *The Farming of Bones* and *Claire of the Sea Light*, as well as a series of poems by Marion Bethel. In each of these texts, the interplay between water and light challenges hegemonic structures of colonial power by creating liminal

zones of lingering, redirected, or reversed temporalities that suggest a biomimetic significance for the sea that is neither the coffin nor the womb, but the lives illuminated in between.

For my purposes, much as the mangrove has been refigured as a uniquely Caribbean rhizome, I plan to investigate the ways in which the ever-present signifier of the ocean's depths can be refigured to accommodate a temporality of refracting light in its shallows. Where Glissant "refers to the tendency of Martinicans to speak of time in terms of natural events like earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, and so on. Their view of time develops, he claims, as a result of what he calls the link between nature and culture" (McKenzie 53). I suggest that one can examine how this regional link between nature and culture manifests itself in Caribbean literature by way of a methodology that focuses on how interrupted, refracted light—the intersection of sunlight and the sea—challenges both Western notions of progressive temporalities and the long-addressed symbolic monolith of the abyssal ocean.

This dissertation concludes with a chapter entitled, *"Wind and Shore are my close companions": Intertidal Temporalities*, which addresses the somewhat incommensurable conceptual space of the shore and its tidal zone. The shore of an island is a strange place. It is neither the island proper, nor is it submerged enough to be considered the sea; it is pushed and pulled by daily tides, regular storms, erosion, and piling; it harbors delicate ecosystems and nourishes highly localized lifeforms. At once immensely resilient and profoundly vulnerable, the shore may be held together with mangroves, traversed by conchs, and illuminated by creative interplays of light and water in the shallows. The shore, in many ways, is a portal: an opened window between land and sea, between placement and displacement, between past and future, between being transported and transporting oneself. It is the point of arrival from the Door of No

Return[13] and the point of departure towards.[14] But where all of these descriptions posit the shore as a backdrop against which realities play out, this chapter reframes the shore as an active temporal agent, as the material force prompting these realities. Understanding oceanic waves as a visual manifestation of energy through water, I am interested in what it means when metaphorical waves crash. In this chapter, the tidal zone functions as a space of symbolic resolution from or towards "suspen[sion] in the oceanic"—a space Hortense Spillers identifies as "an analogy for undifferentiated identity" (Spillers 72). The shore is a space of confrontation, where bubbling discontentment becomes political action like a wave crashing on a beach, where active ancestral fog springs up like sea spray, where identities are made and secrets confirmed. Through an intensive analysis of Grenadian history leading up to its revolution and eventual invasion, I assess the various capacities of the shore in Merle Collins's collection, *Lady in a Boat*, and the tidal zone's representation of recurring revolutionary thought. Placing two of Nalo Hopkinson's early novels together—*Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber*—I investigate a bifurcated depiction of fog, which I reimagine as sea spray, acting as lingering ancestral presence. And finally, in Grace Nichols' collection, *Startling the Flying Fish*, I explore the curious temporalities of the shore and what happens when the crashing waves recede. It is difficult to deny the ways in which the shore—a symbiotic, interactive stage, a liminal temporal plane on which the actors' relevance is operational—is a significant spatiotemporal zone that requires serious critical literary investigation in the Caribbean literary canon.

[13] Here I refer to both the literal, Atlantic-facing door of the *Maison des Esclaves* in Senegal through which countless Africans were forced en route to the Americas, and the metaphorical *Door of No Return* detailed by Dionne Brand in her 2001 publication, *Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Here she identifies this metaphorical space as a site of supreme ancestral loss and disconnection, a lens through which she continuously understands her own identity.

[14] Haitian Kreyól for "the other side of the water," referring to literal crossings, such as between Africa and the Americas or between Haiti and the United States, as well as spiritual travel, typically into the afterlife.

Throughout all four chapters, I pose an ongoing series of questions about the literal and metaphorical vulnerability of these temporal ecologies. But as the metaphorical weight of these symbolic ecologies can only survive in tandem with the very real ecologies to which they correspond, I conclude this project with a turn towards holistic Indigenous environmental practices and their rejection of systems thinking. Where authors like Ben Okri are calling on artists to engage in what he refers to as "existential creativity"—art made with the goal of enacting immediate aggressive change, essentially "re-dream[ing]" the future, I argue that the art we need to incite change is already here—what we need instead is a new way of reading. Alternative contemporary and imagined futures are not limited to works bound by science fiction narrative parameters or performative glances into speculative temporalities—they already exist in other genres and literary forms in ways that a Western critical perspective may not celebrate or even recognize. Communities that have managed the experience and after-effects of forced diaspora and colonization are already metaphorically *and* literally familiar with many of the abruptly shifting temporal phenomena of the Anthropocene. As temperatures dramatically change, the ground beneath us becomes more vulnerable, resources rarify, and swaths of species are forced into extinction, refocusing attentions on the artistic and cultural productions of those who have historically faced these challenges may provide generative perspectives for the uncertain times ahead. Reading for a chronopelago, then, is something of a matter of life and death.

Fig. 1: Smathers Beach after Hurricane Irma, Key West, Florida, October 2017.
Photograph courtesy of author.

1 Mangled Time: Rhizomes and Reanimation

Can we imagine beyond the binary between land and sea?
Maybe we should, and soon. The ocean is rising.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Being Ocean as Praxis*

Life's problems are like trees. We see the trunk, we see the branches and the leaves.
But we can't see the roots, hidden deep down under the ground.
And yet it's their shape and nature and how far they dig into the slimy humus to search for water that we need to know. Then perhaps we would understand.

Maryse Condé, *Crossing the Mangrove*

I am nine years old and lying on the soft sea floor fully submerged, fighting a breath that may release air bubbles from my nostrils and reveal my location. There is only about a foot and a half of water between my face and the glassy blue surface above me, and I am struggling to stay submerged, my lungs still filled with air. Several other children and I are playing hide-and-seek in the mangroves—also known as mangles—off the coast of Big Pine Key, nearly 100 miles southwest of mainland Florida. Some have chosen to smear their faces and hair with the loose, grayish silt often found in these mangrove beds, while I have chosen a more effective but significantly less sustainable option. Hoping for distraction, I gaze up above the water's surface, my open eyes burning in the saltwater, and see a large crab ambling cautiously up one of the mangroves legs, pausing every so often to pull even smaller bits of algae off the root with its delicate claws. As I roll over to get a closer look and let go of the mangrove's root I'd been using as an anchor, my buoyant body hits the surface of the water and no sooner have I grabbed a breath of fresh air than I am tackled by my classmate who screams "Got one!"; I wade over to the penalty box, which is, thankfully, another cluster of mangroves. I sit back down in the shallows to continue my observations.

Fig. 1.1: *Backcountry Shadows 1*, Taken north of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway, 1988. Photograph courtesy of Dean Schroeder.

As an adult I think back on these moments spent in what I was certain were magical forests, unable to express the gratitude and affection I still hold for this amphibious flora. Layers of accumulating time and newly acquired information allow me to superimpose this memory over other mangrove histories, knowledges, and truths. I now know, for instance, that the crab I saw all those years ago is known as a sesarmid crab—a "keystone engineer" (Carugati 1) in many mangrove forests. I know that mangrove forests absorb and bury four times as much carbon than the same square mileage of their strictly terrestrial arboreal rainforest cousins.[15] That as halophytes, though they mostly prefer the brackish waters of coastal bays, mangroves are fully

[15] For more, see "Mangroves among the most carbon-rich forests in the tropics," by Donato, et al.

capable of filtering the saltwater in which they often grow to produce their own digestible fresh water, exhaling the residual salt onto their waxy leaves.[16] I know that mangroves are what is referred to as "detritus-based ecosystems," collecting nutrients from their own fallen branches and leaves to continue to grow and build, establishing vast networks of root systems in shallow silt made mineral rich by their own lifeless remnants. Some mangrove seeds, or propagules, can travel for up to a full year[17] in the open ocean waiting to locate safe and habitable shallows. The forests they construct are vital foundations for coastal food webs, and invaluable habitats for fish, mollusks, and juvenile sharks, providing shelter from larger predators and the aggressive currents of the open ocean. Various species of mangrove can live as far north as the upland transitional zone and as far south as subtropical zones; they are found on the coasts of at least 123 countries and territories,[18] totaling between 53,000 and 77,000 mi^2 globally.[19] Some mangroves are no more than several inches tall, while others may grow up to 213 ft in height,[20] and as rhizomes, they spread grow horizontally as well as vertically, connecting in vast root networks that can spread over vast swaths of coastline.

I now know that enslaved Africans and Indigenous Americans used the mangrove swamps of the Gulf Coast states of America to hide, seeking refuge from the violence of White European predators who saw the forests as impermeable.[21] I know that due to their commercial value in the production of everything from wooden goods to charcoal, from cosmetics to

[16] For more, see "On the halophytic nature of mangroves," by Krauss, Ball.
[17] "They are remarkably hardy and long-lived. Davis (1940) reports that propagules of R. mangle that were kept floating or submerged for 12 months and more grew when planted" (Rabinowitz 49).
[18] For more, see "World Atlas of Mangroves," by Spalding, et al; and "Forests between the Tides," by Dybas.
[19] See Smithsonian report by the *Ocean Portal Team,* and "The Biology of Mangroves and Seagrasses" by Hogarth.
[20] For more, see, "Mangrove canopy height globally related to precipitation, temperature and cyclone frequency," by Simard, et al.
[21] "The Angola phenomenon included a multifaceted history, a community of resistance that succeeded in rallying hundreds of people (Brown 2005) together in the fight against American slavery, a place among a network that actively opposed slavery. The concept of falling back as resistance is helpful for understanding the challenges in finding a maroon community in the mangrove woods and thickets of southwest Florida" (Baram 7).

insecticides and even wine,[22] extensive deforestation of Caribbean islands began with European colonization and continued well into the middle of the 20th century,[23] leaving the islands' coasts increasingly vulnerable to storms as anthropogenic climate change brings increasingly violent hurricane seasons. I also know that mangroves are also still largely under-researched and understudied, despite their vital integrity to our global ecologies. This chapter, and larger work more broadly, proposes the need for a systemic collective inquiry into the ways in which humanity's fragility, flexibility, and fluidity is mirrored in the literary ecological imaginaries of the Caribbean. Expanding past Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's original conception of the symbolic rhizome, past Édouard Glissant's reclamation of the rhizome figured into mangrove for a Caribbean critical context, and even beyond the work of Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, Keja Valens, and Odile Ferly, who engage the mangrove in reparative readings of Caribbean narratives that reframe and focus on women's positionality, unique subjugations, and intimate erotics, I am interested in the project of the rhizomatic Caribbean mangrove as a nongendered temporal narrative force. In other words, I argue that mangroves have the symbolic narrative ability to undermine and reroute static notions of time.

[22] "Mangroves have a global estimated worth of 1.648 billion dollars. The wood is frequently used to build stilt houses, furniture, fences, bridges, fishing poles and traps, canoes, rafts, and boats. Charcoal from mangroves is highly prized in Japan. Products from mangroves are also used in soaps, cosmetics, perfumes, and insecticides. Medicinal properties from mangroves include relieving pain, decreasing inflammation, treating diabetes, acting as an antitumor drug, ridding the body of parasites, as an antiseptic, and many, many more. Rich in tannins—compounds that are notable for their influence on the taste of red wine—mangrove bark is used in the tanning of animal skins to make leather. Treating animal hides with tannin alters the hide's protein structure so it becomes soft, pliable, and resistant to decomposition" (Ocean Portal Team).

[23] "Mangrove bark is now only a minor commercial source for tannins, although large expanses of Caribbean mangroves were cut over for tannin pro- duction from the early phases of European colonization until the middle of this century" (Ellison and Farnsworth 552).

I: Killing the Mangrove: Absent Referents and Necromantic Ecologies

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's 2010 monograph, *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature*, lays the foundation of my theoretical methodology in its reworking of the "intimate landscapes" (Tinsley 2) of the Caribbean. The text proposes an urgent need for a rhizomatic theorization that privileges and centers desire between women. But where Tinsley expands on a foundation of Caribbean theorists of creolité who address the "rhizomatic mangrove swamp as a standard vehicle for conceiving the Caribbean as a space of constant cultural intergrowth and interaction" (24), the text misses out on some of the more capacious metaphorical and linguistic possibilities for disrupting gendered understandings of Caribbean topoi. For Tinsley, Jean Bernabé's theorization of the "mangrove swamp of virtualities" (24) establishes a linguistically gendered poetics of Caribbean ecologies while refusing to privilege the woman-centric narratives that this gendered poetics seems to demand. *Thiefing Sugar* is a response to this refusal, centering instead the ways in which eroticism between women in Caribbean literature is vital to critical interventions that focus on the rhizomatic capacities of the mangrove.

Odile Ferly's 2011 text, *A Poetics of Relation: Caribbean Women Writing at the Millennium*, explores the expansive nature of the mangrove as rhizome in its narrative capacity to connect Caribbean narratives across the colonial linguistic boundaries that so often needlessly divide the Caribbean lived experience. For Ferly, the mangrove is not equitable with the idea of a rhizome, but rather, is an "extension of the rhizome" (Ferly 153). Engaging the paradigm of the mangrove in terms of Homi Bhabha's idea of a Third Space—"marine, terrestrial, at once both and neither" (7)—Ferly argues that while women's narratives perform the same necessary work

as the mangrove by connecting "two complementary Caribbean literary traditions, archipelagic and diasporic" (Ferly 8), the mangrove must stand for "Caribbean discourse as a whole, both female and male" (8) in order to create a more wholistic understanding of the region's literary canon. Where Tinsley's text uses the mangrove as a rhizome which demands the centrality of female eroticism, Ferly's calls for the mangrove as a metaphorical bridge connecting genders and geographies alike. Keja L. Valens pushes further against the binary identifications so often assigned to the Caribbean and its literary productions, engaging the mangrove in its corporeal capacity to actively disrupt static understandings of intimacy and space:

> Mangles grow so intricately entangles that they appear confused, mixed up, bent out of shape, distorted, mangled, but the mangle is a delicately balanced ecosystem based on the simplest of principles: survive in complex and variable circumstances. In the mangle, what regulates relation and growth is opportunity, availability, success of the moment. (Valens 4)

Valens's text positions the mangrove as "a mobile space of uneven recombinations" (11), a type of space that represents the "multiple adaptations and incorporations of all that arrives by sea and ocean, that constitute Caribbean specificity" (11). Valens's mangrove is one of opaque resiliency and urgent immediacy. So what happens when the metaphorical object of opportunity, availability, and success of the moment—an object tangled up in relational time—begins to literally disappear?

A 2018 study on the impact of mangrove forest degradation on ecosystem function reports that,

> despite their importance, mangroves are disappearing at a global loss rate of 1–2% per year, and the loss rate reached 35% during the last 20 years. Climate changes (sea level rise and altered rainfalls) and human activities (urban development, aquaculture, mining, and overexploitation of timber, fish, crustaceans, and shellfish) represent major threats for mangrove habitats. (Carugati 1)

The study assesses the increasing rates of mangrove habitat collapse in terms of its meiofaunal populations—canaries in the coal mine of environmental changes—in the benthic, or ground level, zone of mangrove swamps. As mangroves act not only as coastal stabilizers, but as protective breeding and nesting grounds for larger oceanic fauna, their ecological collapse has far reaching detrimental effects on the functioning ecologies of the oceans as a whole. As mangrove forests are cleared or die off as a result of "human activities," the vital biodiversity harbored by these forests collapse and die off as well. My question is, what do we do with an imaginative literary model based on an ecology that is being destroyed by anthropogenic climate change? How do we theorize a life we can no longer see?

Drawing from Carol J. Adam's early ecofeminist work on *absent referents*,[24] I argue for the ongoing examination of the absent referents of destroyed ecological systems and for a literarily inspired methodology by which we can retroactively imagine a set of thought processes and behavioral patterns that prompt us to consider the referents before they are rendered completely absent. This is where I argue for the importance of literary analysis. Maryse Condé's 1989 novel, *Traversée de la Mangrove*—translated into the English language as *Crossing the Mangrove* by Richard Philcox—has been written about time and again by critical theorists of Caribbean literature, postcolonial narratives, Francophone studies, and African Diasporic scholarship, to name only a few. The novel takes place in a small imaginary Guadeloupean town called Rivière au Sel, set roughly coeval with its publication in the 1980s and explores networks of relation in the wake of a death. Though *Crossing the Mangrove* is not a work of ecofeminist fiction, the way in which this novel is constructed prompts the reader to consider the existence of mangroves without their explicit narrative presence is the way in which we must consider

[24] A term she politicizes in her 1990 text *The Sexual Politics of Meat* to explain the phenomenon by which the sociocultural processes of creating a meat-based meal renders the life sacrificed to make the meal invisible.

ecologies even when they do not *appear* to benefit us directly.[25] By tracing the narrative tropes of water, movement, kinship, and death—the life cycle—four concepts that are integral to both understanding the ecological value of mangroves and understanding Condé's novel—I argue for the reading of *necromantic ecologies*—for the reading of mangroves that no longer exist, but whose absence is legible and requires analysis.

Necromantic ecologies, a concept I've constructed for the sake of this analytic framework, are those that embody a disruption in what we consider to be a typical, unidirectional, life cycle: birth, progress through life, and death. In a necromantic ecological system, birth intermingles with death, and progressions through life are multidirectional, sometimes even what may be perceived as regressive. Necromancy, a term used more generally to describe any sort of witchcraft or sorcery, draws from the Greek prefix *necro*—concerned with death—to mean very literally, "the art of predicting the future by supposed communication with the dead."[26] In other words, necromancy is the practice of accessing the past which we have rendered discrete, in order to procure information that will guide and influence future decisions. For my purpose, a necromantic ecology is one in which we can read death as coeval with life, even providing for or allowing life—not a unidirectional cycle, but an intricate and productive web.

[25] By direct benefit, I mean I am concerned with the long-term versus short-term benefit of mangroves. The short-term benefit of mangroves is anchored in capitalist expansion, with harvesting as much as possible as quickly as possible for financial gain. Long-term benefits are more difficult to observe and recognize, and these are the "benefits" to which I allude here.

[26] "necromancy, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, Accessed September 2020.

The necessary and continued expansion of twenty-first century intersectional ecofeminism is the foundational drive behind my literary analysis of Condé's novel. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*—originally written by Adams as an essay for a 1974 course taught by radical feminist[27] philosopher and then professor at Boston College Mary Daly—explores the relationship between structural, institutional misogyny and the unique relationship between Western culture and the consumption of meat. As one of the first mainstream publications that explicitly researched the connections between feminism, vegetarianism, and ecological preservation, Adams's book remains an early foundational text of the ecofeminist movement in the United States. Where ecofeminism has historically fallen short, however, is in its failure to incorporate intersectional politics. While the field is inherently one of a *type* of intersectional inquiry—founded on its investigation of the relationships between the "domination of women and the domination of nature" (Adams, "Ecofeminism" 127)—as with many subfields of the 1970s Western feminist movement, it historically aspired towards an essentialist feminism that ignores relative raced, classed, and culture-based privileges and power structures within the feminist movement itself. This results in a set of proposed cultural "correctives" that serve to celebrate those privileged enough to participate while demonizing those who cannot or choose not to for cultural reasons[28]. A community of critical philosophers—more recently A.E. Kings—has since taken up this lack as a point of critical intervention. In a

[27] In this context I use the term "radical feminist" in the way in which it was engaged in the 1970s predominantly white feminist communities in the United States. This term has since evolved to encompass and refer to "TERF" beliefs or "trans-exclusionary radical feminism"—a specific subset of philosophical ideologies that engage scientifically unsupported and biologically essentialist understandings of sex and gender in order to exclude trans women and transfeminine people from women's spaces and conversations about women's oppression.

[28] The contemporary vegan movement, for instance, often prioritizes animal welfare over the welfare of the humans who harvest their vegetable-based diets and antagonizes Indigenous populations who have been ethically and conscientiously consuming animals for thousands of generations, rather than working actively on legislation to reform or end factory farming—an industry inherently colonial in its legacies and practices. For more, see "The Problem with White Veganism" by Yazbeck.

2017 essay, *Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism*, Kings applies the multi-level analysis of intersectionality proposed by Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele[29] to draw attention to the privileged position of many ecofeminist ideologies, both historical and contemporary.[30] Moving forward, we need an ecofeminism that antagonizes and repairs its own critical blind spots if it is going to be able to perform the interventions we require from it as a field.

In terms of this chapter, I am invested in the further expansion of intersectional ecofeminism by engaging contemporary theorist Alexis Pauline Gumbs and her critical work with Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick. In her 2019 essay, *Being Ocean as Praxis*, Gumbs takes up Wynter's and McKittrick's work of "being human as praxis" (Gumbs, "Being Ocean" 336), proposing a new depth of ecofeminist theory in which we imagine ourselves being copoietic[31] with the ocean itself. For Gumbs, theorizing a kinship with the ocean and its inhabitants serves as an expansive and vital intervention into the field of ecocriticism: "how does oceanic knowledge, combined with our increasingly impossible-to-ignore knowledge of our dependence on the ocean and its literal rising role in our lived experiences, shift our definitions of the world we are constructing and our place within it?" (339). Gumbs begins by proposing an investigation into our copoiesis with the vast global networks of coral, suggesting that many of coral's more observable behaviors—its seemingly inherent plurality and interconnectivity,

[29] In their 2011 essay, "Intersectionality as multi-level analysis: Dealing with social inequality."
[30] The ideological expansion Kings proposes results in an ecofeminist intersectionality and "recognizes that women are likely to be amongst those most affected by environmental degradation, with those at the margins of society often experiencing these effects earliest and to the harshest degree" (Kings 71). In other words, a viable and effective contemporary intersectional ecofeminism must not only recognize the ways in which the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are a product of the same power structure but must also recognize the "intracategorical" (McCall 1773) complexities within the ecofeminist ideological framework itself.
[31] From the Greek *poiesis*, used to describe the phenomenon of artistic production, this term refers to the concept of two seemingly disparate sources co-authoring meaning from their individually held knowledge base. For more on this term, see Bouncken, et al. and their essay on mutual knowledge creation in alliances.

expansive community building, and living amongst its dead—all uncomfortably mirror human behaviors that we often work to ignore. This potential copoiesis between humans and coral, she argues, is rendered invisible by the language we use to describe coral, and it is this linguistically rendered invisibility in which I am most deeply interested.

Marine biologists refer to coral in terms of *colonies* versus *polyps*[32]—that is, distinctive communities versus individual life forms. These terms are not nearly expansive enough, Gumbs argues, as they simultaneously shortchange the unique and often indefinable collectivity of coral while highlighting the discomfort humans express in imagining our interdependency. Coral networks are still not understood fully and the extent to which they are misunderstood is partially, Gumbs suggests, due to the narrative humans tell ourselves[33] about being separate and distinct from other animals. Pulling the conversation back from coral reefs to the coastlines, mangroves challenge this limiting linguistic stratification in similar ways. When we talk about a grouping of trees, we often refer to it as a forest, but the term *forest*—"an extensive tract of land covered with trees and undergrowth, sometimes intermingled with pasture. Also, the trees collectively of a 'forest'"[34]—does the same incomplete linguistic and cognitive work as *colony* does in reference to coral. If a forest, for my purposes a mangrove forest, only goes as far as describing the tract of land upon which the trees grow or the group of trees that grow on said tract of land, the terminology falls short in its ability to represent the fact that roughly 90% of land plants are connected by an underground network of fungal mycelium, through which they

[32] "To attempt to describe coral, scientists in English have used two strategies: they describe coral as either colonies or polyps" (Gumbs, "Being Ocean" 340).
[33] "Wynter says we are not Homo *sapiens*, we are Homo *narrans*, not the ones who know, but the ones who tell ourselves that we know" (Gumbs, "Dub" xi).
[34] "forest, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/73187. Accessed 1 October 2020.

transmit vital information to each other about soil content and temperature.[35] If 90% of all trees on the planet are exchanging information with their neighbors in the interest of self-preservation, then what purpose does a term like *forest* serve, if not to misrepresent the copoiesis of the global life of plants by imagining all groupings of trees to be composed of separate and distinct individuals? Much like conceptualizing coral as a series of colonies, imagining trees as a series of forests denies the inherent collectivity of these lifeforms while acting as a self-congratulatory reinforcement of the ways in which humans believe our imagined divisions between each other are justified; so too do we maintain the divisions between ourselves and the other life forms on this planet. It follows then, that when humans see global warming destroying vast swaths of both coral and mycelium networks, we are presented with the choice of either holding fast to these divisions as they allow us to turn our backs on the most vulnerable among us or admitting to our copoiesis with the natural world—the same option we have when presented with expanding a field with intersectional intentions.

The primary critical issues I take with the linguistic limitations of terms like *colonies* and *forests* are twofold. First, as Gumbs's essay suggests, they presume a series of closed loop communities living adjacently rather than a single collective loop. The West has been doing this ecologically for decades, watching reef systems collapse,[36] hurricane seasons increase in activity

[35] "It's this network, sort of like a below-ground pipeline, that connects one tree root system to another tree root system, so that nutrients and carbon and water can exchange between the trees. In a natural forest of British Columbia, paper birch and Douglas fir grow together in early successional forest communities. They compete with each other but our work shows that they also cooperate with each other by sending nutrients and carbon back and forth through their mycorrhizal networks" (Toomey).

[36] "Aerial analysis conducted by Terry Hughes, director of the ARC Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies at James Cook University, and others from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, found that coastal reefs along the entire length of the iconic reef -- a stretch of about 1,500 miles (2,300 kilometers) from the Torres Strait in the north, right down to the reef's southern boundary -- have been severely bleached" (Regan).

and levels of destruction,[37] and dramatic flooding destroying coastal communities where the most vulnerable experience the most damage and the slowest recovery.[38] We do this sociologically as well, in terms of the *Global North* and the *Global South*—two conceptually separate communities that linguistically allow for the denial of their inherent interconnectedness at the peril of one loop (the Global South) for the sake of the other (the Global North). This is not to say that the acknowledgement of the way parts of the planet experiencing climate collapse differ greatly is incorrect or detrimental—the issue I take is with the assumption that these two loops, for lack of a better word, are distinct and disconnected. If we see the world as a set of closed ecological loops, we are much more likely to feel comfortable ignoring when those loops begin to die off so long as *they* are not *our* loops. But second, and more important to my point, these terms presume a kind of temporal stability—a static, timeless notion of community that inhabits a perennial state of *being alive*, necessitating the denial of the certain reality of rapidly increasing global temperatures in order to maintain this theoretical timeless present. The set of closed loops necessitates the delusion of a fixed temporal present and the presumption of a predictable temporal future—but the longer we attempt to inhabit an ideological space that presumes temporal stability, the more likely we are to ignore the physical *and* temporal collapse of the ground beneath our feet. Thus, we are left with the challenge of having to conceptualize and act under an assumption of temporal instability.

Mangroves, not unlike coral, already challenge this conceptualization of temporal stability by building over their dead and relying on their dead for renewed life. As a detritus-

[37] "On Sept. 18, tropical storm Wilfred claimed the list's 21st and final name, which means that subsequent storms will "go Greek," representatives with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said in a statement. (Atlantic storms never get Q, U, X, Y or Z names)" (Weisberger).
[38] "'America's coastal communities and their economies are suffering from the effects of high tide flooding, and it's only going to increase in the future,' said Nicole LeBoeuf, acting director of NOAA's National Ocean Services" (NOAA, "U.S. tide flooding continues to increase").

based ecosystem, mangroves pose an ecological challenge to our ideologically limiting linguistic terminologies, necessitating a new vocabulary for a world in temporal and ecological flux. My response to this linguistic limitation is my literary investigation of *necromantic ecologies*: an analytic framework for understanding ecological copoiesis in a world in ecological collapse—one that is predicated on the assumption of this copoiesis as well as on our current spatiotemporal instability. If we are to engage more deeply with our state of temporal flux in an attempt to better conceptualize an increasingly unpredictable future, it is imperative that we refocus our attentions on the disappearing and already absent referents of our ecological systems—the dead and dying. If for Adams, the "absent referent is the animal who disappears to make meat eating and dairy and egg consumption possible" (Alonso), so too must we read the absent referent as the mangroves that have been deforested for the sake of inexpensive palm oil production.[39] A necromantic ecocritical reading, then, is the reading of a text for its conspicuously missing ecological components, drawing a fuller narrative significance from the systems of inherent violence which have been rendered invisible by a linguistic approach that treats life and death as discreet spaces.

Necromancy as an analytical practice in educational studies is far from new. Samuel Wineberg's 2001 monograph, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, posits that historical learning is "neither a natural process nor something that springs automatically from psychological development" (Wineberg 7), positioning the ideal historical thinker as a *necromancer* rather than a processer, arguing that proper historical thinking requires interacting with all the nuance and complexity of the past

[39] "PepsiCo, Unilever and Nestlé have been accused of complicity in the destruction of Sumatra's last tract of rainforest shared by elephants, orangutans, rhinos, and tigers together in one ecosystem. Plantations built on deforested land have allegedly been used to supply palm oil to scores of household brands that also include McDonald's, Mars, Kellogg's, and Procter & Gamble, according to a new report" (Nelson).

through dialogue with it. Following a similar line of inquiry, Joe Sutliff Sanders takes up the concept of "necromantic nonfiction" in his 2017 text, *A Literature of Questions*. Here, he cites Katie R. Peel's 2011 essay[40], reasoning that as we acquire new evidence about historical moments, producing new texts that address these histories with richer context and a Bakhtinian "multiplicity of voices" (Peel 207) we bring the historical moments and the people associated with them back to life, "demonstrating how even after the characters are dead, nonfiction can reanimate those characters and 'invite active reader participation' (Sanders 190). Sanders draws attention to several such examples "of how a book can act as necromancer" (68) and expands this observation to encompass the concept that "at other times, necromancy is more a practice than an event. Once more the subject of necromancy is brought up in Brooks E. Hefner's 2017 monograph, *The Word on the Streets: The American Language of Vernacular Modernism,* in which he explores the concept of linguistic necromancy through Claude McKay's 1929 novel *Banjo*. In this text, Hefner argues,[41] McKay classifies the vernacular language of Black youth as necromancy—that is, this method of communication possesses abilities to disrupt notions of both static time and a word's inherent meaning. Ultimately, Hefner makes us aware of the temporally disruptive force of language, of its ability to demand constant renegotiation—a multiplicity of voices—and an interdependency and coexistence between past, present, and future in order to form a deeper and truer significance—that is, language as necromantic.

[40]For more, see "'Strange Fruit': Representations of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in Children's and Young Adult Nonfiction," by Peel.

[41] "But he admired the black boys' unconscious artistic capacity for eliminating the rotten dead-stock words of the proletariat and replacing them with startling new ones. There were no dots and dashes in their conversation—nothing that could not be frankly said and therefore decently—no act or fact of life for which they could not find a simple passable word. He gained from them finer nuances of the necromancy of language and the wisdom that any word might be right and magical in its proper setting" (Hefner 202-203).

In terms of necromantic ecocriticism as praxis, I would like to investigate the ways in which necromancy functions as a critical methodology and apply these practices in a nuanced reading of *Crossing the Mangrove*. While the conspicuous absence of mangroves in the text—despite its title—is not a result of the violent effects of global warming, I maintain that the narrative implications of reading for a necromantic ecology expands the significance of a text very much concerned with the boundaries between life and death. Even in the past couple decades, we see narrative necromancy as a way of critically engaging with the past by demanding critical thinking and dialogic exchange. Rather than viewing the past as discreet and inaccessible or inalterable, this methodology positions the reader as the necromancer. We additionally see the idea of a text itself as a necromancer, with the ability to resurrect "dead" histories and add nuance, context, new information—ultimately shifting our understanding of history as a field. In so far as fiction is concerned, we've seen the idea of language as necromancy, in which the literal morphology and syntax of a text has the power to disrupt notions of time and meaning—an idea that has been in print since at least 1929. By using this type of multi-tiered necromantic reading—examining the role of the reader, the text, and the language—I argue that we can reanimate or at least reimagine absent referents from the violence that has rendered them dead and invisible by learning to recognize the ghosts, disordered shadows, and chaos they leave in their wake.

My reading of necromantic ecologies in *Crossing the Mangrove* is divided into four parts, each of which addresses a critical theme in the novel that I find integral to reading the text for the

mangroves which appear not to exist. These critical themes also function as aspects of a typical biological lifecycle, all of which function atypically in the absence of the mangrove. Ultimately, this reading will reveal that it is the conspicuous absence of said mangroves which render them visible as a narrative structure. The goal of a necromantic ecocritical reading is to center and privilege the ways in which a text can destabilize its reader, its structure, and its language through an absent ecological referent. Along these lines, I will be focusing on four concepts destabilized by Condé's novel—birth, through the trope of water; growth, through the trope of chaotic movement; community, through the trope of indirect and misdirected kinship; and, ultimately, death and our presumption of its finality. By tracing the ways in which water, movement, kinship, and death are presented and destabilized throughout the novel, the reader will be able to see the ways in which the mangrove, however absent from the narrative, remains ever-present as a guiding narrative structure.

In my introduction, I touch on my decision to engage primarily with texts published at the time of or after the launch of the world wide web, arguing for the exploration of the mimetic relationship between digital ecologies and those found in nature. By beginning with an analysis of a novel published at the dawn of the internet that interrogates relationality, time, interconnectivity, and ultimately, death, I am synthesizing the inherent connections I recognize between digital and natural ecologies by engaging the mangrove in its multivalent metaphorical capacities. As I mentioned earlier, terrestrial arboreal communities are largely interconnected by an extensive global network of subterranean fungus which connects root systems and transmits vital ecological information between individual trees—a process of informational exchange not unlike the internet. If we are to understand this current digital era through the lens of new materialisms, claiming "the substance of what was once called "nature," acts, interacts, and even

intra-acts within, through, and around human bodies and practices" (Alaimo, *New Materialisms* 1)—an era in which we may no longer consider the world as "a background for the human subject" (1) but rather a fully agential force that pushes back against this subject—beginning with a novel published at the dawn of the internet seems all too salient a choice. The internet, once holding the possibility of immeasurably egalitarian information exchange, now exists as a commodity representative of the same hierarchies and exclusions that global capitalism has long-since constructed, isolating and negating participation based on access to resources, intractable poverty, geographic isolation, and political censorship. In 1989, however, the internet still held this potential, and I intend to argue that the mangroves that feature, however invisibly, in Condé's novel mirror this potential. Considering Maryse Condé's allyship with the expansive promise of Marxist philosophies,[42] examining her novel through the trope of anti-capitalist information sharing only further serves to illuminate the ways in which the internet, not unlike the mangrove, disrupts our understandings of interconnection and relationality, time and death.

This chapter introduces a bifurcated framework I'll be using throughout the project: I will begin by identifying an ecological phenomenon in its capacity as a biomimetic signifier, after which I will expand this biomimetic capacity into a critical methodology and reading practice. Following this logic, an ecological phenomenon does not necessarily need to be overtly present in a text to read the text using its signifying methodology—especially in a necromantic ecocritical reading. *Crossing the Mangrove* is a novel that grows an entire narrative community through a series of eulogies—creating many lives from the death of one. The novel itself begins at nighttime, at a funereal wake—the beginning of a story being told from its end. Each of the text's chapters is narrated by a different member of the community, and each of the chapters

[42] "My friends attracted me to their ideological position, and I became a Marxist because my friends were Marxists" (Clarke and Daheny 101).

addresses the way in which that character knew and was affected by the deceased, an outsider named Francis Sancher. As the chapters progress, we see the ways in which these various interactions tie the community together, building connections across and through whole families and individuals alike. By flattening everyone's interactions with Sancher as memories visited during one collective evening, to the point that the entire community is all equally invested in his death, the novel reimagines what relationality is, and what kinship means. By beginning the novel at night, attending the protagonist's wake, we see both time and death's finality being challenged. And by constructing a novel in which one man is posthumously brought to life by every conceivable narrative voice save his own, Condé forces the reader to understand how intricate our network of existence is, and how even minor interactions build connective tissues that last beyond a narrative life. This chapter will end with an investigation of a handful other texts that incorporate mangroves as a narrative tool, as an example of how to extend my proposed methodology beyond the bounds of Condé's novel. I argue, however, that *Crossing the Mangrove* is a foundational text for examining this type of expansive rhizomatic methodology, both in its ability to synthesize the mimetic relationship between digital and natural ecologies, as well as in its projective capabilities in terms of global warming and ecological collapse.

II: Reanimating the Mangrove: Water, Movement, Kinship, and Death

> *Where ocean, sea, and island met along the Caribbean shores, the mangle thrives: strands of mangrove trees filter salt water, transport oxygen, and gather sand and silt. The entwined roots and branches of the mangroves, up, down, and sideways become indistinguishable, and countless species form, thrive, and crush each other…Mangles grow so intricately entangled that they appear confused, mixed up, bent out of shape, distorted, mangled, but the mangle is a delicately balanced ecosystem based on the simplest of principles: surviving in complex and variable circumstances. In the mangle, what regulates relation and growth is opportunity, availability, success of the moment.*
>
> Keja Valens, *Desire Between Women in Caribbean Literature*

Crossing the Mangrove begins with death. The opening lines of the novel itself are a reaction to discovering a death, and the entire narrative develops out of this discovery. Already beginning with an interesting temporal turn, the novel takes place split across two coexisting timelines. One of these is the linear contemporary moment, in which the novel progresses over the course of a single night during a funerary wake. This timeline is established by the subtitles *Dusk*, *The Night*, and *First Light*, and is reinforced through the narrative in the first and last of these segments, in which the reader is reminded through narration that they are reading the goings on of an all-night wake. The secondary timeline—which makes up the contents of *The Night*— is more scattered and complex, taking place in the internal monologues and memories of the attendees of the wake, as they reminisce about their relationship to the deceased. In this second timeline, each new speaker's subsection acts as a new life cycle, beginning before the time that they knew Sancher—and therefore, before his death—and leading up to the moment of the wake: the moment in which these multiple life cycles sync up to present Sancher's renewed and repeated narrative death, contemporary with the first timeline.

The posthumous protagonist, Francis Sancher, is a mysterious force in the novel, and not only because the novel opens after his death has already occurred. He arrives in Rivière au Sel shortly before the novel takes place, purchasing an old house that is considered haunted and

moving in immediately. He is met by the other inhabitants of the community with a variety of responses, from suspicion, to resentment, to curiosity, admiration, and even attraction. Rumors about Sancher's past, his present, and even his true identity circulate and vary widely, none of which are ever clearly confirmed or denied. What little is confirmed through interpersonal conversation suggests ironically that he has moved to Guadeloupe from Cuba to investigate the origins of a familial curse that leaves men in his family dead before the age of fifty. The remaining details of his existence remain ambiguous and debated heavily by members of the community.

Praised widely for its subversive anticolonial political critiques through its original publication in Guadeloupean French Creole, its exploration of identity and kinship in a Caribbean context, its engagement with polyphonic narration, and its resistance to Western interrogation and categorization, *Crossing the Mangrove* is a unique text in many aspects. The range of scholarship concerning this text is expansive and thorough,[43] but despite the numerous angles from which this novel is investigated, the majority of scholarship falls short in regard to the way the novel negotiates and experiments with time. In direct contrast to the tradition of Western novels that take place over the course of a single day—James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* come to mind—this novel spans the length of a single night. Structurally, it is divided into three sections of uneven lengths—tracing time from *Dusk*, through *The Night*, to *First Light*. The middle section, *The Night*, is subdivided further into twenty subsections, each narrated by a different member of the community present at Sancher's wake.

[43] This novel has been taken up repeatedly by critical theorists since its original publication. Notable scholars of this text include VèVè A. Clark, Pascale De Souza, Dawn Fulton, Jarrod Hayes, Kathryn Lachman, Philip A. Ojo, and Richard Price and Sally Price, among others.

This rhizomatic temporality is vital to my reading of the text, and to my proposal of necromantic ecocritical readings more broadly.

Considering the breadth of criticism already written about Condé's novel, I would like to address some of the already established adjacent critical frameworks from which I am departing in my own reading of this novel. It is important to note that I am performing a series of close readings on a translated text.[44] In his translator's preface, Richard Philcox notes that while this translation posed unique challenges, his ultimate goal was not to hunt down individual perfect words, but rather, to look "everywhere for that right tone, trying to get a voice or voices that spoke to [him] of the inner, psychological drama being enacted in each and every one of these characters" (viii). Along these lines, the goal of my close reading will not be to focus on the inherent value of a perfect translation, but instead approach certain internal movements and emotional processes that the characters experience, which extend beyond the bounds of a single word choice.

In terms of discussing the way a kind of *mangrove poetics* functions in the text, Jarrod Hayes reminds us of the way that many critics—Édouard Glissant, Odile Ferly, Keja L. Valens, and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, among others—have identified the roots of the mangrove in terms of their genealogical capacity. For Hayes, "the multiplicity of roots questions the notion of origins and serves as an allegory for a heterogeneous identity that rejects an unchanging essence and a politics of purity" (Hayes 459). In other words, the mangrove as metaphor expands our notions of "direct" relation and kinship for a more creolized exploration of belonging. The novel,

[44] There are obvious and numerous pitfalls inherent in this decision, not the least of which is the unique way that Maryse Condé's original Guadeloupean Creole is able to play subtle and subversive linguistic games with anticolonial politics and "standard, academic French" (Condé viii). Pascale de Souza's 2005 essay (see *"The Bridge of Beyond"*) addresses the more nuanced losses that occur between the original and translated text, for instance, but the primary concern of the essay addresses individual word choices for terms and concepts that do not necessarily translate directly.

he argues, is about Sancher's multivalent search for his "roots" in Guadeloupe. For my part, however, I do not read *Crossing the Mangrove* as a novel about Francis Sancher—I believe the text to be something more expansive than that. Philip Ojo approaches the notion of time in his 2007 essay about the transformative power of death in Condé's novel,[45] but again misses a potentially more nuanced reading in order to focus on the way in which characters experience a type of rebirth in the wake of Sancher's death, positing, "the characters use the intricate connections they have made with the late deceased to restart their lives" (Ojo 117).

The most convincing reading I've come across is that of Kathryn Lachman in her 2014 monograph, *Borrowed Forms: The Music and Ethics of Transnational Fiction*. In her discussion of polyphony and the novel form, she writes of how *Crossing the Mangrove*'s "unique, circular structure has [] drawn a good deal of attention but has frequently been misread" (Lachman 32), arguing that an overwhelming majority of critics seem to write about how the novel resists a singular interpretation, while they inevitably interpret it all the same way[46]. Lachman suggests that while this novel is often brought to bear in terms of its *perceived* polyphony, this categorization does it a disservice, and not only because the multitude of perspectives comes to the reader through a "sequence of silent interior monologues to which only [they are] privy" (32). The inherent value in *Crossing the Mangrove* is, for Lachman, its deliberate opacity,[47] its various stylistic strategies which "undermine simple truths" (34), and its "subversively non-vocal dimension" (35) which leaves a "striking ambivalence between silence and vocality" (35). It is along these lines that I want to begin my own reading of this text, bearing in mind Condé's

[45] For more, see "*The Transformative Power of Death in Maryse Condé's "Crossing the Mangrove" and Jacques Roumain's "Masters of the Dew"*, by Ojo.
[46] "The unanimity in criticism regarding the transgressive dimension ends up being suspect" (Lachman 34).
[47] This is perhaps a surprising critical nod towards Édouard Glissant's theory of opacity, considering the ways in which Glissant and Condé are often seen as antithetical figures. But within the realm of creating text that resists Western interpretation or even comprehension, there can be valuable parallels to draw between them.

recorded protest against "the application of European and North American theory to Caribbean literature," in which she has maintained "that the use of theory often amounts to yet another form of intellectual colonization and stems from a misplaced arrogance on the part of Western critics, a will to render the text transparent" (Lachman 33). My reading of this text, in response, is not an attempt to render the text transparent, but instead to propose one possible methodology to be learned *from* it: not to flatten the text, but rather celebrate its rhizomatic temporal potential.

Crossing the Mangrove is a novel about many things—it is a novel about intimacy and community, suspicion and xenophobia, ostracization and isolation. It is about people, and the island they live on. But it is also a novel about time, and the myriad ways in which death and its related time compel us to move. In her 2016 monograph, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Christina Sharpe reminds us of the parallels between the wake as funerary practice and the wake as temporal and spatial disturbance created by an object in motion: "the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved, in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow" (Sharpe 3). Sharpe's text knits together the fibers of autobiography and theory to address the extreme atemporality of the Atlantic Slave Trade and chattel slavery and the ways in which Black communities in the diaspora are still living in the wake of that disaster. There is distempered movement after death, however chaotic, for "in the wake," Sharpe writes, "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (Sharpe 9). As my close reading of Condé's novel will investigate the ways in which facets of a normative life cycle—watery birth, movement and growth, kinship, and death—are disrupted in a necromantic ecocritical reading, I will begin with water, and the numerous ways in which it misbehaves.

i. Water

The rain never stopped. The Ravine Vilaine overflowed its banks, swelled and in a flow of brackish silt delivered up the bodies of animals it had caught off guard in the savannas. A terrible stench rose up, and in order to drive it away enormous quantities of incense were burnt in the shrines built into the hillsides.

Maryse Condé

My interest with the liquidity of *Crossing the Mangrove* is in its overtly omnipresent and contradictory interferences. Water appears in every section of the novel, and in every subsection of *The Night*, manifesting as one might expect in the form of rivers, rain, gullies, and oceans, but also less obviously, in the forms of blood, tears, vomit, lava, dreams, and even the watery womb.

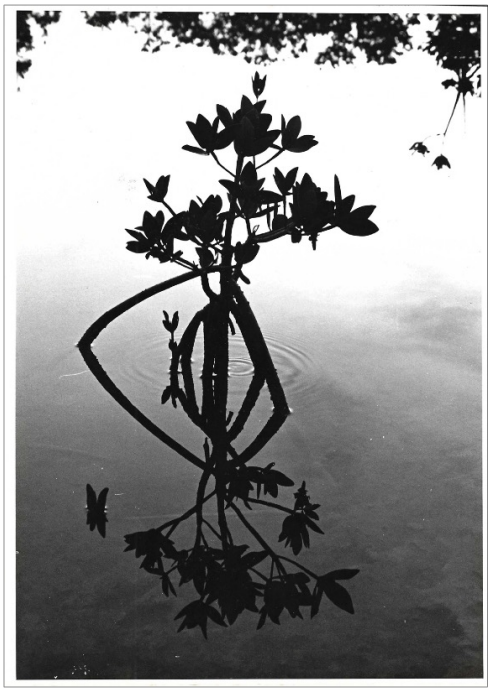

Fig. 1.2: *Backcountry Shadows 2,* Taken north of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway, 1988. Photograph courtesy of Dean Schroeder.

The relative speeds and densities with which waters in this novel move and exist are integral to the conceptualization of a necromantic ecology, an ecology that thrives on a seemingly endless series of coexisting lifecycles occurring overlapped and intersecting. Not unlike the shallow yet fertile waters of a mangrove swamp—seemingly stagnant yet ever-circulating between exposed roots and estuaries, sheltering the vulnerable and drowning intruders, reintroducing life-giving oxygen to the mineral-rich coastal silt—so too do the strange waters of this novel flow unpredictably through and around each of its characters.

When the reader learns of Francis Sancher's death on the second page of the novel, the text's tone is already in disarray as Léocadie Timothée—who often experiences premonitory

dreams—is distressed at not having foreseen his death. Timothée, who receives her own subchapter in *The Night*, but is also featured in both the *Dusk* and *First Light* segments, is the person who discovers Sancher's body, and throughout the novel becomes a kind of caretaker to his corpse. The novel opens with her words, and she is the only character privileged with spoken dialogue in *First Light*. Yet while she combs through the "opaque waters of [her] sleep," "nothing had emerged" (Condé 2) that would warn her about discovering Sancher's body lying "face down in the sticky mud" (2). After discovering his body, she immediately vomits in the tall grassy bank—an opening scene of many opaque and disruptive waters, to be sure.

As news of his mysterious death spreads through the town, we observe Vilma—another community member—crying "warm salty tears"—which the text is quick to qualify as "tears of pain, tears of mourning, but not of surprise" (4). And as the novel proceeds into the opening of *The Night*, while Sancher's wake begins, "the moon shone grandly from behind the damp curtain of rain" (12), suggesting a liquid translucency not granted to many active rainstorms. The novel is thoroughly drenched before the core of the text even begins, before anyone has really had a chance to reflect on the so-called protagonist's death. Between the rain, the mud, the vomit, and the tears, we bear witness to a multitude of liquid viscosities, predicating the text on the notion that water here is not synonymous with one reading, but with many. Water stagnates and kills, it obscures and reveals, it sickens and relieves, and it is this kind of omnipresent, multidirectional, unpredictable liquidity that persists throughout the novel.

In Aristide's recollections, for example, water resurfaces in the form of blood—both his own and Sancher's. Surprised at the "violent reaction of his blood" (57) over Sancher's love affair with his sister, Aristide's resents that Sancher died with no apparent blunt force trauma, thinking to himself, "that's not how he should have died. His blood, his blood should have been

made to flow and avenge my sister" (Condé 45). Blood appears again in Mama Sonson's section as she remembers a premonitory dream she had about her brother Samuel, "lying in his [own] blood between the roots of a tree" (63). Later still, when Mira tells Dinah about how Sancher was poisoning her to induce an abortion—a liquid poison for a watery fertile womb—she notes having "vomited blood and phlegm" (83); Luciana's "baby's blood [] curdl[es] in her womb" (86); and Léocadie's blood "turn[s] to ice" (118) when she is rejected by a love interest.

The bloody waters of this text are violent, incestuous, premonitory, misdirected, curdled, and frozen. In other passages still, waters are circumstantial malevolence, as Mama Sonson mourns that her body "is tired of tossing and turning like a pirogue on the high seas" (66); they are deceptive comforts, as Rosa reminisces on the "delicate way [her unborn daughter] swam in [her] waters" (133) before dying in infancy; they are Carmélien dreaming of being "master of the water, irrigating the grateful soil," only to wake up in a "pool of urine" (144) that would anger his mother. Lucien Evariste tells Sancher that his "great-great-great-grandfather drowned the morning after his second wedding in the swamps of Louisiana, where he had taken refuge after fleeing from Guadeloupe" (185). Mira refuses to "go down to the gully again," as "it too betrayed [her]" (192). While here I include only a very limited list of watery passages, across the text we see water on its own acting against the interest of the character to which it is attributed, or with whom it is interacting. When taken out of context with the rest of the life cycle, water pushes back—in the absence of the mangrove, water destabilizes.

As often as water is read as womb, so too is it read as grave—most uniquely in the context of the African diaspora. Valérie Loichot approaches the concept of *exaqua*—a term coined by M. NourbeSe Philip in her memorial text, *Zong!*—in her 2020 monograph, *Water Graves: The Art of the Unritual in the Greater Caribbean* as she examines the intersecting

poetics of the bones of humans thrown overboard and the "liquid aesthetics of water" (Loichot 202). This "bone water" aesthetic, she posits, is necessary to address the unique poetics of Philip's text, as the language of exhuming utterly fails when addressing death in the hands of the ocean. It is Philip's departure from the terminology of exhuming that draws my attention, however, as the language of "ex-humus"/"out of the soil" reminds me of Vilma's section in *Crossing the Mangrove*, in which she remarks:

> Life's problems are like trees. We see the trunk, we see the branches and the leaves. But we can't see the roots, hidden deep down under the ground. And yet it's their shape and nature and how far they dig into the slimy humus to search for water that we need to know. Then perhaps we would understand. (Condé 139)

It is the "slimy humus" in which a tree's truths lie; it is "sticky mud" (2) in which Sancher is found dead, face down; it is the "brackish mud" (158) one would suffocate in if attempting to cross a mangrove. The soil of this novel is always wet, and always full of secretive truths and premature deaths. Just as Philip's poem is "adaptable, mobile, floating, [and] resting on the random flotsam and jetsam left behind by shipwrecks" (Loichot 202)—Condé's novel digs over and over into the humus, attempting structure in the watery chaos. Much like coastlines rapidly erode in the anthropogenic absence of mangrove forests, so too is this novel overtaken by water. While each new voice acts as a new root attempting to take hold in the soft, slimy mangrove humus, the water in these memories overwhelms, drowns, and suffocates.

ii. Movement

Today she had taken a different path.
What had been more powerful than years and years of habit?

Maryse Condé

While I think most of the thematic metaphorical aspects of the lifecycle I've chosen to address here are more obvious, movement as a metaphor deserves some elaboration. When I write about movement in a necromantic ecocritical reading, I am thinking about time and growth—more specifically, growth over time. Putting down roots. Fostering life. The accumulation of layers of silt and sediment. Slow evolution. Deliberateness action. The normative shift from seed, to sprout, to sapling, to tree, to forest. I am thinking about how mangrove propagules—the nearly foot-long seeds they grow slowly and drop into the sea—endure what is referred to as an *obligate dispersal period* during which, after dropping from its parent tree, it *must* spend a certain amount of time floating in the ocean before stranding itself in a favorable growth area.[48] I am thinking about the way both mangroves and vulnerable coastal communities thrive in a sustainable cyclical existence, but have been violently disrupted by anthropogenic climate changes and how these increasingly severe climate events have destroyed the normative movement of these lifecycles.[49] In terms of Maryse Condé's novel, I am most interested in the ways in which characters draw attention to their own atypical movements. In a

[48] According to the Newfound Harbor Marine Institute based in the Florida Keys, obligate dispersal periods differ across mangrove varieties, with white mangroves dispersing propagules for only 5 days, while red mangrove propagules drift for up to 40 days. They have, however, been known to float for up to a year before grounding themselves, waiting for an ideal growth location. These dispersal periods correlate directly to germination periods. (Newfound Harbor Marine Institute)

[49] "Mangroves face numerous threats — 35% were lost between 1980 and 2000, and since the turn of the 21st century almost 1 in 50 of the remaining mangrove forests has been cut down. Today, one of the direst threats to their continued existence comes from rising sea levels caused by climate change" (Center for Biological Diversity).

necromantic reading, reading for the not-mangrove, movement is not linear or normative, it is unexpected, comes in bursts, is unpredictable, and often violent.

We know in the very first pages of the text that non-normative movement is responsible for the instigation of the novel itself. Léocadie, who discovers Sancher's dead body on page three and who, the text tells us, goes on walks "every morning and every evening" (Condé 121), is described as having "taken a different path. What had been more powerful than years and years of habit?" (3). It is the deviation from her normal route that allows her to discover Sancher's body, and to set this text in motion. Once *The Night* begins and the reader becomes privy to the stories of the community, we learn from Moïse that after visiting with Émile Étienne, "Francis Sacher began to step up his mysterious wanderings through the woods" (26), during which he would be gone all day, not returning until the middle of the night. Moïse begins to follow him on these walks to understand their purpose, but "never managed to obtain any definite clues" (26).

Examining further the atypical descriptions of movement in this novel, when Mira and Sancher meet in the gully and have sex, she describes the scene as follows: "He succumbed, without resistance, but watched my every movement as if he thought I would deal him some fatal blow" (37). Sancher appears to redirect normative movement around him, jostling everyone in his path like a wave moving through an unprotected estuary. Even Aristide notices this, as his section suggests that the earthquake that rolled through Rivière au Sel on the night of Sancher's wake was caused by the dead man himself, who had played a last trick on them before shooting off to lose himself in eternity" (51). Multiple other passages in the novel reflect characters literally running because of Sancher. Joby reflects on when he first meets Sancher, who explodes into an unprompted tirade about politics, prompting Joby to take off running through the woods

to escape him. “I continued to run as fast as my legs would carry me and got back home. I went and sat on the steps of the old ornamental pond and cried hot tears. Why? Because Francis Sancher had told me a lot of nonsense?” (Condé 75). Not long after, Dinah meets Sancher for the first time and, haunted by his beauty, “[she] ran home as fast as [she] could. But that same evening, with doors and windows shut tight, he came and joined [her]. And the night after and the night after that…” (80). Sonny is prompted too to run, after coming to pick fruit from Sancher’s yard and being verbally harassed by Mira until “he took to his heels” (92). Léocadie, meanwhile, is the cause of Sancher’s atypical movement when they first meet in the forest and “he ran until he disappeared into the darkness between the trees” (121). Characters in this novel are always moving too quickly, too abruptly, in unexpected directions.

A particularly interesting non-normative movement is described to Cyrille by Sancher who, on describing his failed rebirth in Cuba, claims, “You are never born again. You never come out twice from your mother’s womb. You can’t tell her: ‘It didn’t work, take me back!’ Once you’re up on your two feet, you have to go on to the end, right to the grave. I’ve walked until I’m exhausted! The marathon started a long time ago” (125). The reader sees here that Sancher has always understood movement to be atypical because being born prompts a certain set of motions and directions that he feels at odds with, a tension with. Even the moment in the novel that gives us its title speaks of thwarted or frustrated movement. As Sancher talks to Vilma about a novel he is attempting to write, he says, “I’ve already found the title: ‘Crossing the Mangrove.’”, to which Vilma shrugs her shoulders and responds, “You don’t cross a mangrove. You’d spike yourself on the roots of the mangrove trees. You’d be sucked down and suffocated by the brackish mud.” Sancher agrees, “Yes, that’s it, that’s precisely it” (158). Even the original title of the novel—*Traversée de la mangrove*—speaks to this unlikely movement, and the

inevitability of Sancher's own demise, face down in the brackish mud. There is no slow burn in this novel, no gradual layering of silt on the ocean floor: action points happen quickly, abruptly, and severely. Babies die in infancy. Lovers get overheated. Everyone seems to be running and crying and in a constant state of reaction, jostled to and fro in the waves of the narrative.

iii. Kinship

Oh my, he was a vagabond who came to bury his rotten self here.
We don't even know whether he was white, black, or Indian.
He had every blood in his body.

Maryse Condé

Continuing through the necromantic lifecycle of Condé's novel, kinship evolves in unexpected directions in this text as well. In much the same way that Hortense Spillers identifies a unique circumstantial kinship of the descendants of the African Slave Trade in her foundational 1987 essay, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,* so too does this text present a nonpatrilineal, non-Western kinship network. And while one could certainly read this text through Spillers's essay alone, recognizing the uniquely rhizomatic timing of this narrative allows for a more nuanced interpretation through a necromantic ecocritical reading—that is, continuing to read for the *not-mangrove*, the absent mangrove, presents a similar setting in which traditional family structures are rendered dysfunctional through anthropogenic violence. In terms of a direct correlation between this close reading and its metaphorical framework, I am thinking

about the ways in which mangrove forests encourage expansive and interconnected biological systems and food webs in the protected shallows of their roots,[50] and, in contrast, how detrimental the absence of mangroves can be to such ecosystems: "Mangroves and fish populations are so intertwined that the loss of one square mile of forest will cause a loss of about 275,000 pounds (124 metric tons) of fish per year, the same weight as a small blue whale" (Ocean Portal Team). Recontextualizing this as an analytic framework, reading Condé's novel for the conspicuously absent mangrove reflects similarly redirected networks of kinship.

It is clear from the onset of the novel that notions of kinship and relationality are already strained, and the arrival and death of Francis Sancher instigates a revelation and reorientation of these relationalities within the community. Even more interesting, the collection of voices that congregate at Sancher's wake are reincorporated further into a new kind of family—one formed by mourning, however performative. While Sancher's presence in Rivière au Sel clearly touched more than just the guests at this funerary service, we only hear from those present at the wake, which privileges their unique ties to Sancher and uniting them together in a kind of grief network or grief kinship. The definition of family, we come to understand, is multivalent and flexible in this text.

In the very first internal monologue of *The Night*, we hear from Moïse—an outsider in the community who forms a tense friendship with Sancher not long after his arrival. His section opens in the present tense timeline as he stands in the wake:

[50] "Underwater sponges, snails, worms, anemones, barnacles, and oysters are a few animals that cling to the hard surface of the roots. For swimming species, not only are the roots a great place for ample food, they are also a great hideout to avoid predators. Many crabs, shrimp, and fish will spend the early stages of life within the safety of the mangrove roots before making their way out into the open ocean as adults. For this reason, mangrove forests are considered nursery habitats. The rainbow parrotfish and Goliath grouper are two species listed on the IUNC Red List that rely on this nursery for protection and food. Only once the grouper reaches a meter in length—roughly six years of growth—will it venture from the safety of the roots to a coral reef" (Ocean Portal Team).

> "I was the first to know his real name." Moïse repeated the words to himself as if they gave him a right to the deceased, a right he was unwilling to share with either of the two women who had loved Francis or with the two children he had planted in their wombs, one who was already shooting up fatherless under the sun, the other who was getting ready to enter this world as an orphan with nothing but two eyes to cry with. (Condé 13)

Moïse's "right to the deceased" is predicated on a unique access to private information—access Sancher granted to very few, and with Moïse, only while heavily intoxicated. For Moïse, his relation to Sancher is based in this proximity and perceived trust, a one-sided friendship. The nature of this friendship is almost immediately undermined by the community, when we read the omniscient narrator gossip that they may have been lovers.[51] While the reader knows that they were not, the town's speculation further obscures the authentic nature of this relationship.

Even genealogical connections are thwarted, redirected, and obscured in this novel. In Mira's section, we learn her mother died in childbirth: as a young girl, she "could not accept the fact that there was no mama somewhere on this earth for [her]" (34) and would spend hours each day in the mountains searching for her, finding comfort in a specific gully. Mira's half-brother's mother also dies in their childhood, "so pale you knew she wouldn't live" (Condé 35). Their father marries again, a woman named Dinah, who also "languish[es] and wilt[s] like grass deprived of water" (35). Maternal figures come and go quickly in Mira's household. But it is in the gully she discovered while looking for her own mother where she first meets Sancher, and where the two have sex, turning Mira into a mother herself.

Mira's half-brother, Aristide, also lives with misdirected kinship affection. The reader learns quickly that he has possessive romantic and even sexual feelings towards Mira, which fuel his hatred when Sancher's relation to her becomes apparent: "A man had robbed him of his sister, the treasure of his heart, and this man was allowed to go free, breathing and coming and

[51] "There was something fishy about that friendship and the two men were makoumeh! That's for sure." (20)

going as he pleased. And he had not laid him to rest in his final resting place" (Condé 55). By contrast, Sonny, the disabled son of Dodose—who is deemed responsible for a townsperson's stillbirth after she suffers a seizure after coming "face to face" (85) with him, leaving him more ostracized from the community than he already had been—has an altogether different relationship with Sancher. In an attempt to distance himself from his bullies, Sonny spends his afternoons in the empty house that Sancher inevitably moves into. For Sonny, kinship forms out of a mere passing kindness:

> Who knows why and how the little seed of friendship takes root and starts to bud? Sonny ought to have hated Francis Sancher for having burst into his kingdom and plundered it. Instead of which he found a friend. Somebody who tried to decipher his mumblings. Who wiped his brow and his lips compassionately with a handkerchief. Who painted life with the colors of travel and adventure. (90)

Devastated when Sancher dies, Sonny's mother brings him to yet another specialist who "pronounc[es] his case hopeless" on the grounds that "his friend was dead" (92).

Kinship is even further reevaluated in Léocadie Timothée's section as she thinks critically about the town in which she lives, understanding that relationalities like race can be superseded by class distinctions. "Our skins were the same color, our hair the same texture. And yet I was living in opulence, without hardship, in a house with a veranda and an attic. I had my fish cleaned by a maid who served me two meals a day. In their eyes I was a traitor! I suffered from this isolation because I wanted to be loved" (114). Timothée's deep loneliness and isolation exists despite her perceived connection to her community, a kinship of shared ethnicity and proximity disrupted by socioeconomic class. Her relationship with Sancher is one of similar distance and tension, exemplified by the opening sentences of her own section in which she establishes, "That corpse is mine…I have become his mistress and his accomplice. I won't leave

him until the first shovelfuls of earth fall on his wooden coffin" (Condé 111). She meets Sancher only one time, and on seeing her, he runs.

Désinor, ostracized by the town for his Haitian citizenship, finds solace only in his companionship with Xantippe, another ostracized community member. "…Désinor felt tied to Xantippe by a stronger bond. Who could be more miserable, more lonely than they were? Without wife, without children, without friends, without father or mother, with nothing under the sun." (168). He is only made an equal in the community through his attendance at Sancher's funeral, and while he comes to the wake only for the food and the rum, his attendance renders him a part of the family of mourning. "For once he was on equal footing with the people of Rivière au Sel and wished he could have insulted them, shocked them and made them realize who in fact this Désinor Décimus really was, instead of taking him for a wretched Haitian gardener" (163).

Francis Sancher's relationality to each person at his wake varies wildly, from hated rival, to lover, to even "the big brother and young father [Lucien] never had" (Condé 187). But despite this familial metaphor, patrilineal family networks spark with dysfunction throughout this narrative. Rosa, Vilma's mother, describes Vilma in her womb as a "voracious parasite, feeding off my flesh and blood" (135) because her previous daughter died in infancy. Mira is sedated by Sancher and wakes up to him attempting to abort their conceived pregnancy with a "long, sparkling needle" (83). Aristide describes the "violent reaction of his [own] blood" (57) when he realizes he has fallen out of love with his half-sister. In fact, it is largely the relationships built outside traditional patrilineal kinship networks that even vaguely thrive. Kinship in this novel rearranges and converges on assemblages such as class distinction, friendship, and grief, eschewing traditional kinship networks that rely on blood relation. Francis Sancher does not

instigate or nurture the tensions in the patrilineal family networks of Rivière au Sel, nor does his death release these tensions. His presence in this community only serves to highlight the relative discomforts experienced throughout these networks as they stood, because his funeral is where all of these tensions converge into a singular, cohesive narrative. Kinship, in a necromantic ecology, expands and redirects in unexpected ways. In the face of disaster, it must. Reading for the mangrove that is not there, a "mangrove" which may have provided some semblance of kinship stability, the inhabitants of the town coalesce at this wake, where a new kind of kinship germinates.

iv. Death

Our ancestors used to say that death is nothing but a bridge between humans,
a footbridge that brings them closer together on which they can meet halfway
to whisper things they never dared talk about.

Maryse Condé

Whether forsaken swamp, sea abyss, or riverbed,
unspecified places of dying or repose render all ground ambiguous:
the dead are both nowhere to be found and potentially everywhere.

Valérie Loichot, *Water Graves*

In addressing death last, I feel I am almost doing a disservice to the exercise of close reading a lifecycle gone awry: Maryse Condé's novel hardly approaches death as a finality, despite structuring its narrative across the long arc of a wake. The novel itself begins three days after the death of Sancher, a somewhat cheeky allusion to the Biblical resurrection. But even

beyond the inevitable death and rhizomatic reanimation of our posthumous protagonist, the idea of death in Condé's narrative is flexible, predictable, inspirational, and even hoped for on occasion. Francis Sancher comes to Rivière au Sel with mysterious intentions, but across the various subchapters of *The Night*, the reader understands his arrival in the small Guadeloupean town as inescapably tied to his own demise. Sancher anticipates his own death so regularly to so many of the townspeople that their own relationships with death shift and evolve, and by the time his wake ends, many of them have found renewed purpose in living. As the insular but diverse Guadeloupean community collectively remembers the already dead protagonist Francis Sancher at his wake, his still-living memory becomes the nexus through which their community performs the necessary symbolic, symbiotic work of re-membering themselves. [52] If "water is an element which remembers the dead" (DeLoughrey, *Heavy Waters* 704), Condé's uncrossable, absent mangrove drops the reader directly into that element, challenging what it really means to "end."

While death and dying are integral to this narrative from its onset—"death being what it is, when it passes by, respect it" (Condé 2)—Sancher's conversations on the matter are regular and disconcerting. After Mira tells Dinah that she woke up to him attempting to abort their conceived child, Sancher tells Mira, "I have come here to end it all. To come full circle, to put the finishing touches, you understand. Return to square one and stop everything. When the coffee tree is riddled with greenfly and only bears black, stony fruit it has to be burnt" (83). Almost immediately after, Dinah's recollections are overtaken by the present timeline in which she is attending the wake, looking around at the women around her who are praying: "I counted the dead happy because they were dead, happier than the living who are still in life" (83-4). But

[52] I mean here, specifically, the type of "work" (10) that Christina Sharpe discusses in chapter one of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.

despite this distinctive unhappiness, Dinah decides there and then to leave her husband, take her boys, and "look for the sun and the air and the light for what's left of the years to live" (Condé 84)—the narrative leaps from the unborn child, to the almost aborted fetus, to the deceased Sancher, to Dinah's expansive and living future. A swirl of deaths, both potential and past tense, resettle to form a new kind of futurity.

Sancher's predictive relationship with his own death reappears again and again. He tells Cyrille that death has been following him, commenting, "Alas, there's nothing to be done. I have only a few days left" (126). He tells Carmélien, "Everywhere I've been, I've seen men and women tired of waiting for happiness, their hands folded on their laps, tired of sowing without reaping, tired of planting and being nipped in the bud. Do you want me to tell you something? I'm glad the end is near" (149); when Carmélien asks for clarification on whose death Sancher is referencing, he responds with a laugh, "Mine, of course! The only one that counts in my eyes" (149). In Vilma's subsection, she remarks that he belongs to no woman, but instead "the creature…hiding in the shadows amid the sounds of the night" (159), as Sancher drifts into a hallucinatory state at night, asking her, "Can you see him? Can you? He's standing there under the ebony tree. He's waiting for me. He's counting the days" (159). He tells Lucien, "I'm more or less a zombie trying to capture with words the life that I'm about to lose" (183).

But while haunted by his obsession with his own imminent death, Sancher prompts nearly everyone around him to reconsider their own relationship with life. Dinah decides to leave her husband; Mira rejects the expectations of her to live a repentant life in Sancher's absence, claiming instead, "Nothing of the sort will happen. They're all mistaken. My real life begins with his death" (193). Emile Etienne decides at the wake to take up his pursuit of recording local histories: "Looking at the coffin, [he] suddenly felt ashamed of his cowardice…He felt filled

with an immense courage and renewed energy that flowed mysteriously through his veins. Yes, he would set to work the very next day" (Condé 199). Even Rosa, Vilma's mother, thinks to herself,

> Now Francis Sancher is dead. But he alone has come to an end. The rest of us are alive and continue to live as we've always done. Without getting along together. Without liking ourselves. Without sharing anything. The night is waging war and grappling with the shutters. Soon, however, it will have to surrender to the day and every rooster from every henhouse will crow its defeat. (140)

She completes this wake-side reflection with a renewed intention of healing her relationship with her daughter: "It's not too late for our eyes to meet and our hands to touch" (140). Nearly everyone who attends Sancher's wake is impacted by his loss, reorienting their actions and thoughts and redirecting their energy towards self-improvement. Where Philip Ojo suggests that the inhabitants of Rivière au Sel "use the intricate connections they have made with the late deceased to restart their lives" (Ojo 117), I disagree. No one's life ends in this narrative except Sancher's, as Rosa reminds us. But not only do most characters experience a sense of renewed gratitude for the lives they have—Sancher's death is so disruptive that it prompts active clarity and expansive regrowth.

While this may seem holistic and generally positive, I would like to posit an alternative reading. In a detritus ecology, death is not only a normative aspect of the life cycle, but an integral one. Fallen leaves and rotted roots and decaying bodies contribute to the nutrient rich silt that creates exactly the kind of ecosystem mangroves are known to host. Most of the characters in this novel, however, are absolutely derailed by Sancher's death. In opposition to the seemingly normative response to Sancher's demise, Xantippe's story—a character often associated with death[53]—reveals that not everyone has the same seemingly salutory response to the wake.

[53] He is described as a "soucouyant" (Condé 74) by Joby, "a leech" by Sancher (92), and Cyrille tells the reader Xantippe's "look gave you the creeps" (127).

Xantippe, whose subsection is saved for last, is evidence of the way in which death flows through the living. The character with perhaps the most intimate relationship to the island, Xantippe lived a life that can only be described as copoetic with nature. He gives names to the various natural forces around him, describing the process as "a jet of [his own] sperm" (Condé 200), identifies "trees as our only friends" (202), and he turns himself, however metaphorically, into a "devil's darning needle to listen to the song of the water" (204). Xantippe also lived a life as a Maroon, protected by the forest, and had since watched Rivière au Sel slip into modernity: "I watched the coming of electric light…In La Pointe the guppies died of thirst at the bottom of the storm canals, drained of their water, while men's hearts turned hard and wicked, devoured by stereo players and color television sets" (204). For those devoured by modernity, death becomes a disrupting experience. Xantippe, who has been watching cycles of death and destruction his entire life, is largely unaffected by Sancher's death. For Xantippe, Sancher's absence is just another absence in a long string of unending absences. Water, kinship, movement, and death come together in this final segment.

> I picked up a handful of cinders. I walked to the beach. Standing under a sea grape tree I opened my hand and the wind blew the ashes over the sea. Ever since that day everything has become muddled in my mind and I've lost track of the days. Do you remember, my love without a grave, when we drifted on the foam of pleasure? (205)

That this final segment of my close reading remains shifting and unconclusive is appropriate. Death, in a disrupted cycle of life, is a curious notion, and spreads unevenly throughout Condé's novel. Life is not "restarted" here in the same way that Sancher doesn't really die in this novel. His death predates the novel's opening and the lives of those affected extend beyond its final page. In Rivière au Sel, water overwhelms, growth is explosive and unpredictable, kinship

germinates where it is least expected and flounders where it is, and death is neither final nor productive. It simply is.

Conclusion: On the Move

Any evolutionary story, like any narrative at all, requires a decision about when the beginning was. And it is always a lie. And it is always too late.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Being Ocean as Praxis*

Mangroves are survivors. With their roots submerged in water, mangrove trees thrive in hot, muddy, salty conditions that would quickly kill most plants. How do they do it? Through a series of impressive adaptations.

Ocean Portal Team

... mi cuerpo naufragó pero nunca murió.
Felipe Baeza

Felipe Baeza was born in 1987 in Guanajuato, Mexico. The winner of multiple arts fellowships and grants, Baeza has had his work in exhibitions all over the world. His piece entitled, "*En mar abierto, lejos de la tierra, en este lejano exterior salado naufragó mi cuerpo pero nunca fallecio,*"[54] is a 196.8 x 127 cm piece constructed of ink, acrylic, twine, gel medium, cut paper, egg tempera, and glitter on paper. Roughly translated from Spanish to, "In the open sea, far from land, in this distant salty outside my body was shipwrecked but never died" (translation mine), this piece was featured in his first solo exhibition in 2018 at the Maureen Paley gallery in London. The work is beautiful and textured, showing a sort of bisected

[54] For visual reference, see permanent exhibition site in bibliography.

perspective of both above and below water, as though the viewer was wearing a snorkel mask half-submerged in the shallows. The top half of the piece features a light cloud grey background with black mangrove roots, branches, and leaves in the foreground. The bottom half of the work reveals what is below the surface of the water, with a dark azure blue background and textured grey/blue legs in the foreground. There is no torso, but rather, the mangrove roots and branches in the top half of the piece appear to be growing directly out of the lower back of the legs in the bottom half, as though the legs, roots, and branches were of the same organism. This piece was on display as part of an exhibit of works that largely feature plant life growing out of human bodies.

The title of this work—*In the open sea, far from land, in this distant salty outside my body was shipwrecked but never died*—and the image it offers the viewer, speak directly to my interest in a necromantic ecology. The idea of near death, of seemingly inevitable but incomplete death, of a death that should have been or maybe was, but adapted and survived, supports, maintains, and nourishes the rhizomatic Caribbean. In Baeza's work, the legs are maybe stand-ins for the mangrove propagules that drive for days, even months, looking for a safe place to land. *Shipwrecked*, stranded, *far from land*, suggests the devious and surprising shallows in which the mangrove thrives. Often growing even without a coastline in sight, mangroves create their own land, their own coastlines, constructing and sustaining a coastal ecology without soil, without fresh water, relying on their many unique adaptations to thrive in the most unlikely of circumstances. They create and foster life where other plants would certainly perish.

Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming is a Trinidadian Bahamian Mechanical/Building Services Engineer, poet, fiction writer, artist, and part-time college lecturer. Her 2000 collection of poetry,

Curry Flavor, includes a poem entitled, "The Hills Not Dancing No More," in which mangroves feature as an ecological metaphor for her home in the Bahamas.

> Long before white mangrove planted
> Grey legs and drank salt tears
> From the grouper crèche
> The Blue Hills used to
> Dance (Manoo-Rahming 95-96)

Here we see the "grey legs" of the mangrove—grey from the layers of salt and silt that dry on the exposed roots during low tides—and the "salt tears," reminding the reader of the method by which mangroves convert saltwater to freshwater, exuding the salt onto their leaves. The reader also encounters the "grouper crèche," an endearing visual referent to the nursery ecologies created by the nutrients, shade, and calm waters of mangrove root systems that nurture young fish like groupers. The Blue Hills Manoo-Rahming mentions are a geological and cartographic feature of Nassau, and as her poem continues, she observes that over time, the natural rhythm of the island has shifted, along with the ecologies associated with it. This shift in rhythm announces a shift away from natural ecologies towards man-made ones, resulting in a muted or absent natural space.

> Mangrove dry up
> Rooster get eat
> Seagulls scavenging
> Sir Milo's Highway
> And the Blue Hills the Blue Hills
> Not dancing no more (Manoo-Rahming 97)

Where we once had mangrove tears and grouper nurseries and, presumably, feral roosters, we now have dead mangroves and seagulls scavenging one of Nassau's main highways. Even the highway itself, named for Milo Butler, the first Governor General of the Bahamas after gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1973, speaks to a time since past. Once freshly independent, now a scavenging ground. In its dense association between Bahamian culture and

ecological landscape, this poem tracks the direct correlation between decreased ecology and decreased cultural richness. Dried up mangroves have no legs for dancing.

The relationship between mangrove roots and legs is not new, but I am interested in the way it travels across the Caribbean. Whether as a dangerous crossing in Maryse Condé's novel, a route by which passage seems impossible, or the submerged legs of Baeza's work and the grey legs of Manoo-Rahming's poem, *mangrove legs* suggest something unique and specific. They suggest a slow, nearly unobservable shifting. Where arboreal trees, grounded in soil, may pick one location in which to grow with roots extending out in a radius, mangrove "legs" imply movement, change, potential. From Guadeloupe to Mexico to Trinidad and the Bahamas—we even observe this correlation in Tiphanie Yanique's 2014 novel, *Land of Love and Drowning.* The Duene women of Anegada are described as having "mangrove legs and backwards feet" (Yanique 56), and Jacob Esau, one of the main characters, is a "sand-colored man with long mangrove legs" (118). In both cases, mangrove legs denote a kind of flexible strength, unique beauty, and the suggestion of movement and adaptation, both literal and metaphorical. In terms of a necromantic ecology, of a necromantic ecocritical reading, mangroves embody this potential of movement, of adaptation, and in that potential, are always capable of vanishing. It is up to the reader to watch where they go. As anthropogenic climate change prompts our ocean levels to rise and our coastlines to erode, the need to read for the absent mangrove will only become more dire.

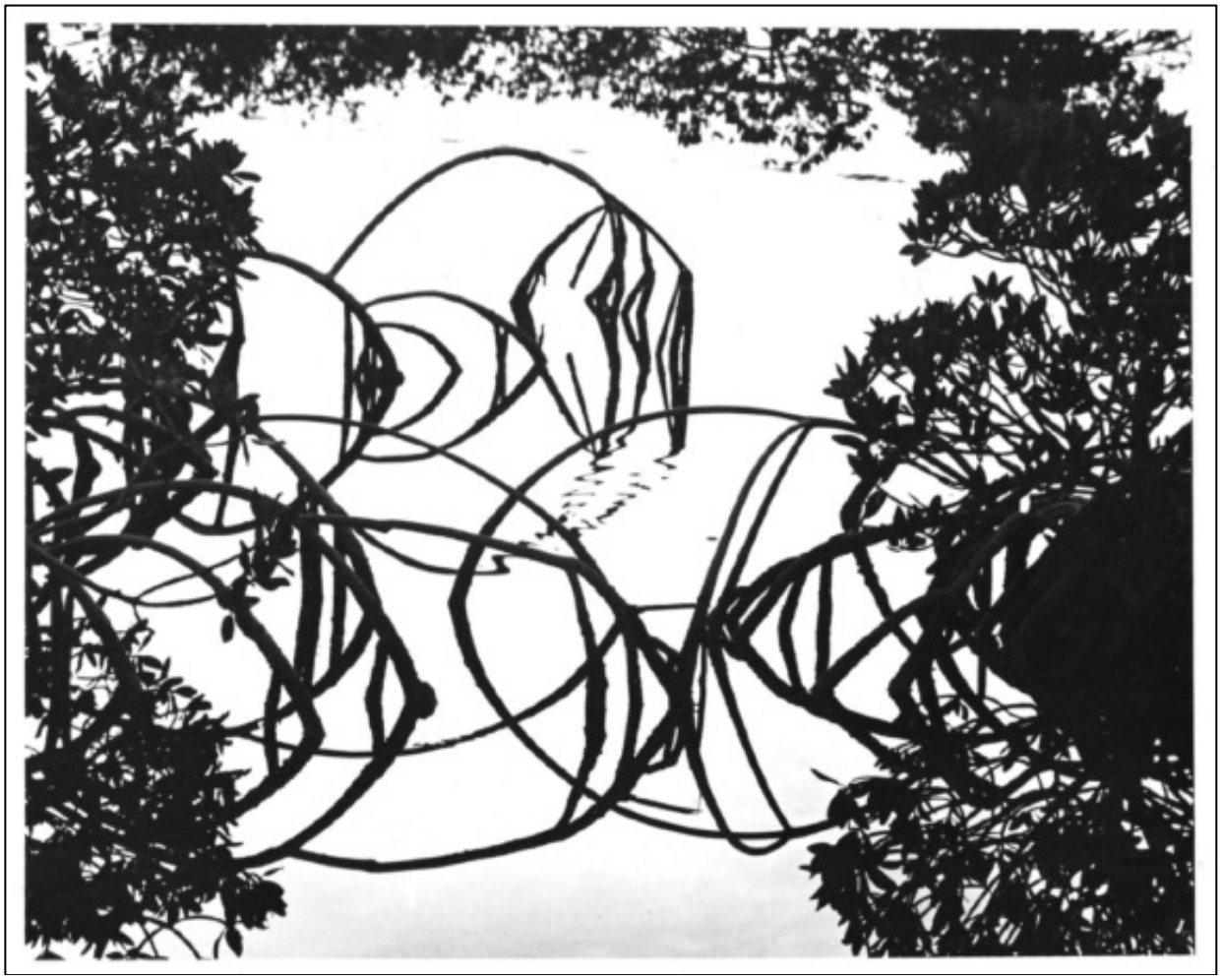

Fig. 1.3: *Backcountry Shadows 3*, Taken north of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway, 1988.
Photograph courtesy of Dean Schroeder.

2 Combing the Beach for a Conch Shell Poetics

From the structure of the double helix that defines every living being, to the swirl of stars, gas, and dust that compose the galaxy, the very foundations of the universe unfold in a spiral, implicitly putting even the most dramatically isolated beings into relation.

Kaiama Glover, *Haiti Unbound*

Fig. 2.1: Conch shell outside a friend's childhood home, Fogarty Avenue, Key West, Florida, October 2017. Photograph courtesy of the author.

"Strombidae" is the taxonomic name used to describe *true conchs*, a family of large-shelled aquatic snails native to tropical, equatorial waters. In the Western hemisphere, they are most commonly found in the Caribbean, South Florida, and central America. A conch's shell can grow up to twelve inches in length, weigh up to five pounds with the animal inside, and they can live for roughly thirty years, depending on the species. Conchs develop a periostracum—a thin, rough, organic skin coating the outside of the shell—and harbor a smooth, often pink interior where the gastropod lives. The fleshy, hard-muscled snail that inhabits these shells has two eye stalks and a single foot that may be retracted back inside the shell to protect against predators.[55] The most commonly identifiable variety of these is the Queen Conch, or the Strombus gigas, native to the sandflats and seagrass beds of the Bahamas, Virgin Islands, Jamaica, and the Florida Keys.

Historically, the conch has been largely visible as an item of commercial value. With the expansion of Caribbean tourism, its shell has become a coveted memento for visitors. Its meat, once a more localized dietary staple, is now a popular culinary adventure for foreigners. Queen conchs, in particular, have been so aggressively over-fished over the past several decades that they are widely considered an endangered species. Because their dense egg sacks are a vital component of zooplankton in the marine food web in the region, maintaining their population is of particular urgency, and they are routinely protected from unlicensed fishing by laws carrying heavy penalties of jail time and fines.

Culturally, the conch is invoked across the Caribbean in a variety of ways. Often observed adorning gates of houses or outside front doors, conch shells are positioned to symbolically keep the ocean out of one's home (fig. 2.2). The shells are commonly seen in

[55] See Delgado, Gabriel A., et al.

cemeteries, adorning graves, standing in as name plates, or delineating a gravesite when cement or more formal mausoleums too costly (fig. 2.3). They can also be used as construction materials supplementing or repairing pre-existing graves (fig. 2.6), due to the shell's considerable durability. [56] The conch, in name, is invoked as a referent to describe the specific population of people born in Key West, Florida (fig. 2.4)—originally descendants of Bahamian immigrants[57]. They are used as namesakes for public space designation, as in *Espace Konn'Lambi*[58] in the Texaco neighborhood of Fort-de-France, Martinique (fig. 2.5), and feature on the back of the rarely used Bahamian one-dollar coin. They even feature in Trinidadian Soca artist Machel Montano's 2020 track, *Conch Shell*, which engages the shell in its Carnival-rallying capacities as he explains, "everybody know when the conch shell start to blow, we come to gih dem hell" (Montano).

Fig. 2.2: **Top:** Conch shell outside a home on United Street, Key West, Florida, October 2017. **Bottom:** Conch shell outside a home in Le Diamant, Martinique, November 2019. Photographs courtesy of the author.

[56] Family mausoleums are a common burial practice in the Caribbean for the purpose of preservation and maintenance, as many cemeteries are coastal and therefore significantly more vulnerable to storm and flood damage.
[57] See Davis's entry on *Conchs* in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*.
[58] "Lambi" is the Martinician Creole term for the "conch" animal; "Konn'lambi" means "conch shell."

Fig. 2.3: Conch shells adorn gravesites in Cimetière du Diamant, Le Diamant, Arrondissement du Marin, Martinique, November 2019.
Photographs courtesy of the author.

As a biomimetic signifier—a living symbol whose biological and ecological features perform metaphorical work—the conch is at once expansive and contained, disruptive and nonbinary,[59] corporeally fixed yet symbolically unbound, embodying so many of the contradictions often located in the postcolonial Caribbean imaginary. Frequently invoked across the Caribbean artistic landscape—by Maryse Condé as grave markers, by Edwidge Danticat as a method of garnering favor and protection from the Haitian loa Lasirèn in *Claire of the Sea*

[59] Here I use the term *nonbinary* in its polysemic capacity—both as a general defiance of binary identification, in terms of space and time, as well as its more contemporary usage regarding gender. To this effect, my analysis of the conch as a signifier is interested both in the rejection of a singular understanding of timespace, as well as in the rejection of a singularly gendered literary and critical Caribbean archive. In her chapter in *Black Sexual Economics* (2019), Angelique V. Nixon describes nonbinary gender identification as "not-so-gendered identity" ("On Being" 241), and it is this rejection of singular identification in which I ground my theory.

Light[60], or indeed as a musical instrument used to herald the abolition of slavery in works such as Haitian sculptor Albert Mangonès's statue, *Le Marron Inconnu*, as well as Guadeloupean artist Jocelyn Pèzeron's *Nèg Mawon* memorial in St. Anne (fig. 2.6)—the conch boasts a fortified calcium carbonate exterior defending a vulnerable interior against external possession and definition. Rounded, flowery, and almost vaginal in appearance, the opening of the shell is rooted strongly to a sharp, straight central column. Growing outwardly in a spiral pattern, the conch shell rarely leaves behind its origin shell, instead constructing new protective material as it expands, similarly resisting any simple mediation between beginning and end. In prose and poetry alike, the conch appears in literatures from Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, Haiti, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Cuba, the Bahamas, and Jamaica, among others[61], urging readers to expand their understanding of communication, history, time, and the archive itself. Yet despite the apparent ecological, economic, cultural, and artistic omnipresence of the conch across the Caribbean, it is rarely invoked in terms of a critical, rhetorical context.

Fig. 2.4: High School Marching Band T-Shirt, Key West, Florida, 2005.
Photograph courtesy of the author.

Fig. 2.5: *Espace Konn'Lambi,* Fort-de-France, Martinique, November 2019.
Photograph courtesy of the author.

[60] "Like most fisherman he knew, Nozias, in his boat, next to his trap, net, hook, line, and tin can full of bait, kept a burlap sack in which he had a mirror, a comb, and conch shell, an amulet to attract Lasirèn's protection" (Danticat, *Claire of the Sea Light* 34).

[61] In order, conchs appear in *Victoire: My Mother's Mother*, by Maryse Condé; "L", by Derek Walcott; *The Farming of Bones* and *Claire of the Sea Light* by Edwidge Danticat; *Land of Love and Drowning* by Tiphanie Yanique; "In The Doorjamb" by Reina María Rodríguez; "Of Pirates and Junkanoo" by Marion Bethel; and in "Home" by Safiya Sinclair.

Where the conch *is* engaged critically, moreover, it is mentioned as an afterthought, a tangential referent. Kaiama Glover's 2010 monograph, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon*, mentions the conch in one clause of one sentence as she introduces the ways in which the spiral figures as a spatiotemporal metaphor in Caribbean literature. Glover's text addresses the Haitian arts movement of the mid-1960s in a critical rejection of the too common exclusion of Haitian literary contributions from the postcolonial Caribbean canon. The Spiralist movement, a literary and artistic protest aesthetic that raged against the Duvalier regime, was informed by the symbolic aspects of the spiral itself—inherently incomplete, eternally in motion, denying any sort of comfortable dialectic between origin and destination—an aesthetic of "vertiginous spatio-temporal spirals" (Glover 102). Focusing on prominent Spiralist authors Frankétienne, Jean-Claude Fignolé, and René Philoctète, Glover constructs a

Fig. 2.6: Left: Conch shells and cement bolster the corner of a gravesite in Cimetière de Morne-à-l'eau, Guadeloupe, October 2019. Right: *Mémorial du Neg Mawon* by Jocelyn Pèzeron, St. Anne, Guadeloupe, November 2019.
Photographs courtesy of author.

graceful interrogation of the regional relevance of contemporary Haitian literature, considering "the extent to which Spiralism not only connects with but significantly enriches the contemporary models of literature and theory in the postcolonial Caribbean" (Glover xi). Placing these three authors in dialogue with canonically recognized Caribbean theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and Derek Walcott, Glover reminds the reader of what should be the obvious connective tissue between Haiti and the rest of the Caribbean that is so often neglected, forgotten, or outright ignored.

While *Haiti, Unbound* oscillates between addressing the spiral both in terms of its form and content—that is, it is invested in the spiral as both an active symbol and as a larger narrative structure—the text is uniquely focused on the landscapes of these novels, which are "dynamic and unfixed…dialecticized, alternately immobilizing and liberating, degraded and filled with potential, real and marvelous" (103). Engaging the spiral in this manner, *Haiti, Unbound* emphasizes the aesthetic regional importance of rejecting spatial binaries: the multiple binaries that often provide spatial orientation in New World postcolonial literature—forested hills vs. flatlands, urban centers vs. rural communities, restrictive/ed island space vs. outward-opened expanse of the sea, etc.—are largely absent from Spiralist works. The rejection of fixed temporal boundaries, Glover continues, are likewise integral to the Caribbean literary tradition. The novels the text addresses "move backward and forward in time, generally collapsing past, present, and future realities into a single frame—urgent and immediate—and avoiding definitive accounts of time's progression" (103). Calling to mind Michelle M. Wright's critique of Mikhail Bahktin's chronotope,[62] Glover's text reminds us of the "haunting spiralic repetition of unresolved, putatively past episodes in the present", of "repeatedly revisited and revised moments whose

[62] In which Wright counters that "…a linear progress narrative struggles to be diasporic, because the notion of return suggests a reversal of the progressive direction from the narrative's origin to the present day/era" (Wright 73).

'reality' is perpetually unfixed" (Glover 104). The mimetic significance of the spiral, in relation to both time and space, allows for a reinterpretation of both that denies binary identification, instead privileging a text in which "the reader perceives events without hierarchizing them—without any one version supplanting any other as truth or fact" (104).

Picking up where Glover's texts leaves off, this chapter engages the metaphor of the spiral to advance the reconciliation of silences in the postcolonial Caribbean canon. If Glover's primary concern is with the ways in which Haiti has been excluded from a larger Caribbean discourse, she argues for its inclusion with an overwhelmingly masculine archive. And while undoubtably the Spiralist "phenomenon"[63] in Haiti was overwhelmingly comprised of men-identified authors, specific and glaring omissions in the canon remain. These omissions, however, do not seem so much of a failure with Glover's text specifically as with contemporary perceptions of Caribbean authorship in a broader context. If the academy sees formal Caribbean literature only in terms of its canonical monoliths like Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, or Kamau Brathwaite, then certainly arguing for Haiti's equitable inclusion based on a shared regional aesthetic *would* only invoke other male authors. Though *Haiti, Unbound* deftly figures as "an interrogation of the criteria for inclusion in New World traditions, considering the manner in which new centers and margins have been created in the already peripheralized space(s) of the Americas" (xi), it argues for the inclusion of Haiti into a Caribbean aesthetic by comparing Haitian male authors with other Caribbean male authors. Thus, the "new centers and margins" that Glover's text seeks to interrogate inevitably reinforce outmoded standards by neglecting to include the narratives of women and nonbinary perspectives. My project, then, is to expand on the goals of Glover's text in terms of its aim towards increased inclusivity, emphasizing the need

[63] "More a phenomenon than a literary movement" (Glover xi).

for a renewed understanding of what and whom a Caribbean literary discourse should include by teasing out a more nuanced application of the text's central metaphor: the spiral itself.

"[The spiral]", Glover writes, "is present in the bands of the hurricane winds that regularly ravage the island, and it makes up the structure of the conch shell, an object that functions symbolically to recall the rallying cries of Haiti's revolutionaries" (Glover xiii). Here, Glover places two spiral signifiers in conversation with each other: the hurricane and the conch shell. Both omnipresent across the Caribbean and part and parcel to a canonical—so to speak—Caribbean lived experience, these objects argue for the (re)incorporation of Haiti into a broader regional aesthetic. If, as Valerie Kaussen suggests, the reason why Haitian literature is so often excluded from the more popular Caribbean theoretical models is because its entry into the postcolonial context was marked by "decolonization, revolution, and militancy" rather than the "creolization, multiculturalism, and hybridity" (Kaussen 18) embraced by current Caribbean postcolonial theory, the spiral confronts this isolation, understanding the mimetic value of the spiral as central to *both* Glissant's creolized theories of circum-Caribbean experience as well as to Haiti's "bloody, visceral seizing of sovereignty" (Glover 17). The exclusion of Haiti from a broader Caribbean context hurts not only the broader Caribbean, but Haiti as well. Even if the revolution of the first Black republic separates it temporally from the multiple and varying decolonizing efforts of the rest of the region, claiming as Léon-François Hoffman does, that "the colonial era has left few traumatic traces in [Haiti's] collective memory," and that the nation, by way of its comparably early emancipation, "has avoided the complex of the decolonized" (Hoffman 27) is to blatantly misremember Haiti's past and to misunderstand it's post-independence history of enforced international debt to France, U.S. military occupation, and ongoing state-level government destabilization by numerous international interferences.

Expanding the mimetic value of the spiral into the hurricane or the conch shell, it turns out, performs an interesting metaphorical trick that may have been originally unintended. While the aesthetic interest in the spiral is, for many Caribbean theorists[64], its eternal dialectical denial of beginning and end, imagining the spiral as a hurricane or, for my purposes, as a conch shell, enhances the signifier. While a conch shell grows ever outwards in a spiral fashion, much in the same way bands of wind may extend outwards from the eyewall of a hurricane[65], to ignore the columella, or central column of the conch shell—or, indeed, the eye of the hurricane—would be to destabilize the spiral completely. Thus, while the sharp interior of the conch shell's central column may contradict the rounder, softer-looking unfurling curves of the shell itself, the column is integral to the structural stability of the shape, and thus to the metaphor. [image] Kaussen's evaluation of the deliberate exclusion of Haiti from a Caribbean literary context, then—that Haiti's violent and militaristic revolution somehow conflicts with the fluid, multivalent plurality of current Caribbean theory—fails to understand the ways in which this central column of decolonial activity might have unfurled into the créolité[66] that scholars engage with contemporarily. This, I suggest, is an inherent gap between the theory and praxis of the postcolonial Caribbean context. The spiral, a theory, does not necessarily allow for the incorporation of difference in the same way that a hurricane or a conch shell—manifesting a

[64] Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, and Thomas Glave, among others, all make deliberate critical gestures towards the spiral as a model. See Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (36), Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (16), and Glave's interview in *Callaloo* in which he discusses the hurricane as a literary metaphor (1238).
[65] "The hurricane itself, or the idea or metaphor of one, plays a central part in the book's narrative construction. It contains the spiraling and return again-in cycles, you might say, although termed the book's "density" had to do with certain and forth between time periods, approximating the kind of cyclical, whirling currents that a hurricane room for the eye-the silent eye, as a point of centrality and unsettled silence" (Glave 1238).
[66] I refer here to the literary and cultural movement spearheaded by Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, and Édouard Glissant in the 1980s. Working in contrast to the Négritude movement of the 1930s which sought to identify individuals in the African Diaspora in terms of their African origins, Créolité suggested instead that this identification was reductionist and backwards looking, choosing instead to celebrate the plural, multifaceted ethnic and cultural identity of the Caribbean as unique to the region, with Creoleness as its identitarian center.

lived experience—might. Much as the rhizome may be expanded into a mangrove for the sake of a uniquely Caribbean conversation, as addressed in the previous chapter, so too does the spiral become increasingly regionally relevant as a conch shell.

In direct opposition to the oppressive restrictions put in place by the Duvalier regime, the Spiralists imagined a new aesthetic force. "Integrally reflective of the processes by which organisms and living systems grow and develop, the biological, physical reality of the spiral was as significant to their insular existence as to the wider world from which they were so acutely cut off" (Glover viii). The work this school of thought produced was a response, their response, to a fascist regime, "a formal testament to the possibility of the infinite" (viii). The spiral, reimaged as a conch shell, expands on this response by placing in relation—rather than at odds—the rounded curves of the shell with the stark column of its center. Using the conch as a spatial and temporal signifier, then, demands a shift in the perception of the Caribbean and its authorship by expanding current understandings of the region as a postcolonial space. This is not to say, of course, that the Haitian experience is central to, indicative of, or singularly representative of a larger Caribbean lived experience; in imagining the Haitian revolution as the central column of the conch shell, the temporal signifier only privileges Haiti in terms of time and incorporates the nation in all of its difference into the Caribbean theoretical canon, as Glover suggests, "implicitly putting even the most dramatically isolated beings into relation" (viii). And if the Caribbean can be seen, Antonio Benítez-Rojo suggests, "as a loosely-bounded figure combining the straight lines and curves, let's say, a spiral galaxy tending outward—to the universe—that bends and

folds over its own history, its own inwardness" (Benítez-Rojo 36), one might easily posit the conch shell as the symbolic embodiment of this combination of straight lines and curves, seeking actively to "deny [the] linear structure" (Glissant 145) of Western time on which, Glissant suggests, the limiting canonical narrative structures of European literatures rely. In the most basic of terms, my project suggests exactly this: the conch shell is a living symbol of nonbinary spatiotemporal lived experience—a uniquely Caribbean, disruptive signifier of time and space.

Haiti Unbound examines the Spiralists' novels on multiple levels, by assessing the value of the spiral both in terms of content and form: examining the ways spiral objects appear literally in novels as well as the ways in which the literary structure of the novels themselves come to reflect the aesthetic of the spiral itself. In a similar fashion, this chapter will address two main texts—Edwidge Danticat's 1998 novel, *The Farming of Bones*, and Tiphanie Yanique's 2014 novel, *Land of Love and Drowning*—in terms of their symbolic and formal engagement with Glover's seemingly off-handedly identified spiral signifier: the conch shell. By beginning with a Haitian novel and expanding outward geographically, I aim to reinforce Glover's claim that Haitian literature is an essential component of the aesthetic core of the postcolonial Caribbean canon and that other regional novels may be interrogated on similar terms, while simultaneously arguing for a more expansive understanding of the canon itself. Examining the ways in which *The Farming of Bones* and *Land of Love and Drowning* embrace the conch shell both as a signifier and a literary framework, I intend to identify a unique type of poetics—one which expands on the spiral as an inherently Caribbean form: a conch shell poetics. Ultimately, my question is this: What can a conch shell tell us about the spatiotemporality of the Caribbean literary field that the spiral neglects, and how can we engage this expansive, disruptive signifier

to expand a regional identity that reflects and celebrates its twenty-first century writing community?

I: *Nature Has No Memory*: Conch Shell Altars and Liquid Ghosts

> *In the coal black darkness of a night like this, unless you are near it, the river ceases to exist, allowing you to imagine just for a moment that all of them—my mother and father, Wilner, Odette, and the thousands whose graves are here—died natural deaths, peaceful deaths, deaths filled with moments of reflection, with pauses and some regret, the kind of death where there is time to think of what we are leaving behind and what better things may lie ahead.*
>
> Edwidge Danticat*, The Farming of Bones*

Edwidge Danticat's 1998 novel, *The Farming of Bones*[67], is a work of historical fiction set in the Dominican Republic and Haiti surrounding the brutal 1937 massacre incited by General Rafael Trujillo and his paramilitary troops. In a deliberately anti-Haitian, anti-black attempt to decrease the quantity of Haitian laborers in Dominican agricultural fields, Trujillo's troops terrorized the rural Dominican countryside with machetes. The devastating historical event is more familiarly known as the Parsley Massacre[68] and remained suspiciously ambiguous and often unstudied historical event until relatively recently.[69] The novel follows the lives and

[67] The title of the novel is explained early in the text when the protagonist describes "cane life"—laboring in sugar cane fields—as "travay tè pou zo, the farming of bones" (Danticat, *Farming of Bones*, 55).
[68] Named so for the shibboleth used to distinguish Black Dominicans from Black Haitians during the slaughter. Dominicans, speaking Spanish, would pronounce the word *perejil* with a rolled or trilled "r," whereas the French-based Haitian Creole speakers saying the Spanish word for parsley would pronounce the "r" as a "w," making them as Haitian and not Dominican.
[69] For more, see "How Lucky for You That Your Tongue Can Taste the 'r' in 'Parsley': Trauma Theory and the Literature of Hispaniola," by Ayuso.

afterlives of Amabelle and her lover Sebastien, two Haitian nationals living and working in the Dominican Republic when the massacre begins. The massacre itself begins roughly halfway through the novel, at which point Amabelle loses track of Sebastien, never finding him again. The narrative concludes with Amabelle's return to Haiti, having escaped the massacre and survived to an old age.

The novel's chapters alternate between standard font and bold font, with the standard font chapters following the linear historical timeline leading up to and following the massacre. The bolded chapters, however, are temporally nonreferential, outside of any discernable linear timeline. They are dreams, sometimes revisited memories, that Amabelle has of Sebastien or of her parents, and often of both. For just over half of the novel, these bold excerpts appear every other chapter, folded neatly between the chapters of the linear temporal plot structure. They pull the reader out of the harsh reality of Amabelle's daily life, as *Haiti, Unbound* might suggest, "generally collapsing past, present, and future realities into a single frame" (Glover 103). Importantly, these sections privilege Amabelle's internal thoughts over the overwhelming accumulation of present-time moments that she is incapable of altering or resisting.

Amabelle and Sebastien are both orphans, the novel is quick to establish. Amabelle has lost her parents at a young age when they drowned in the river at the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic as the family emigrated; Sebastien lost his father in Hurricane San Zenon—a very real storm that decimated Hispañola in 1930. For the sake of space, I would not expand too deeply on the recurring presence of orphaning in Caribbean narratives—though you will see it appear again in my reading of Yanique's novel—but if one is attempting to push back against vertical lineages and simple relationships between beginnings and endings, the figure of the orphan is of a powerful significance.

Another common trope in the literary canon of the African diaspora—the fraught connection between water, death, and memory (Drabinski 298)—is omnipresent across the text as the novel begins in Amabelle's bold-text voice, "His name is Sebastien Onius. He comes most nights to put an end to my nightmare, the one I have all the time, of my parents drowning" (Danticat, *Farming* 1). Amabelle's parents' death is a memory she returns to repeatedly throughout the novel, reliving it through a dream sequence, or imagining it to herself while awake. It bleeds into the thoughts and actions of her every moment; it is the central, internal tragedy of the novel, operating in a persistent omnipresent timespace outside of the immediacy of the plot of Trujillo's massacre. Where the novel opens to this dream sequence, it is immediately by the first standard font chapter in which Amabelle assists in the delivery of her employer's premature twins' births.[70] The novel closes with Amabelle returning to the same river that claimed her parents, disrobing and lying in its shallow waters, contemplating the losses accumulated during her life:

> I thought that if I relived the moment often enough, the answer would become clear, that they had wanted either for us all to die together or for me to go on living, even if by myself. I also thought that if I came to the river on the right day, at the right hour, the surface of the water might provide the answer: a clearer sense of the moment, a stronger memory. But nature has no memory. And soon, perhaps, neither will I. (309)

For all of the momentum of the plot, the aging of the protagonist, and the exchange of national sceneries, the novel closes much in the way it opens. Where it begins with a watery dream and the risky, en-caul birth of a set of twins, it closes with Amabelle lying in the river, "cradled by the current, paddling like a newborn in a washbasin" (310). Suspended between life and death: a half-conscious memory of a water-borne trauma, an unfurled spiralic life wound tightly around a half-remembered psychic wound.

[70] "Births and deaths were my parents' work. I never thought I would help at a birth myself until the screams rang through the valley that morning, one voice like a thousand glasses breaking" (Danticat 5).

In terms of examining the way a conch shell poetics might be useful for understanding the novel as a prime example of postcolonial Caribbean literature, it is important to examine the conch both in terms of its significance as an object in a specific scene, as well as in terms of a model with which the novel's narrative structure may be more clearly understood. In much the same way that the spiral operates both as a meditative shape as well as a narrative structure in the Spiralists' novels, so too does the conch shell operate both in terms of content and form. Early in the novel, Amabelle comes home after work and waits in her room for Sebastien to return from the cane fields, arranging a set of objects around her.

> I spread an old sheet on the floor next to a castor oil lamp and a conch shell that Sebastien had given me, saying that in there flowed the sound the fishes hear when they swim deep inside the ocean's caves. On the wall was pasted a seven-year-old calendar, from the year of the great hurricane that had plundered the whole island… (Danticat, *Farming* 45)

The conch shell, in this scene, can be read for its biomimetic value, as it acts both as a centrifugal repository of memory—metaphorically pulling Amabelle into the shell itself—and as a centripetal influence over the scene around it—imbuing each object in its vicinity with a more nuanced significance. Inside the shell, Amabelle notes, is a liquid memory, an aural representation of the ocean and romantic connection to her lover. In contrast to the novel, which is rife with moments of broken communication, unspoken last remarks, and desperate desires for more information, the conch shell has an active oral capacity, speaking to Amabelle when other sources run dry. Here the conch shell acts as it does in many representations of Haitian independence: a tool of communication.

From depictions of the conch in use at the pre-revolution Vodou ceremony at Bwa Kayiman,[71] to installations commemorating the end of slavery, the image of the shell is engaged

[71] Haitian Kreyòl spelling for Bois Caïman.

in the imaginary of Haitian independence, always featuring as a method of communicating unity over great distances. Haitian painter Ulrick Jean-Pierre's 2004 piece, *Cayman Wood Ceremony,*[72] for instance, draws on more inclusive histories of Haitian independence that elevate Cécile Fatiman's central role in the legendary Vodou ceremony.[73] The painting features both Fatiman and Dutty Boukman[74] central in the image, while a man in white shorts standing behind Fatiman blows a conch shell. In Albert Mangonès's 1967 installation, *Le Marron Inconnu de Saint-Domingue*, [75] a nearly twelve-foot tall bronze statue in front of the Parliament building in central Port-au-Prince, a man kneels on his right knee with his left leg splayed back, arching his back and blowing on a conch shell aimed directly at the sky. In his right hand, he holds a machete, and around his left ankle is a broken shackle. Completed at a difficult moment in Haiti's history, as François "Papa Doc" Duvalier's regime was closing and he was granted permission by the National Assembly to name his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, his successor, this statue stands as "a reminder of the call to rebellion against slave-holding France in 1791."[76] In both works, the conch shell is being blown as a horn, a rallying cry to unite in resistance against colonial violence. Mary A. Renda describes the significance of the conch shell in the 1791 ceremony that led to Haiti's eventual independence in her 2001 monograph, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*:

> The conch or *lambi* is sounded to link people across great distances, for example, to communicate across the field of battle…It is used, as we have seen, to announce the start

[72] See Christophe's essay, "Ulrick Jean-Pierre's 'Cayman Wood Ceremony.'"
[73] See Dayan's monograph, *Haiti, History, and the Gods.*
[74] A Senegambian man who was captured, enslaved, and transported to Jamaica and then to Haiti, where he became a Vodou hougan and participated in the early stages of the Haitian revolution. For more on the figure of Boukman, see Laurent Dubois's text, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (2005).
[75] Maroons, referenced here as *Le Marron*, are the descendants of Africans in the Americas who formed settlements independent of chattel slavery. They often lived in covert communities in mountainous or densely swamped regions across the Caribbean and North America, deliberately difficult to locate or access by local slavers, and their communities were comprised of Maroons born free into these communities as well as individuals who had escaped slavery.
[76] *"Albert Mangones, 85; His Bronze Sculpture Became Haitian Symbol."*

> of the Vodou service, just as it was used in Bois Caiman in 1791. Thus, the symbolism of the conch is powerful for a people who have drawn the strength to gain and maintain their independence from the power of their religion…For all these reasons, a conch horn could function as a literal artifact of a proud history, passed down from father to son, again and again, linking a family across the generations, quite possibility from the Revolution down to the present. (Renda 43-44)

Here we see the multivalent significance of the conch shell in Amabelle's room begin to unfold. Though it is unlikely that the shell Sebastien presented to her was present in the Revolution, it has been passed to her and carries the symbolic weight of independence, of freedom from oppressive structures, of alternative communication, and of community both social and national.

Returning to the novel and the scene more explicitly, the reader sees that there are five objects in play: Amabelle's sheet, oil lamp, conch shell, calendar, and a set of freshly cleaned goat bones she requests from a friend. Two of these objects have a clear, performative function: the sheet protects Amabelle from the ground; the lamp illuminates the scene and the objects implicated in it. The goat bones call to memory a game she once played with her father when she was young,[77] and are given ample textual explanation, while the anachronistic calendar, once functioning as a relevant keeper of linear time, now circulates as a memorial for an obscured history which has been, as Glissant suggests, "reduced…to a chronology of natural events" (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 63). The conch shell, however, which is given barely a clause in a single sentence and seems to be the least important item in the room, engages its biomimetic capacities and pulls the other items in the scene into a legible set. Its narrative value is not only located in what it contains deep in its spiral, but in its capacity to tie the four otherwise disparate objects together. In this sense, the objects in this scene become something of an altar, the conch shell implicating them together into an object-oriented ontological set. The scene becomes a

[77] "When I was a child, my father and I used to play a game called oslè using the small front-leg joint bones from a goat" (Danticat 44).

direct challenge to the "perverse logic of the linear progress narrative in a Middle Passage epistemology" (Wright 84), using the present tense to revisit and honor the past. The objects on this altar inform each other, becoming a shrine to an atemporal memorial time.

It may be no coincidence, then, that conch shells are ritually used in altars and ceremonies for the Haitian lwa Agwé and Lasirèn. [78] "These two control the ocean, ocean crossings, and more broadly travel—in more recent decades they are often invoked by those embarking on the dangerous trip across the ocean to Miami or other parts of the Caribbean" (Dubois 214). The larger Agwé family, often appealed to by sailors, influences the sea, the winds, waves, and the currents. Agwé can be called when one is lost at sea,[79] to find direction, or for assistance in fishing. Agwé is also said to captain the boat, *Immamou*, that ferries souls to Guinée.[80] Identifying this scene in *The Farming of Bones* as a subtle overture to a Vodou altar, though Vodou is not explicitly referenced in the novel, lends further symbolic weight to conch shell that is difficult to ignore.

Considering the "geo-cultural space" (Glover vii) of the text, the connections between water and memory so often located in literature of the African diaspora converge here as Amabelle lies down to wait for Sebastien, allowing herself to wade through old memories. Much like a conch may retract into the safety of its shell while under threat, so too does Amabelle retreat into the safety of a pleasant memory, "something [she] always did at times when [she] couldn't bring [her]self to go out and discover an unpleasant truth" (Danticat, *Farming* 45). As spiral movement may be tracked both inwards towards an imagined center or outwards towards an expressed infinite, so too does the conch shell operate for Amabelle. It represents possibility

[78] See *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* by Maya Deren.
[79] See Coates's *Glossary* (1992).
[80] "*Lan Guinee* is the real and mythic West Africa from which by far the greatest number of New World slaves were taken" (Benson 727).

and unbridled imagination, while simultaneously drawing together the scene in which Amabelle may quietly protect herself from the possibility of losing Sebastien. This shrine of juxtaposed lamp light, water, and memory presupposes Amabelle's access to recollections of her childhood, as Amabelle asserts, "(When you have so few remembrances, you cling to them tightly and repeat them over and over in your mind so time will not erase them)" (Danticat, *Farming* 45). Therapeutically replaying treasured memories interrupts the progression of linear time—a time that Amabelle suggests would actively participate in erasing those memories. Just as a Vodou altar may condense and implicate *seemingly* "disparate stuff" (Cosentino 67) into a singular, unified conceptual focus, so too do the items in this room function as an altar for nonlinear temporal travel. If the goal of the novel of the Americas is, as Glissant suggests, "to make contact with ourselves *and* express ourselves" [emphasis mine] (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 145), a simultaneous lived experience of internal cohesion and external expression must be located and explored, in this case by spiraling both inwards towards a preserved core memory, or outwards towards an unresolved trauma.

Just as the "inward orientation of the spiral twists away from the intrusive reach of the Duvalier regimes into spiritual and fantasy life" (Jensen 136), so too does the inward orientation of a conch shell poetics twist Amabelle's narrative away from the intrusive reach of Trujillo's massacre. Expanding the reading of the conch now from a living symbol in a scene to a larger narrative framework through which to understand the novel, I want to discuss the text in terms of three core physical aspects of the shell itself: the columella, the whorls, and the aperture. The columella, or central column of the shell, is the straight vertical axis inside of the shell, around which the whorls of the shell twist. Referring to the columella as the central column of the shell, and for my point, the central column of the novel, is the point around which the protagonist

cycles as the novel progresses. The structure of the whorls—the curved, cyclical interior of the shell that twist around the columella—is the spiralic narrative progression so closely mirroring Glover's analysis of the Haitian Spiralists, the same narrative structure that actively resists a linear progression. The aperture, or place at which the shell's interior spiral ends and the shell's mouth opens, providing narrative release from the cycling, some semblance of traumatic resolution. These three physical aspects of the shell—the central column, whorls, and aperture—construct a recognizable narrative structure in Caribbean women's narratives: a central trauma or loss, followed by spiralic search for closure, and final release. Reading Caribbean women's narratives through this structural framework, I argue, provides space for a uniquely nonbinary, nonlinear narrative structure *identified* by conchitic temporal progression, rather than disrupted by it. It is this conchitic narrative structure, I suggest, that establishes Danticat's text as both uniquely nonbinary and entirely postcolonial in its Caribbeanité. In this reading of the structure of *The Farming of Bones*, I will be address these three portions out of order—beginning with the whorls, before addressing both the central column and aperture.

As previously mentioned, Danticat's novel follows an intricate pattern of alternating chapters—those printed in a bold font denote when Amabelle recuses herself from the linear plotline in order to attend to memories or dreams. The novel begins with such a chapter, written—as all of the bold text chapters are—in the suggestively timeless literary present tense:

> His name is Sebastien Onius. He comes most nights to put an end to my nightmare, the one I have all the time, of my parents drowning. While my body is struggling against sleep, fighting to awaken, he whispers for me to "lie still while I take you back." "Back where?" I ask without feeling my lips moving. He says, "I will take you back into the cave across the river." (Danticat, *Farming* 1)

While the reader does not know it yet, the cave Sebastien references here is the one in which the two make love for the first time, at the mouth of the river in which the cane field workers bathe;

scenes involving Sebastien often recall some combination of darkness, atemporality, and water, just as this first chapter suggests. Sebastien functions throughout the novel as a kind of liminal character, oscillating between being part of Amabelle's central column and traveling through the whorls, a sort of liquid ghost. This tripartite theme of darkness, wetness, and memory that haunts Amabelle throughout the novel, however, also connects this text to a much broader body of postcolonial Caribbean authorship, a tradition of diasporic resistance.

After this verbal exchange, Amabelle undresses at Sebastien's behest: "Take off your nightdress," he suggests, "and be naked for true. When you are uncovered, you will know that you are fully awake and I can simply look at you and be happy" (Danticat, *Farming* 2). As she does so, she considers how vulnerable she feels without Sebastien's presence. "I am afraid I cease to exist when he's not there. I'm like one of those sea stones that sucks its colors inside and loses its translucence once it's taken out into the sun, out of the froth of the waves. When he's not there, I'm afraid I know no one and no one knows me" (2). A nuanced understanding of a postcolonial Caribbean experience is integral to properly understanding this passage. Read out of such a context, Amabelle's anxiety could easily be interpreted as codependence, as a simple overindulgent romantic overture towards a lover—but that type of reading would do a great disservice to this passage and to the novel as a whole. I argue, instead, that Sebastien's character functions as a narrative portal through which Amabelle may dip in and out of the memory of her losses, in and out of the relentless violence of the historical linear movement of the text. He represents, and is part of, the water of her memory.

Before the massacre begins, Amabelle is employed in the home of Señor Pico Duarte and his wife Señora Valencia. While Señora Valencia is kind to Amabelle—having known her since Amabelle's orphaning at age eight—Duarte is a high-ranking officer in the Dominican military,

and a fervent supporter of Trujillo. For all the kindness that Señora Valencia may show her, Amabelle works in a country that does not recognize her, in the home of a family whose income relies on the Dominican military—the same military incited to extreme violence against a Haitian minority. In a country led by a man with great ambitions of wealth and a practice of anti-black politics that ran so deeply that he refused to acknowledge his own Haitian grandparent[81], Amabelle's socioeconomic identity as a domestic employee and as a Haitian inevitably supersede any true emotional recognition in her workplace surroundings.

In order to better understand the emotional economics of this novel, it is vital to recall how deeply Rafael Trujillo's reign as a fascist military dictator was informed by his forced control over the Dominican Republic's very real economy. El Generalissimo's interference with the national economy

> began by his obtaining an exclusive contract with the Dominican army to provide laundry service to soldiers, whose monthly salary was taxed for this expenditure. From prostitution to house paint, from exporting fruit to acquiring monopoly rights to the production of sale of such staples as salt, meant, rice, and milk, Trujillo used cunning power and the military to enrich himself and his family. (Cambeira 179)

By the end of his reign, Trujillo controlled roughly 80% of the nation's industrial production, while 60% of the nation's labor force relied on him for income (Ezrow 269). The relationship between Trujillo's extreme form of nationalist economic exploitation relied on the flattening of the idea of the individual, on constructing a singular national narrative at the expense of its citizens.

[81] "Trujillo himself had a grandmother of Haitian descent, as had generations of both Dominican elites and working people. Ulises Heureaux, president of the Dominican Republic in the 1880s, was partly of Haitian descent. Popular 20t-centry presidential candidate José [Francisco] Peña Gómez was adopted into a Dominican family and thought to have had Haitian birth parents who fled Trujillo's death squads" (Nichols, "The Dominican Republic's Mass Haitian Deportation).

Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha's interrogation of such a "totalizing" (Bhabha 160) national narrative, one free from confrontations and dissenting voices, relies on the deliberate forgetting of certain truths: the excesses rendered by capitalism and the ongoing subversive movements of resistance against national machinations, among others. For Trujillo, this "forgetting" manifested as state-ordered executions, mysterious disappearances of intellectuals and political dissidents, and "free" elections in which he regularly garnered over 90% of the votes. Having taken up this concept many years earlier, Walter Benjamin positions the concept of "empty homogenous time" against "messianic time" (Benjamin 254), suggesting that capitalism had commodified time to the point that each minute measured by a clock is an endlessly unobserved renewable commodity, utterly equivalent to the next. The "messianic power" he alludes to confronts this empty temporality, interrupting the linear progress of commodifiable time by illuminating singular identifiable moments in which history becomes legible, recognizable. These interruptions or compulsive remembrances disrupt the ever-renewing commodification of time by attaching value to singular fragments of memory. This messianic time, Benjamin suggests, is marked by its heightened emotional quality and its power to effectively subvert and reorient the capitalist value system ascribed to homogenous time.

Returning to Danticat's novel, deliberately reading it as a postcolonial narrative, the reader can easily identify the bold-text memory chapters as these compulsive remembrances, as messianic moments interrupting the empty homogenous linear timeline of the plot. If Amabelle is employed by a military family, and Sebastien works in the sugar cane fields, it can be easily presumed that both of their incomes rely on Trujillo's dictatorship. Where capital-reliant economies—such as Trujillo's—commodify time to the extent that each minute is only as valuable as the capital it produces, minutes in which work does not take place become valueless

to that economy. In this sense, the working day is rendered as a time of capitalist production while the worker's disposable time,[82] if spent on themselves, is akin to temporal theft. Thus, productivity outside the bounds of the working day—such as the emotional labor performed by Amabelle in each of the bold-text chapters—becomes a subversive postcolonial destabilization of Trujillo's economic grip on the nation.

For Amabelle, the liquid ghostly Sebastien acts not only as a lover, but also as a witness. He bears witness to her life outside of work, to her selfhood outside the context of Trujillo's fiscal value system. If daytime equates to laboring for another, then nighttime and darkness belong to the self. This is made exponentially more true when taking into account the exploitative labor—expanded out from chattel slavery and plantation economies—that haunt the world of the protagonists. Being "taken out into the sun, out of the froth of the waves", then, means literally being taken from the comfort of liquid darkness, of Sebastien's presence where she is seen, known, and acknowledged, and brought into sun, the daytime hours working in the Señora's house where she becomes opaque, unknown, and unrecognizable. In this opening scene, the text has already established where Amabelle feels most at home, a space where she can be "naked for true": truly recognized.

Sebastien's shadowy presence in Amabelle's dark, watery memory is firmly established at the end of this first chapter, as Amabelle wakes to his absence. Before the sun even rises, he has already left for work in the cane fields, but his multivalent liquid residues remain. In the pre-dawn darkness, she can still smell his sweat, which she compares in thickness to sugarcane juice; she can still feel his lips, which leave behind the taste of goat's milk used in a curry; she recalls his bracelet having scratched her face slightly, leaving behind a drop of dried blood on her

[82] For more, see Karl Marx's *Das Kapital,* Ch. 10: *The Working Day.*

cheek; and she can still "feel the wet lines in [her] back where his tongue gently traced the life-giving veins to the chine" (Danticat, *Farming* 3). Sebastien's absence is identifiable by the dried memories he leaves behind. Memories of sweat, milk, blood, and saliva—nearly every watery trace a human can produce—are as testimony to Amabelle's memory. Whether these fluids are extracted through exploitative field labor, as his sweat is compared to the juice of the same cane he harvests, invoked accidentally, as the green coffee bean bead of his bracelet scrapes her face, or given over willingly, as he runs his tongue down her back, they are all characterized by their displacement. His sweat calls back to the fields, his lips to a goat's milk, and the wet lines he leaves on her back, are really long since dried, his mouth having left with the rest of him before the sun rose. Negotiating this displacement of liquid—the water from the river inside her parents' lungs to the ghostly residues left by Sebastien, becomes a repeated trial for Amabelle. As the novel progresses from this first bold-text chapter, she often revisits memories of Sebastien, and of water. In one, she remembers a pot of soup her mother kept boiling all day (82) while in another, she closes the door to her room at night to create a makeshift sweat lodge in the hopes that when she stands, the excessive perspiration will prevent her from having any tears left with which to cry (94). This watery cycling occurs regularly, every other chapter, until the massacre begins.

This is where, I argue, reading the Danticat's novel through the lens of a conch shell poetics enables a more productive reading. The key to the spiral, Glover specifies, is the pattern of "repetition *and* deviation" [emphasis mine] (Glover viii)—that is, time can cycle backwards or forwards, but never to the exact same place. Adjacent, but not identical. And while this is useful in many ways, a spiral is all rounded circles, and adjusting our reading from spiralic to conchitic allows us to incorporate a central column and aperture of a text that may otherwise be

structurally incompatible. Glover uses the model of the spiral to relate Haitian male authors to other Caribbean male authors in an attempt to bridge the gap between Haiti and the rest of the postcolonial Caribbean. I suggest that reading Caribbean women's literature through the poetics of the conch shell allows for readings that simultaneously resist binary identifications—much in the same way a spiral does—while allowing for both a stark and sometimes brutal central narrative column, as well as a narrative aperture.

For Amabelle, the whorls are her bold text chapters, in which she cycles in and out of the safety of her liquid memories. The central column of the text is her parents' drowning. Each time she cycles into a bold-text chapter, some aspect of that original trauma is revisited: shifting slightly, expanding, spinning out, deviating. It may be watery, like the river where her parents drowned; it may be an atemporal sense of loss or loneliness, mirroring her early orphaning; it may be darkness and shadows. Once the massacre begins and Amabelle loses track of Sebastien, the bold chapters vanish for over one hundred pages and Sebastien joins her central column—as Amabelle prefaces in the first chapter, "at times Sebastien Onius guarded me from the shadows. At other times he was one of them" (Danticat, *Farming* 4). This is where the expansive nature of the conch shell poetics allows for a plurality of readings. Maybe losing Sebastien is so disruptive to Amabelle's psychic patterns that she is unable to revisit memories until she's returned to Haiti. Maybe the bold-text chapters are more important during the first half of the text because she *needs* to compulsively remember, to break up the empty homogenous time of laboring for another, and once she flees the Dominican Republic, there is less monotony to interrupt. One might even read the novel's conchitic temporal progression as a radical destabilization of the Haitian trope of the zombie[83], wherein the bold-text chapters where Amabelle "relives" her past

[83] "Utterly suspended in time, the zombie inherently defies the conception of life as forward-moving, event-based, chronological progression from birth to death" (Glover 161-162).

are privileged in their disruption of the monotony of her labor in Señora Valencia's house. One of the more valuable aspects of the biomimetic reading of the conch shell is in its role as an open signifier, allowing a sense of return otherwise denied by the Western progress narrative.

Concluding this reading, I turn now to the end of the novel. In terms of a conch shell poetics, this is the analysis of the aperture—the opening, the release from compulsive spiraling. Amabelle has now returned to Haiti, and the bold-text chapters are few and far between. Her body slowly heals from the trauma of the escape, but her mind never departs too distantly from Sebastien, from the slaughter, from her parents and the river. The final bold-text chapter begins, "The dead season is, for me, one never ending night. I dream all the time of returning to give my testimony to the river, the waterfall, the justice of the peace, even to the Generalissimo himself" (Danticat, *Farming* 264). This chapter is not focused on a single memory, but rather, is an amalgam of memories and thoughts, overtures towards those she's lost. "Heaven—my heaven—is the veil of water that stands between my parents and me. To step across it and then come out is what makes me alive. Odette and Wilner not coming out is what makes them dead" (264-5). If the central column of the text is the loss of her parents, we've now arrived at the final iteration of this conchitic cycling. "I just need to lay it down sometimes", she pleas at the end of this passage, "even in the rare silence of the night, with no faces around" (266). Amabelle has identified her own columella, recognized her journey around it, and understands now where the aperture will take her. The novel ends with Amabelle returning to the very same recurring river. And here, where she lies down in the gently running waters, this is Amabelle's aperture release. The moment where her central column resolves its tensions with the whorls and opens into an uncontested space in which Amabelle can release herself from the spiralic motion of the text. Just as in the opening scene of the novel, Amabelle now removes her dress in the darkness,

"naked for true." She lies down in the shallows, "paddling like a newborn in a washbasin" (Danticat, *Farming* 310)—the years of trauma and aging have been shed in a watery, womb-like space that seems to flow outside of time. Having spent the narrative negotiating liquids and the remembrances they carry, Amabelle no longer needs the bold-text chapters to create an atemporal memorial escape, as she joins the liquid nature, which "has no memory."

II: *That's Me in Your Shell*: Conch Shell Whispers and Liquid Roots

> *We say sometimes their love began with music, but as with all things, it began with water. And as with all things of importance to us, it began on a beach. It began that day when Jacob saw Anette in her stewed-cherry dress, and Anette put the shell to his ear, and they each heard their father speak the sea.*
>
> Tiphanie Yanique

Tiphanie Yanique's 2014 novel, *Land of Love and Drowning*, is a polyphonic, epic family narrative set in the United States Virgin Islands that follows the tangled, tangential lives of the Bradshaws and their expansive kinship networks. Like Danticat's text, *Land of Love and Drowning* is also a work of historical fiction: the novel begins in 1917, in the immediate wake of the transfer of the Virgin Islands from Dutch ownership to American, moving through two world wars and the inevitable postwar Americanization of the island into the 1970s. But where the unrelenting methodological pacing of *The Farming of Bones* leaves one with the desperate unfulfillable desire to outrun Amabelle's consistent existential pain and even the novel itself, *Land of Love and Drowning* leaves the reader in a state of perpetual excited exhaustion, eternally struggling to maintain matching velocity with the unpredictable trajectories of the prose. And

while *The Farming of Bones* mourns for the myriad ghosts of lives that were never lived, inhaling possibilities never fulfilled and exhaling brief eulogies for each, *Land of Love and Drowning* unabashedly pursues each conceivable root one could lay down, spirographically staking claims to them all.

The Bradshaw family, loosely inspired by the personal familial history of the author herself (Yanique, *Land* 396-7), consists of shipping merchant Captain Owen Arthur Bradshaw, his wife Antoinette, their daughters Eeona and Anette, and Owen Arthur's illegitimate son, Jacob Esau McKenzie. The familial network, however, is extensive, reaching backwards towards Antoinette's family roots in neighboring island Anegada, and projecting forward through Anette's three partners and three children. Of the 101 chapters that comprise the novel, twenty-six are narrated by the three offspring of Owen Arthur as they grow into adulthood, with the remaining seventy-five chapters narrated by the omniscient third person voices who identify themselves as *we old wives*[84] of the island. The observers, the confirmers of record: a Greek chorus of timeless women working in tandem to provide the narrative that the family members cannot or will not, and more importantly, to provide the narrative that the history books do not. A text greatly concerned with, though consistently frustrated by, history and historical record, Yanique's novel bends and stretches the way we understand the work of remembering, the art of being remembered. *Land of Love and Drowning* creates a sort of multilayered supplemental archive of the islands, an Audre Lordeian biomythography,[85] by way of a family and their various abilities to recall and record.

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[84] "We old wives, who had always known, nodded to ourselves" (Yanique 50).

[85] See "Speaking the Unspeakable" interview between Karla Jay and Lorde, in which Lorde says the following regarding her then newly described genre, the biomythrography: "Because there was a gap, *Zami* was written, and so *Zami* is not only an autobiography, but mythology, psychology, all the ways in which I think we can see our environment. And this is what I think good fiction does. And it is fiction. I attempt to create a piece of art, not merely a retelling of things that happened to me and to other women with whom I shared close ties. I define it as biomythography because I've found no other word to really coin what I was trying to do" (Jay 110).

In much the same way that Saidiya Hartman argues for a reimagined history which "strain[s] against the limits of the archive" (Hartman 11), so too do these family-narrated chapters augment the historical progression of the novel itself, "re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view" (11). Anette, who first introduces herself from inside her mother's womb as "the historian in the family" (Yanique, *Land* 10), is the predominant narrator of these twenty-six chapters, and establishes early the flexibility of what the reader might consider to be true: "Nowadays," she says, "people think historians are stuffy types, but history is a kind of magic I doing here" (10). Only twenty pages later, Anette tells the reader, "I don't remember nothing of my life before I turn four years old. But I don't need memory. A historian, that's me after all" (31). History, we understand, can be as fluid and elusive as the memory recalling it.

As one might predict in a novel uniquely preoccupied with the ambivalence of the archive, one pervasive theme in this text is secrets and silences, the consequences of failed communication. Failures to explain the boundaries of familial relationships, failures to share internal desires and dreams, failures to ask for clarification when necessary and failures to respond in kind. Owen Arthur Bradshaw keeps secret his sexual relationship with his eldest daughter, Eeona, as well as his illicit relationship with Rebekah McKenzie, another man's wife; Antoinette keeps secret her repeated self-induced abortions and inner dreams that extend beyond the bounds of St. Thomas; Eeona keeps secret from Anette the identity of their half-brother, Jacob. Much in the same way that Amabelle's parents drown in a river, so too do the parents in this novel drown early, Owen at sea, and Antoinette, drowning in her own lungs, sick after a trip to the continental United States. As the characters who possess important information either die early or refuse to share it, everyone else must piece together whispers, rumors, and suggestions

in order to understand. It is the process of navigating this kind of history writing, the piecing together of various silences, the "listening for the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigured lives" (Hartman 3), that brings us to the figure of the conch shell.

When the half-siblings Anette and Jacob meet for the first time, they are both eight years old. Owen and Antoinette have already died, leaving Anette in the care of Eeona. In the midst of struggling with the debt left by her father, settling the family estate and moving herself and her younger sister to an apartment, Eeona brings Anette to the beach for an afternoon distraction. Rebekah McKenzie, the woman with whom Owen Arthur fathered Jacob, has brought her own sons to the same beach. Though we, the readers, know that Antoinette brought Anette to the sea before she was even one, teaching her to swim by the moonlight,[86] we also know that Anette has no memories of her life before the age of four. So the old wives inform us,

> Anette didn't remember being on this beach and learning to swim. She didn't remember her mother holding a conch shell to her ear. But now she picked up such a shell and ran it over to Eeona…Eeona grabbed the pink shell from Anette and held it to Anette's ear. Now Annette's eyes opened wide. She listened intently as thought being given directions or told a secret. (Yanique, *Land* 80)

Of course, Anette will not learn the true nature of her relationship to Jacob until the very end of the novel, after they have fallen in and out and into love, after they have had a child together. But what neither the reader nor Anette know at the time of this scene is that Anette is being given both directions *and* a secret, and that the conch shell is the device by which she inherits both. The passage continues with Eeona instructing Anette, "'Be quiet and you will hear the ocean,' Eeona said, which is what Papa had taught her. 'I hear Papa in the shell,' said Anette" (80). Though Anette claims no memory to her first four years, to the moment in which her mother

[86] Not unlike Amabelle's recalled memory of Sebastien, there is a weighted significance here to Anette's swimming lessons occurring at night—secluded on a beach away from the prying eyes of the public, Anette inherits this knowledge from her mother, in itself its own kind of unrecognized "after hours" labor.

originally explained to her that "You can hear Papa in the shell" (Yanique, *Land* 52), and even without Eeona having verbally associated their father with the shell—as "Eeona was neither teaching nor telling" (80) —Anette picks up on this connection regardless, startling Eeona. "Eeona looked at Anette as though the child had spoken another language, one with sharp screeches for vowels" (81). While the text renders Anette's speech unintelligible to her sister, the instructions provided by the conch shell appear to remain clear and legible, as, "Anette only looked far off and seemed to continue to listen intently" (81). Moments later, Jacob and Anette meet and Anette offers the conch to him: "Do you want to listen to Papa in my shell?" (82) she asks, without knowledge that their fathers are one in the same. After listening briefly, Jacob responds, "Mama say I come from the sea…that's me in your shell" (82), and Anette responds in kind: "Me, too." Both have located themselves as sourced from the sea, as being "inside" the shell, along with their secretly shared father.

It may seem redundant to once again recall the importance of water in a story about islands. Certainly, islands would not exist without the water surrounding them, confirming and reconfirming their boundaries. But *Land of Love and Drowning* is a novel uniquely preoccupied with water, with being overtaken by water, by wetness, by the unrelenting force of the ocean itself. Opening with a "tropical gale" (3) and closing on a beach, Yanique's narrative interrogates water, what it brings us and what it denies us, and while I hesitate to read this novel through the deeds and misdeeds of Owen Arthur Bradshaw, it is impossible to ignore that from opening to close, his presence looms large. It is his debts to the Lovernkrandts that leave Eeona and Anette homeless, his sexual relationship with young Eeona that ultimately leaves her unable to find respectful mutual intimacy with another partner, his affair with Rebekah McKenzie that produces Jacob and, therefore ultimately, Jacob's and Anette's own child, Eve Youme. "Owen Arthur

didn't even leave Anette anything when he left. Not even a piece of land…Owen left his wife and children nothing but the sea" (Yanique, *Land* 45). As overwhelming and omniscient as the sea itself, Owen Arthur's ghost seeps into every crevice of this novel, a liquid broken history, present even without proper recollection. So of course, when Antoinette first holds a conch to the ear of baby Anette and tells her, "you can hear Papa in the shell," the text immediately relents in the very next sentence, "What they could hear was the sea itself" (52). So even as Owen Arthur leaves his family nothing, he leaves the sound of his own ghost, *the sea itself*.

Though the conch is never really mentioned again in the novel as an object, an item, except in passing when Anette wishes she could order it off a much-too-fancy menu, the mirrored, echoing conch shell in both of these scenes is imperative to understanding how memory, inheritance, and history will function in the novel. Eeona, we know, is not alone in her refusal to tell or teach, as authority figures in this novel defiantly withhold vital data throughout the narrative, denying an informational inheritance that could save many from plenty heartache and confusion. Where Rebekah, Owen Arthur, Antoinette, and even Eeona knew about the half-brother Jacob, none but the conch shell managed to explain it to Anette. The conch shell interrupts and supplants the necessity for a verbal lineage. We understand early that knowledge will never be passed down from parent to child in the way standardized history explains it should, and the conch shell is the prism through which the inheritance of family history is dispersed, dehierarchized. True though it may be that Anette does not fully understand the weight of the scene on the beach with Jacob and Eeona and Rebekah, the extent to which the lack of explicit understanding will haunt her for the majority of the novel, or the level of pain she will experience when, as an older woman, she finally learns the truth, if history is a "type of magic", that magic is being performed here by the conch shell. History is a collective production.

It cannot be relayed by one voice, or two, or even a family of voices. In all the ways we, as readers, often fall prey to trusting narrators, however much of our own flawed selves we see in them warning us against such trust, we find ourselves shrinking in betrayal when Anette tells us, many chapters later, "I need to keep something to myself. Secret. In truth, I ain even telling you everything." Which is why we need the old wives to fill us in, as the next sentence begins, "What Anette is not telling, because she will never tell, was what happened only a week later between her and Jacob Esau" (Yanique, *Land* 187).

This is, I argue, the difference between feminine and masculine archives. Aside from two brief chapters narrated by Jacob, rife with ellipses, uncertainties, and apologies—"If I may…once more. Please." (365)—the book is narrated, whether by Anette or Antoinette or Eeona or even the old wives, entirely by women. And where, in his two meagre passages, Jacob tries desperately to establish some semblance of a singular truth, of a *real* history to which the reader might alternately cling, the other ninety-nine chapters make no such promise, no such apologies, no such gesture towards a singular realness. A masculine lineage, patrilineally inherited from father to son, passed in a straight line, stands no chance here. So just as the conch shell in Danticat's novel pulls the disparate objects in the scene into recognition while projecting and dispersing that recognition into the room in which it sits, so too does the conch shell operate on the beach—pulling together Jacob and Anette, Rebekah and Eeona, implicating them all into a multifaceted spectrum of various truths, all of which contribute to some larger collective archival memory. For as we are told early by the wives, "This family will know itself through stories told in time and others told too late" (9).

In my reading of *The Farming of Bones*, I assessed the conch shell both in terms of its relevance as an object in a specific scene, as well as in its influence as a uniquely disruptive, nonbinary, postcolonial narrative framework through which to read the novel: content and form. I intend to do the same here. And while the narrative arc of *The Farming of Bones* is primarily concerned with Amabelle, and *Land of Love and Drowning* follows the lives of three very different protagonists, I suggest the framework can be engaged similarly. Here, as in Danticat's novel, we see a central spiral—a moment of violence that initiates the text—three identifiable sets of whorls—cyclical journeys spent traveling incrementally outwards from the trauma—and three narrative apertures—moments in which the characters may be released from that specific traumatic cycling. A loss, a journey, and a release.

It seems clear that the central column for all three children would be the death of Owen Arthur Bradshaw, but it is important to investigate the individual ways in which each child is uniquely impacted, as these individual post-mortems instigate the spiralic journeys they will take for the entirety of the novel in search of release. As suggested earlier in this chapter, the column is important in its violence, in its ability to disrupt; while the spiral may infinitely spiral in and out, eternally rounded in its buried curvatures, the conch shell, like the novel itself, is a physically finite object, however infinite and expansive its metaphorical possibilities.

Though of course we are told he will die much earlier in the text, Captain Owen Arthur Bradshaw dies on page sixty-five. "A telegram came the following evening: '*Homecoming* wrecked on Anegada reef. Two survivors. Captain not among them.' As simple as that" (Yanique, *Land* 65). This information is shared with the reader directly following the last intimate moment between the captain and his eldest daughter, as he informs her that she is to be married and moved to Paris with her husband-to-be, and she informs him that she "just wish[es]

[he]would die." The captain, ever liquid, "streamed from the room," and the telegram arrives in the next sentence. But while Anette and Jacob will be changed by the captain's death, Eeona is uniquely changed by the captain's *drowning*. Eeona is the only child who will remember the immediate aftermath, the rumors and stories surrounding his death:

> Most said drowned. But the Frenchies knew that Owen Arthur was a man of the sea and men of the sea don't just drown. They walk into the sea with stones in their fists. They drink and bow into a heavy wave. They are smashed in the head by a loose anchor and heaved into the sea. (Yanique, *Land* 67)

Eeona knows for the entirety of the novel that men like her father do not just drown, and especially not in a place so intimately familiar to himself as Anegada. Rumors circulate about a murderess, a "woman with backward-facing feet and hair like the sea," a "witch mistress, who knew magic and knew love and knew that they were one and the same, despite any sin" (67). Eeona knows it was she who caused her own father's death, and it is this internally located guilt that initiates Eeona's narrative body whorl. As her father's death prompts her fiancé to break their engagement and leave the islands, Eeona will spend the novel desperately attempting to relocate the blame, to relocate her father, to relocate that intimacy that sunk to the bottom of the ocean with the captain.

This cyclical, conchitic, search through echoes *is* her narrative body whorl. This is why Eeona will jump on a seaplane and make a life with Benjamin McKenzie, Rebekah's long-thought-dead husband now secretly living in St. Croix and living under the name Kweku Prideaux; this is why she will carry his child, and why, when the baby is stillborn, she will name him Owen Arthur. This is why Eeona will move back to St. Thomas and whisper Antoinette's magic stories to Eve Youme while she sleeps. And, ultimately, this is why she will move to St. John when land rights are made available and open an inn that is in all ways visibly identical to her childhood home. A dizzying, lifelong journey around the central column of her father's death

is littered with gestures towards a life that could have been, Eeona is certain would have been, had Owen Arthur lived.

Anette, who had only just been born when Owen Arthur dies, loses not a lover, as Eeona, Rebekah, and Antoinette have, but a source of historical data: an archive. Perhaps, had Owen Arthur not died, Antoinette would not have gone to America, gotten ill, and died as well; perhaps Eeona would not have been the sole repository of genealogical information, knowing no better than to hide the family's truth from Anette; perhaps Anette would have understood the deep emotions she feels for Jacob throughout the text to be familial and not erotic. Perhaps. But what is a historian without their archive? Self-described as such from the first moment we hear from her in utero—*Don't mind I ain born as yet. I is the historian in this family* (Yanique, *Land* 10)—Anette loses both the information the captain may have shared about his work, the economy, the island networks, as well as the stories Antoinette only ever gave Eeona—stories of duene, of magic. Spending the majority of the novel exploring various outlets of emotional intimacy, from Ronald, to Jacob, finally ending up with grade school friend Franky, Anette's life is a series of echoes of the historical roots she never knew. She inevitably pursues a career teaching history in the local Anglican school, her own lack of historical clarity mirrored by the failure of the curriculum to teach any set of accurately diverse Caribbean history:

> Anette was a history teacher but she hadn't studied this history, despite the fact that it was only next door. There was no course where she could study Anegada history or Virgin Islands history at all. She taught American history and a general Caribbean history that focused mostly on the pirates of Jamaica. That is what there was for her to teach at the Anglican school. (290)

Routinely frustrated by the elusive nature of her own roots, of having "been an orphan since she could remember" (290), Anette manifests her own roots wherever they seem most likely to take hold—men, children, houses, histories—seeking belonging through to the end of the novel.

And while Jacob is not as clearly affected as either of the Bradshaw sisters, he follows his own spiralic journey through the novel trying always too hard to establish his own identity, his own truth, his own version of history. Struggling between a McKenzie name that is not really his and a Bradshaw lineage he may never claim, struggling against a mother who he can never quite seem to defy, struggling in his misplaced and frustrated desire for Anette, Jacob's two chapters are brief and pleading. "May I interject here?", he all-too-politely asks, before explaining that he only needed to obey his mother long enough to become a doctor, "and then [he] could be [his] own man" (Yanique, *Land* 244). In the only other chapter granted to Jacob, he explains, once more through an elaborate series of ellipses, why he decided against sending his and Anette's daughter away for corrective surgery. "If I may…once more. Please. I would like to make clear that I made an attempt" (365). Jacob's own tone, so jarringly in contrast with the confident and deliberate descriptions Anette presents of him, is desperate and apologetic in these two passages, pleading forgiveness for something it seems no one has really accused him of. The discrepancy between Anette's "sandman", the man with the mangrove legs, and the Jacob who speaks directly to us creates a sort of literary whiplash, an echo-Jacob that suggests that we readers are just as uncertain about this man's identity as he is, a Jacob Bradshaw and a Jacob McKenzie, each as fallibly formed as the other.

So the three siblings, Eeona's own self, trapped in a complex of guilt, sunk to the bottom of the ocean, Anette's excessive rooting and rerouting, and Jacob's echoey split soul, spiral through the novel desperate for a release, an answer to the questions they could never quite ask. It is not until the very end of the novel that any of the three experience any sense of relief, through what I've previously identified as the narrative aperture: the opening of the conch shell. The nature of each release is, of course, directly reflective of the nature of each whorl and though

I do not argue in any sense that this "release" is a release from trauma writ large, I do suggest that there exists a set of narrative moments in which the three siblings may find a sense of release from the central column of narrative trauma around which they've circled their entire (written) lives. Inherited trauma may never really end, but novels do. The aperture is not resolution from trauma, it is only release from that very specific set of motions.

Anette's aperture occurs first. She and Jacob have agreed to meet at a hotel for dinner to discuss the physical condition of their now teenage daughter, Eve Youme, who has inherited a backwards facing duene foot; they are considering corrective surgery. Anette is, as she so often is around Jacob, overcome and overwhelmed, and decides to go inside the hotel to spend a moment in the bathroom "to rearrange [her]self into a proper married lady, because it feeling like [she] forgetting who wife [she] really is and what life this really is" (Yanique, *Land* 341). But where her aim is to rearrange herself, to calm herself and remind herself of where she thinks she is, she finds out all too soon that the hotel she is in is actually her childhood home—the same home Eeona told her decades before had burned to the ground. Inside the hotel, she finds a man named Hippolyte Lammartine, who had worked in the Bradshaw home when Anette was born, and it is in this scene that Anette learns the truth about Owen Arthur and his relationship with Eeona, and the true nature of her relation to Jacob. And though Anette "ain want to hear this foolishness at all," Lammartine explains, "But you must. Because Captain Bradshaw and he side woman make a boy child that look like a handful of sand. He name Jacob Esau. He passing for McKenzie" (344). Anette's narrative whorls, spend circling around Owen Arthur and his Jacob for all these past years, dump her firmly into a realization that devastates her. "My life just get ruin. Everything I love just get make a sin. Something coming like a wave and is to drown me this time" (345). And so much like how the open ocean has come to represent her father and her

boundaries and her perception of reality, now too does Anette become exposed to a wave, intent on drowning her.

Without even stopping to let Jacob know she's leaving, she runs the entire way home to phone Eeona for confirmation. But Eeona, at this point, has already left for Anegada to pursue her own aperture. From here, Anette finds new purpose in stabilizing her life, ending the whorls, understanding that the love she feels for Jacob can never be the same again. That night, as Franky walks in the door, Anette "feel[s] the sand beneath [her] feet…Now [she] smelling the sea. And it ain that [she drowning or that [she] in a net. [She] swimming like how Jacob teach [her]" (Yanique, *Land* 347). Anette spends the remainder of the novel reestablishing her sense of belonging, to her sister and husband, to the Virgin Islands themselves.

Eeona's aperture manifests, as previously mentioned, when she makes the decision to return to Anegada to find her father's sunken ship, aptly named *The Homecoming*. As soon as Eeona steps off the boat, she is recognized as a Stemme—her mother's maiden name—as "family" (379) by Angela Norman, the woman who greets her. Immediately embraced by the Normans, distant relatives of Eeona herself, she encounters echoes of her life all around her in Anegada, the "haunted place where the past greets you at the door" (380): Lyonel Norman "looked to Eeona just like Owen Arthur" (379), and that first night, she sleeps in a large mahogany bed that night, "the kind that Antoinette and Owen Arthur would have slept in" (382). But where Anegada feels to Eeona like a graveyard of memories, she is in fact the one identified as a shade, as the Normans tell her, "ghosts like you always washing ashore" (380). The following day, she requests to see *The Homecoming*, and Lyonel—the very same man who had, decades prior, proposed marriage to Antoinette before Owen Arthur interceded—agrees to bring her to the wreck.

Viewing the wreck is a transcendental moment for Eeona, one in which many layers and timelines condense and superimpose over eachother, allowing a clarity that Eeona has been searching for the entire novel. “This was her father’s ship. And this was Eeona’s ship. And though she was no underwater expert, she now held her breath, let go of Lyonel’s hand, and shot her body down, so at least she might touch the mast” (Yanique 383). And though, in her old age, Eeona is not able to reach the mast, this is the moment in which she is released. The passage here describes Eeona as falling, “up, up, up towards the silvery surface” (Yanique, *Land* 383-4), “buoy[ing] up facedown” (384). The physics of this passage is what I find most spectacular, as Eeona’s body is described as *falling up*, rather than as *floating*. The narrative allows the laws of physics to be altered, providing Eeona with a specific spatial intervention in which she is both traveling vertically *up*, while *falling*—denoting both a reversal of perspective as well as an artificially accelerated speed of travel. Here we see a kind of magic in which the sinking and drowning Owen Arthur is mirrored by Eeona’s vertical travel up out of the water, a kind of magic in which the part of her that sank with *The Homecoming* all those years before meets and compiles with the version of her that, as an old woman, now falls up through the water: coming home.

The Normans pull her unconscious body from the water and she sleeps for an undisclosed amount of time, dreaming.

> And then Eeona awoke. And she was not herself. Not herself at all. She knew where she was. She knew how she had gotten there. She knew she had not made it to touch *The Homecoming*. But she took one hazy look at the lobsterman standing over her with a bowl of lobster soup and she realized that he did not look that much like her father at all. (384-5)

This is Eeona’s aperture. The endless cycles and echoes she navigates throughout the novel searching for her father, giving birth to a stillborn son who bears his name, passing down stories

to her niece as though she were her mother, release her in this moment. Having spent the entire novel as "herself"—herself being defined as a *not* knowing, as permanently *unrecognized*—she now knows exactly where she is, and who. In seeing Lyonel as looking more like her mother than her father, she finally understands the shattering that had occurred at her father's death, where "she'd been her desired self for nearly two decades" (Yanique, *Land* 385) when that desired self sank with her father's ship, prompting a life-long search for that sense of recognition, of closure. Eeona returns to St. John after this, briefly, to notify Anette of her discovery, and to inform her that she will be moving permanently to Anegada.

Jacob, as he has his whole life, experiences his aperture as a result of other's actions and movements. Constantly steered through his whorls by the inaction of Owen Arthur, the fervent convictions of his mother, the state control of the U.S. military, and indeed, the final actions of Anette, Jacob experiences his aperture only after his and Anette's daughter releases him. "I phoned the Joseph residence day after day…for weeks…until finally my daughter answered" (366). After agreeing over the phone not to send her to Spain for corrective surgery, he tells us, "I let Eve be" (366). Eve Youme, who is both his daughter and his half-niece, has, without knowing it, let Jacob go. And as so much of this novel is dedicated to not knowing, to not remembering, this final paragraph of Jacob's is a list of things he remembers. He concludes, "I remember that beauty can be dangerous…I don't know…perhaps even that danger is worth it" (367). Jacob ends the novel with Anette, in a chapter narrated for us by the old wives. They sit, old now, on a quiet beach together, reading a letter written by Eve, who now lives on Anegada with Eeona. "Just two people who have been in love a long time sitting on a bench with their daughter's words swimming before them. And now Jacob and Anette are pressed together as the cool comes in from the ocean" (392).

Maybe, like in *The Farming of Bones*, we are made to understand at the end of both texts that even if no parents had drowned, everything would have unfurled the same, produced the same results. Some larger violences are too big to grapple with, to confront directly. Parents passing down life doesn't promise anything, or prevent anything, and though these children fixate on those deaths consciously or otherwise, what these novels remind us is that histories aren't linear. They climb and disperse like networks of veins, branching out in all directions, spiraling around a center, pulsing from a single heart, unpredictable, unreliable, and difficult to describe in any singular way. The apertures of Eeona, Anette, and Jacob are not resolutions, not endings, only releases from their conchitic spiraling. Outside the conch shell, after all, there is still open ocean.

Conclusion: Open Ocean

Have I forgotten it –
Wild conch-shell dialect

Black apostrophe curled
tight on my tongue?

Safiyah Sinclair

In her 2015 publication, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, Michelle Wright approaches the racial category of Blackness as a product of a specific spacetime: a result of *when* and *where*, rather than a *what*. In a response to Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's use of the chronotope—in which he draws attention to the pattern of narrative cooperation between time and space which guide the structure of modern literary forms—Wright

counters that the limits of Newtonian spacetime used in the linear progression of Western literary forms leave no room for complete, accurate readings of diasporic literatures, which inhabit a very different temporal space. “Rendered in its most basic form, a linear progress narrative struggles to be diasporic,” Wright suggests, “because the notion of return suggests a reversal of the progressive direction from the narrative’s origin to the present day/era” (Wright 73). To close this gap, Wright proposes an expanded, parallel methodology for reading diasporic texts: one which takes into account *both* linear time and what Wright describes as Epiphenomenal time: “a time frame in which return is a matter of not simply backtracking along the progress narrative but recognizing that one is manifesting the past in the present moment” (74). Proposing this methodology with the intention of generating more “cogent, cohesive, and inclusive analys[e]s of Blackness” (74), Wright envisions an approach that does not presume time as a straight line on which one can travel backwards and forwards, but instead privileges interpretations of time that understand the present moment as always containing both the past and the future. Expanding this proposal, I return now to the conch, and to the idea of a conch shell poetics.

If reading literature of the African diaspora requires an expanded understanding of timespace, and Epiphenomenal time is the expansion proposed by Wright, I suggest that the conch shell functions, in the literature of the Caribbean, as a nonbinary epiphenomenal temporal signifier. Bound up by its history on the plantation and its role in early independence movements and maroon rebellions, both common and mundane enough to be eaten and discarded while also special and significant enough to rest on grave sites or to communicate with deities, the conch shell resists both singularly masculine *and* Western linear temporalities. The “spiral conch” is invoked, for example, as the banister of a set of stairs in Cuban poet Reina María Rodríguez’s poem, “In The Doorjamb”, where it is engaged as a metaphor for the “timid,” “patient,”

"waiting" temporalities that women must navigate for self-recognition—held in deliberate contrast to the "indifferent[]" growth of boys (Chacón 38). The shell appears again in Bahamian author Marion Bethel's poem, "Of Pirates and Junkanoo," a poem primarily concerned with the cyclical renewal of exploitation from piracy, to the plantation, to neocolonial tourism. The conch is revived here in its role in Bahamian Junkanoo[87] performance, beginning the of the poem: "I blow again my shell of conch / stripped of wax / chronicler of stacks / of raw sugar, tobacco and mould", and again at the end of the poem, as a directive: "Blow that conchshell shake them bells / in junkanoo resistance bold / pirates sell land like tourist shells / greased hands / in a trance / of lashes—myths of gold" (Bethel 6). Angelique V. Nixon writes, on the conch's appearance in these lines, writes:

> While the conch shell as a horn was used during slavery by slave masters and drivers to call in slaves to/from the fields, it was also used as a form of communication among slaves, particularly for planning rebellions and forming maroon communities. Given the history of Junkanoo during slavery, the use of the conch shell connects the Bahamian festival to resistance. Thus, the conch shell can be seen as a complicated symbol of resistance because it is being used here by the Junkanoo performer "stripped" of its memory of "raw sugar, tobacco and mould," and at the same time, the shell carries these memories as "chronicler." The Junkanoo performer is attempting to forget, but at the same time forced to remember and understand this past in the present. (Nixon, "Imaginings" 4)

Again, we see the conch as an object existing in the present tense, carrying both a distant and painful history with it while projecting desires that can only exist in a future timespace. The conch shell acts here as a signifier of Wright's Epiphenomenal time, forcing the Junkanoo performer to "remember and understand this past in the present."

[87] Junkanoo, Jonkanoo, or even sometimes John Canoe celebrations occur as holiday festivals across the English-speaking Caribbean and are tied closely to West African cultural practices. For more on the history and contemporary Junkanoo practices, see "Junkanoo: Festival of the Bahamas" (1991) by E. Clement Bethel, composer, musician, and the first appointed Director of Culture in the Bahamas.

In her 2016 poetry collection, *Cannibal*, Jamaican poet Safiya Sinclair investigates the origins of the word itself through an interrogation of *The Tempest* and its postcolonial legacy. The poem entitled *Home* opens with the rhetorical query, "Have I forgotten it— / wild conch-shell dialect, / black apostrophe curled / tight on my tongue?" (Sinclair 3). *Home* unfurls from there in a stunning visual composite of legible Jamaican imagery—"sargassum", the "Doctor Bird", "lignum vitae plumes"—but the reader can never quite escape this unanswered question. Eight couplets later, the poet addresses "diction" again, "now as straight / as my hair", and the reader understands diction as something that can be artificially, mechanically 'straightened'. The curvature of the conch-shell dialect is markedly absent as the speaker longs for a reality in which "our half-sunken hearts could answer." The poem concludes with an imagined swim in "the sea / still lapsing in a soldered frame, / the sea that again and again / calls out my name." Sinclair's *Home* can easily be read by the push and pull between the home and not-home, self and not-self, so common in the Caribbean context, as the wild spoken conch-shell dialect is confronted by the restrictive, printed "black apostrophe", curling around the speaker's tongue, binding and rerouting the speech until the diction reads as "straight." In the end, it is only the sea that is left with the power to communicate clearly as the speaker longs to hear her name called out.

I've only addressed five instances here in which the conch shell appears as an active signifier, but I strongly suggest this living symbol appears and works even more broadly. In this chapter alone, we see the shell appearing in texts from Haiti, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Cuba, the Bahamas, and Jamaica, traversing multiple linguistic heritages, colonial histories, and postcolonial presents. Whether the shell is indicative of a linguistic system one is forced to forget, reminds one of something one might not want to remember, or stands in for a conversation that never happened, it carries a symbolic, weighted history of communication and

resistance that reaches through centuries to whisper important secrets. Combining a striking central column with flowery, geometrically fortified whorls of calcium, and opening at an aperture that even the most basic artistic interpretation could recognize as vaginal, the conch shell is an unmistakably nonbinary signifier for the literary region: feminine and masculine, neither and both.

In the tradition of Glover's work on the literary productions of the Haitian Spiralist community, and Wright's proposal for Epiphenomenal readings, and indeed Hartman's demand for an archive that actually reflects the contentious plurality of the history it purports to preserve, I propose this new symbolic framework for reading Caribbean women's narratives: one that draws on the historic weight of the conch shell as a symbol of resistance and alternative modes of communication, and one that uses the shell as a framework which understands nonlinear time as integral to the text's progression, rather than disruptive of it. As the Caribbean literary canon continues to be represented by a male-dominated authorship, producing new methodologies for reading and understanding inclusive authorships is vital. Histories are not singular, linear, or easily recorded, and reorienting the ways we read and understand the construction of the archive is integral to expanding it.

Fig. 2.7: Conch grotto, Stock Island, Florida, June 2020.
Photograph courtesy of author.

3 Waiting Through the Shallows

When Derek Walcott, the poet and Nobel Laureate from St. Lucia, was recently asked what makes Caribbean literature unique, he said simply, "It is the sea." Given this, it is strange that few novels by Caribbean writers actually make much narrative acknowledgement of this ubiquitous element. Perhaps this is because the sea, in the culture and creative thought of the Caribbean, has historically represented a highway either for transporting people in shackles or for migrants escaping poverty. The sea, then, must be approached with trepidation—in the literature it is generally the coffin, not the womb.[88]

Tiphanie Yanique

While holding abominable, anonymous, and innumerable deaths,
the space below water simultaneously acts, in the Caribbean and African diasporic imaginary,
as a sacred site.

Valérie Loichot

Departing from writing about tangible, measurable flora and fauna, I find myself exploring the ocean itself as a conceptual space. In order to imagine the ocean as a flexible, fluid metaphor—let alone a metaphor capable of being divided up into multiple symbolic depths—I needed to learn about the ocean in the ways we've come to define its parameters through formal study. I needed to know that the various depths of the ocean are largely defined by their access, or lack thereof, to sunlight, and that photosynthesis at the ocean's surface impacts every zone of increasing depth thereafter. I needed to understand that weather as we measure it on land exists parallel to our experience, only underwater—that whirling eddies[89], abrupt temperature shifts, and the intricate yet extensive global system of currents circulate nutrients, minerals, and whole populations of oceanic inhabitants in much the same way that air currents and terrestrial storms do. Perhaps most importantly, I needed to read reports documenting the ongoing and extensive damage that we as a species have done to upset the balance of these naturally occurring networks of life and movement, most profoundly in the Caribbean.

[88] For more, see "Mother/Nature," by Yanique.
[89] For more, see "The Oceans Have Their Own Weather Systems," by Carlowicz.

Inspired by theorists like Christina Sharpe[90] and Alexis Pauline Gumbs who have written about the poetic capacity of the ocean's depths and their expansive relativity to our own various existences, I turn towards the shallows. *The shallows* is not a scientific, academic term used to define a specific zone of depth but rather a conceptual spatial term used in various capacities to explain an intimate relationship between various parts of the ocean and the sun's light and warmth. The deeper the water, the less light reaches, the colder the water stays, the more creative life must get in order to survive. And while a network of theory has been established connecting deep oceanic waters to their extensive metaphorical capacities—not the least of which has been the legacy of relations between the Atlantic Ocean and the Atlantic Slave Trade—the shallows seem largely unexplored in terms of a praxis. Along these lines, my first goal is to establish, however elastic, my own parameters of the shallows, what it means to wade through them, to inhabit them, and ultimately, what their relationship with light tells us about time. So, where *are* the shallows? How far can the shallows extend before we think of them as deeper waters? Before they lose their access to light? Surely they *begin* at the low tide mark, which can be as varied as the lunar phases and latitude allow. But where do they end?

If we are to understand the shallows in terms of its relationship to sunlight, we know that once we enter the euphotic (or "sunlight") zone, there is "rarely any significant light beyond 200 meters (656 feet),"[91] but I doubt many of us would consider 650 feet of oceanic depth to be *shallow* water. Looking through the various subdivisions of the euphotic zone, however, we see that coral reefs tend to suffer in waters deeper than 90 feet[92] for lack of access to direct sunlight

[90] "There have been studies done on whales that have died and have sunk to the seafloor. These studies show that within a few days the whales' bodies are picked almost clean by benthic organisms—those organisms that live on the seafloor" (Sharpe 40).
[91]For more, see "How far does light travel in the ocean?" by NOAA.
[92] For more, see "How coral reefs grow," by Coral Reef Alliance.

and warm temperatures generated by the sun. As my primary literary interest here is with the Caribbean, I will be conceptually locating the shallows between the low tide mark and the edge of what marine scholars call the insular shelf: before the reefs drop off the continental banks. Considering the unique variations of islands across the archipelago of the Caribbean—some banks being volcanic in nature[93] while others are submerged atolls[94]—each island will have its own relative oceanographic shallows, but this functions for my general purposes as a broadly defined conceptual sea space.

When Tiphanie Yanique ponders the reason why the "ubiquitous element" of the sea is so often left out of Caribbean novels, she references the violence inherent in the historic imaginary of the Atlantic Ocean as a route to traffic individuals into chattel slavery, proposing that the use of this body of water as a highway from familiar safety to unfamiliar violence precludes it from being a literary metaphor with any endearing or redeeming qualities. Valérie Loichot further recognizes that on the occasions that Caribbean artists do feature the sea, "Caribbean poets and artists of the sea deal in the depth of the sea rather than with its oft-touristic surface. The novelists, sculptors, and painters of the *anba dlo* in the Caribbean are innumerable, so great is the force of water in the everyday imagination of the islanders" (Loichot 146). But what about the "oft-touristic" surface? What about the part of the sea where "regattas, maritime sport ships, surfing, [and] snorkeling" (146) take place? Our contemporary understanding of the modern[95] Caribbean understands the space as one of cyclical capitalist exploitation. From European

[93] Like St. Lucia.
[94] For example, the Bahamas.
[95] Elizabeth DeLoughrey's essay *Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity* follows in the critical wake of many African Diasporic and Caribbean theorists who understand the Atlantic Ocean as an integral participant in our Western perception of "modernity" in its role as travel route and final resting place for the countless "wasted lives" (*Heavy Waters* 703) trafficked during the Atlantic Slave Trade. DeLoughrey cites Glissant's *Poetics* in which he posits the Atlantic as "'a beginning' for modernity, a space 'whose time is marked by…balls and chains gone green' (Glissant, *Poetics* 6)", "where the haunting of the past overtakes the present subject" (DeLoughrey, *Heavy Waters* 703).

colonization laying siege to indigenous Caribbean communities, to plantation and pirate economies, to the tourism economy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the capitalist imaginary seeps through and reframes much of the Caribbean lived experience into its exploited associations. Yet, while the regatta-faring tourists may be what comes to mind when thinking about Caribbean coastlines, it is important to be reminded that the waters with which regular, everyday folks interact, are indeed, the shallows. Living on an island, the shallow coastal waters become the entrance and the exit, the part of the sea with which one interacts most frequently. Coastal travel, non-commercial fishing, bathing, baptisms, all occur in these shallow waters—the sacred *and* the banal.

Where Édouard Glissant has addressed the infinitely overwhelming tautology of the abyss, and Kamau Braithwaite identified a sense of Caribbean unity as submarine, it still seems as though these perceptions view the ocean as a singular metaphorical mass. But what happens when you can see the ocean's floor? Touch it with the soles of your bare feet? The shallows are a liminal relational space, a space of constant flux and transition: naturally occurring oceanic channels can change with major storms; exceptionally high tides, which most commonly occur during a new or full moon, can change our perception of where the shallows even begin. Surely the monolithic imagining of the ocean's depth must be expanded to accommodate nuance. If deep water is memory, haunted by the endless lives perceived as expendable, marked by a dark, cold vastness and a history of death, the shallows are, by contrast, shot through with light and life and alterior perspectives.

In her 2009 essay, *Radiation Ecologies and the Wars of Light*, Elizabeth Deloughrey engages Maori author James George's 2006 novel *Ocean Roads* in its heliographic capacities—that is, the way in which it approaches the modernity of the Pacific in terms of its relationship to light and radiation ecologies. *Ocean Roads* is an intergenerational novel that follows a family throughout multiple scenes of Pacific-centered violence—the atomic bomb tests, Nagasaki, and Vietnam—documenting the ways in which these episodes of modern warfare carry on long after the bombs are dropped. The novel, Deloughrey posits, "suggests that the primary way we understand the environment and its relationship to modernity is through the vehicle of light, even if that vehicle often exceeds the limits of representation and comprehension" (Deloughrey, *Radiation Ecologies* 469). Deloughrey continues on to explain her interest of literary representations of light: that while most ecocritical fictions "are often focused on representations of matter" (469), since "we associate ecology with relations between matter" (470), George's novel is unique in that it investigates "what illuminates matter, but is not necessarily constituted by it" (469), i.e.: light. Light, this essay argues, is a rarely investigated facet of ecocriticism, despite metaphors of illumination and enlightenment being "closely tied to knowledge production" (470). "Profoundly relational…light can only be apprehended in relation to the objects it illuminates and can only be 'seen'—from material experience to classical quantum physics—by its affect upon local ecologies" (470), and it is this relational illumination that I am most interested in regarding literature of the Caribbean.

Deloughrey's analysis departs from my interest in the literary analysis of light in order to better address the relationship between modern militarization and literary interpretations of radiation,[96] but her rendering of light as both omnipresent and obscure, "simultaneously local (in

[96] Deloughrey's essay expands on light in terms of its morphology as radiation, in terms of both anthropogenic radiation and natural radiation from the sun. Invoking Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and more recently

its perception) and planetary (in the universal movement of light)" (Deloughrey, *Radiation Ecologies* 470), is vital to my investigation of shallow Caribbean waters, as it renders "the ecology of light [as] vital to the question of otherness" in its ability to "enable apprehension of the other" (470). And while the definition or source of *the other* may vary from text to text, for my purposes, I am interested in the ways in which light enables the apprehension of temporal otherness. If light may only be observed in relation to the objects it illuminates, when discussing the shallows, there are two focal points for investigating the relationship between light and water that I find most important. By this, I mean it is vital to examine both what happens when light interacts with water directly *and* what kind of ecosystems—both literal and literary—are created by the combination of light and water, in contrast to water that exists beyond the reach of sunlight. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will be analyzing a series of texts that address life in shallow waters. Some of these texts will present very literal interpretations of the shallows, while others will be more metaphorical, expanding ecocritical interpretations to incorporate evolving notions of nonlinear, fluid time.

When light molecules traveling through the air hit water, they slow down and change direction slightly. This change in direction is what we refer to as refraction. Light refracts whenever it travels from a substance with one refractive index to another, creating changes in how we perceive the light when the bent stream is projected onto a surface. In terms of literature, the temporally normative movement of light through the day, as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, is intrinsic to the function of a linear historical narrative progression. Days and

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Deloughrey aligns her investigation of radiation with Spivak's theory of planetarity: "the defamiliarization of familiar space" (Spivak 77), or "that process by which the familiar is rendered uncanny and unhomely" (Deloughrey, *Radiation Ecologies* 471).

nights turn into weeks and months and time moves "forward." In consideration of the movement of time in terms of this narrative progression, one might look towards Mikhail Bakhtin's idealized Newtonian notion of chronotope, which suggests that subject formation occurs in the novel due to a cooperative intersection of temporal and spatial markers—*chrono*, meaning time, and *topo*, meaning space. That is, subject formation is intrinsically attached to the passage of narrative time. But as Bakhtin's analyses largely address classic Western genres, this logic set is used to address narrative structures like the hero's adventure, or the Western epic—linear progress narratives. As Michelle Wright notes in *Physics of Blackness*, however, "a linear progress narrative struggles to be diasporic, because the notion of return suggests a reversal of the progressive direction from the narrative's origin to the present day/era" (Wright 73). As diasporic narratives often address the notion of return as inherent to a diasporic experience—forceful displacement laying the foundation of such texts—this renders the classic Western conception of a chronotope ill-suited to address subject formation in literature of diaspora. Wright's commentary suggests that the concept of the chronotope requires adjustments in its understanding of time in order to accommodate such narratives.

This is where my interest in light enters. Jamaica Kincaid, for instance, draws our attention to the discrepancies[97] in how sunlight appears and vanishes in Antigua versus England in her essay *On Seeing England for the First Time*, suggesting that one cannot expect the temporal categories of night and day to be experienced similarly across the globe. While a gradual mornings and extended evenings may be commonplace in London, far above the

[97] "'When morning touched the sky' was one phrase, for no morning touched the sky where I lived. The mornings where I lived came on abruptly, with a shock of heat and loud noises. 'Evening approaches' was another, but the evenings where I lived did not approach; in fact, I had no evening—I had night and I had day and they came and went in a mechanical way: on, off; on, off" (Kincaid 34-35).

equator, these phenomena do not exist in Saint John's—the temporal measurement of a day is experienced differently there. Therefore, while a linear progress narrative set in England may engage an experience of time reflected by the natural ecologies of England, the same must be said for a narrative set in the Caribbean: it must engage the experience of time reflected by Caribbean ecologies.

It is along these lines that I investigate the notion of refracted light, beginning with two novels by Edwidge Danticat—*The Farming of Bones* and *Claire of the Sea Light*—as well as a series of poems by Bahamian author Marion Bethel. I will conclude by addressing a new collection of poems by Celia A. Sorhaindo, a poet from Dominica. All three authors engage the intersections of light and water to complicate the readers' understanding of time and illuminate the ways in which this uniquely liquid temporal movement flows through the Caribbean lived experience. In terms of expanding conceptual understandings of a Caribbean literary corpus, addressing literatures from Haiti, the Bahamas, and Dominica—all nations whose literary productions have been often excluded from a Caribbean canon—on the grounds of this shared eco-temporal trope is vital to the inherently expansive notion of the chronopelago.

A longstanding body of critical theory already investigates the shared linguistic economy between physics and literature.[98] In *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant identifies the nontraditional progression of time and history unique to the Caribbean:

> Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously, like sediment as it were, as happened with those peoples who have frequently produced a

[98] Frieda A. Stahl, for example, cites works by Huxley, Plath, and Durrell, among others, as evidence that "a number of significant works of fiction in twentieth-century English-language literature use concepts of classical and modern physics as literary metaphors" (Stahl 61). Though she relents that many authors may only have a passing phenomenological understanding of physics, this practice has a unique resonance in reference to a regional body of literature which has been critically characterized by its direct confrontation with, or denial of, various widely assumed theories of modern physics.

> totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance European peoples, but came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces. This dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all characterize what I call a nonhistory. (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 61-62)

Reading Glissant's notion of this nonlinear nonhistory in conjunction Wright's investigation locates the Caribbean, and its canon of literature, in an interesting position wherein various aspects of modern physics function differently in the Caribbean canon than they might in Western literature. In investigating this unique interaction between the Caribbean and modern physics, Earl McKenzie writes, "Glissant refers to the tendency of Martinicans to speak of time in terms of natural events like earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, and so on. Their view of time develops, he claims, as a result of what he calls the link between nature and culture" (McKenzie 53). I suggest that one can examine how this regionally-acknowledged relationship between nature and culture[99] manifests itself in Caribbean literature by way of a methodology that focuses on how unique ecological metaphors—to my point, the refraction of light—disrupt Western notions of linear time. In terms of the shallows, my analysis is interested in the productive literary intersections that occur between light and water: refracted, or bent, light—light through the literal lens of water—provides a unique resistance to the Western linear progress narrative in the way it appears to bend or alter the progressive linear experience of time.

[99] This relationship between nature and culture—ecopoiesis—has been taken up by ecocritical theorists with increasing regularity since the early 1990s. Greg Garrard's 2004 monograph, *Ecocriticism*, loosely defines the field as being "essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction" (Garrard 179).

I: *There is always light, night and day*: Refracted Shallow Time

When the night comes, you don't know it inside the cramped slippery cave because the waterfall, Sebastien says, holds on to some memory of the sun that it will not surrender.

Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*

While my previous chapter also addresses this text, Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* proves a source of rich analysis in terms of narrative refraction, and I would like to return to it, if only briefly. Throughout the novel, Danticat repeatedly ruptures and reconstructs time and memory using a network of interactions between light and water: just as light through water is prismatically refracted and redirected, likewise are time and memory refracted. The novel opens with a juxtaposition between the night's darkness and the pale light of protagonist Amabelle's oil lamp, the wetness of the night's erotic encounter still lingering at the "first lemongrass-scented ray of sunlight" (Danticat, *Farming* 3); it closes with Amabelle sitting in a river in the late hours of the night, revisiting old memories and "looking for the dawn" (310). This unique interplay between light and water that seems to challenge the "limitations and logical paradoxes predetermined by the linear narrative" (Wright 74), suggesting instead an alternative method of narrative subject formation.

As I've mentioned, even initial observations of the text reveal that *The Farming of Bones* is atemporally structured, with chapters alternating between following a linear plot, printed in standard text, and nonlinear dreamy flashback memory-based chapters, which are printed in bold text[100]. Throughout both types of chapters, however, the text inverts notions of daylight and

[100] Judith Misrahi-Barak discusses this departure from heterodiegetic narration as a deliberately temporal move made "in order to orchestrate [a] return to the site of trauma" (172). "Trauma being a moment when one cannot be present to oneself, when one cannot take in what is happening at the moment it is happening, it is particularly interesting that Danticat should use the present tense in those chapters, as if suspended in time, in an attempt to

nighttime, creating space where darkness is lit up brightly with lamps, lanterns.[101] In her 2002 essay, "Reflection/Refraction of the Dying Light: Narrative Vision in Nineteenth Century Russian and French Fiction," Sharon Lubkemann Allen addresses the unique narrative capabilities of reflective versus refractive light:

> Refractive light is far more unpredictable. It fractures light, but in doing so also sends it off in all directions. Its illumination is prismatic, creative, expansive…Indeed, refractive light has the capacity for dialogic realization that Bakhtin astutely denied to the mirror and interior monologue. If the reflective gaze in the mirror is solipsistic, the refractive gaze, even internalized, is shot through with alterior perspectives. (Lubkemann Allen 3-4)

Just as light passing through a refractive medium, such as water, changes the light's velocity at a staggered rate and alters the light's course of travel, metaphorical and linguistic narrative refraction hosts unique productive capabilities that allow for temporal contradictions, pluralities, and "alterior perspectives" (4). *The Farming of Bones* engages this effect by deliberately juxtaposing sources of light and water.

The moment of interaction between water and light that I find most striking in this novel occurs as one of Danticat's bold, memory-focused chapters. The scene itself it short, two paragraphs followed by two separately indented sentences. The two paragraphs are written from a second-person narrative perspective, though it is clear that Amabelle is reflexively addressing herself, and the point of view shifts back to a first-person narration just for the last two sentences. The passage is dreamy in tone and visually striking, describing Amabelle's memory of the first time she and Sebastien made love. "You walk half a morning to get there, a narrow cave behind the waterfall at the source of the stream where the cane workers bathe" (Danticat, *Farming* 100), the passage begins. The deeply intimate and heightened sexual memory is a direct

process the unprocessable" (173), Misrahi-Barak suggests. For more, see "Exploring Trauma through the Memory of Text".

[101] This is reinforced by the phenomenon by which daytime is occupied with laboring for someone else's profit, where nighttime is reserved for living one's own life.

contrast to Sebastien's physical labor, deliberately positioned in a space apart from the bathing stream.[102] Danticat writes, "At first you are afraid," but,

> still you tiptoe into the cave until all you see is luminous green fresco—the dark green of wet papaya leaves. You hear no crickets, no hummingbirds, no pigeons. All you hear is water sliding off the ledge and crashing in a foamy white spray into the plunge pool below. (Danticat, *Farming* 100)

The space here has been effectively made liminal, a physically separate location from that which exists outside the cave, containing no sounds, no spatial markers to suggest that the space in which they stand exists outside of that timespace at all. The passage continues,

> When the night comes, you don't know it inside the cramped slippery cave because the waterfall, Sebastien says, holds on to some memory of the sun that it will not surrender. On the inside of the cave, there is always light, night and day. You who know the cave's secret, for a time, you are also held captive in this prism, this curiosity of nature that makes you want to celebrate yourself in ways that you hope the cave will show you… (100)

Wright's engagement with Epiphenomenal time asserts what she refers to as the "primacy of the present moment," wherein "the present and future are not discrete moments but rather are conflated into the one moment that is the now" (Wright 41). This phenomenology plays out in how we experience time: "what we forget in one moment, we remember in another" (41-42). Amabelle's experience in the cave is one of refracted time. Tucked away from the reality of the cane fields, she and Sebastien inhabit an erotic space in which it is neither day nor night, as the waterfall "holds on to some memory of the sun that it will not surrender" (Danticat, *Farming* 100). In the slippery, womb-like cave, the sunlight captured and retained by the waterfall refracts outward onto the walls at all times, establishing a seemingly eternal "primacy of the present." If the linear progression of time is marked by the rising and setting of the sun and the passing of

[102] In terms of the relationship between nature and culture, the striking sensory differences between the inside of the cave and the cane fields in which Sebastien labors are vital to understanding the sublime intimacy of the moment. Their shared time in the watery cave is as vibrant and hyperreal as the text suggests because of how starkly it contrasts with Sebastien's comparative anonymity as a cane worker.

days, this cave is a liminal space marked by its capacity to upset that linear narrative. "There is always light, night and day," so past, present, and future moments spent in this cave are compacted and compounded, rather than experienced in any linear sense of space-time. The refusal of this "curiosity of nature" to surrender the memory of day, to surrender the primacy of the present, is directly responsible for maintaining and preserving this memory, as it is responsible for holding *you* captive "in this prism" (Danticat, *Farming* 100). Even as Danticat engages the visual of "feel[ing] half buried" in the crook where Amabelle and Sebastien make love, she relents, "the light can't help but follow you and stay" (101). This specific sentence marks the transition back from second person narration to first, concluding the passage with the next sentence wherein the narration has been thoroughly transitioned back to a first-person narrative.

This temporary interlude of second-person narration, I suggest, plays an integral role in the effectiveness of this passage as well. Just as water in the cave "fractures light, but in doing so also sends it off in all directions" (Lubkemann Allen 3), the perspective of the novel is unsettled and refocused, making space for the reader to implicate themselves as subject in this scene. If, as Lubkemann Allen suggests, "the eye figures for "I," for the subject's ways of knowing the world" (2), not only does this allow the scene to be read as intimate rather than voyeuristic, but we, as the text suggests, "are also held captive in this prism" (Danticat, *Farming* 100). Interior though this recollection may be, the narrative shift in perspective allows the experience to be "shot through with alterior perspectives" (Lubkemann Allen 4), prompting the reader to experience the cave as Amabelle does, in a state of heightened subjective awareness.

> Sight mediates and metonymically represents the aesthetic refraction of reality in verbal as well as visual arts. The eye performs a literal act of translation. For the body, the eye is both an opening and an organ. The lungs and stomach process what mouth and nose exhale; the eye performs a more complex operation: it filters the world both into the body

> and into consciousness. Light, color, and form are interpreted rather than digested, refracted through memory. (Lubkemann Allen 2)

The experience in this passage is transferred to the reader as, due to the brightness of the cave's interior, we see everything Amabelle sees, and though the closing of the passage (and its subsequent shift in perspective) reminds the reader of Amabelle's narrative primacy, this does not negate the brief shared experience of cave's secret. It is the unique engagement with linguistic refraction, echoed by the thematic refraction, inspired by the literal interplay of light and water, that makes this perspective shift so effective.

This series of close readings brings me to the most omnipresent body of water in the text: the river. The river is responsible for the death of Amabelle's parents, the river divides Haiti from the Dominican Republic, and it is lying in the river that Amabelle ends the novel. Throughout the text, the river is a symbol of division and permanence, separating the living from the dead, separating Amabelle from her past, separating Haiti from the DR. After Amabelle shares the story of her parents' drowning, it resurfaces as a repeated dream, which she wakes up from, sweating. "I had my dream of my parents in the river," she tells Sebastien, to which he responds, "I don't want you to have this dream again" (Danticat, *Farming* 55), suggesting its recurrent, implacable nature. In his desire to alter this cyclical traumatic experience, Sebastien tells her, "We'll have to change this thing, starting now":

> He blew out the lamp. The room was pitch black. I squeezed my eyes shut and listened for his voice. "I don't want you to dream of that river again, he said. "Give yourself a pleasant dream. Remember not only the end, but the middle, the beginning, the things they did when they were breathing. Let us say the river was still that day." (55)

As I have suggested, the narrative introduction of light to water, or vice versa, creates a multiplicity, rupturing the linear progression of history making. In the dream of Amabelle's in which her parents drown, she "always see[s] it precisely the way it took place" (55)—that is, no

matter how many times she experiences the dream, she cannot alter the course of that experience. She wakes drenched in sweat, corporeally coated in water: a physical manifestation of her nightmare. In order to rewrite the linear history of Amabelle's past, one must return to it in its linear state: that is, by removing the light in the room, Sebastien's voice becomes the interlocutor of the new linear history of Amabelle's past, recording over the old one:

> "And my parents?"
> "They died natural deaths many years later."
> "Any why did I come here?"
> "Even though you were a girl when you left and I was already a man when I arrived and our families did not know each other, you came here to meet me." (Danticat, *Farming* 55)

In the darkness, where the light of the oil lamp cannot interfere with the dream river, the sweat along Amabelle's spine, Sebastien and Amabelle make "a pact to turn [their] unhappy tales into happy ones" (56), reciting new histories for themselves.

The memory of the river persists throughout the narrative: it is a border to cross, a taker of lives, a receptacle for agony, ghosts and "white spongy bones" (308). Most thematically resolute, perhaps, is the concluding scene in the novel, which takes place after Amabelle returns from her visit across the Haitian border. It is very late at night, not yet morning, and Amabelle tells us, "in the coal black darkness of a night like this, unless you are near it, the river ceases to exist" (308). She addresses the river, remembering once more the day her parents drowned, her mother's desperate gesture of raising her arm one final time above the rising currents.

> I thought if I relived the moment often enough, the answer would become clear, that they had wanted either for us all to die together or for me to go on living, even if by myself. I also thought that if I came to the river on the right day, at the right hour, the surface of the water might provide the answer: a clearer sense of the moment, a stronger memory. But nature has no memory. And soon, perhaps, neither will I. (309)

The river, for Amabelle, is an intractable force in her memory. It stole her parents from her and created a circumstance in which she would spend the rest of her life waiting for it to answer for

its transgression. At this moment, however, as she undresses and descends into the shallow river bed, there is no light present, no multiplicities or alterior perspectives to interrupt the interaction between Amabelle and the water. The scene itself is eerily, deliberately silent. In a novel characterized by tangential and metaphorical interactions with water, Amabelle now physically confronts with the river itself, lying down in the literal manifestation of her own linearly progressive history. She "look[s] to [her] dreams for softness, for a gentler embrace" (Danticat, *Farming* 310), aware that her pact with Sebastien was optimistic at best. The novel ends with Amabelle still lying on her back in this river, "cradled by the current, paddling like a newborn in a washbasin," "looking for the dawn" (310). For all of Amabelle's life, the river has been a place of trauma and restlessness, but now, as an older woman, Amabelle is returned to its womblike watery embrace, gently cradled like an infant. It is important here that the novel does *not* conclude with a scene of watery refraction. As Amabelle tells us, she has spent most of her life thinking that if she replayed memories often enough, that history would not be lost, and that she would finally understand the truth she'd spent so much time waiting for. But ultimately, she understands, "nature has no memory" (309). In the darkness of the early morning, with no light to refract in the waters of her past trauma, Amabelle aligns herself physically with the source of her pain as she wonders, "and soon, perhaps, neither will I" (309).

If the daily movement of light is a temporal marker of linear progression, the engagement of water as an amorphous spatial marker infers atypical results at their refractive intersection. By juxtaposing water and light, Danticat's novel constructs an alternative version of Bakhtin's chronotope, establishing narrative subjectivity based not on a temporally linear progression, but on a diasporically theorized narrative progression which relies on the notion of return. As Amabelle revisits memories, the notion of return is an alternative form of meaning-making rather

than a circuitous negation of meaning. The unique physical interaction between light and water, two omnipresent physical facets of living on an island, allow for these suspended moments of internal negotiation, of "dialogic realization" (Lubkemann Allen 3). While *The Farming of Bones* takes place far from the shallow coast of Hispañola, the phenomenology of the shallows persists in the unique interactions between light and water in this novel, leaving the reader with a nuanced experience of narrative time.

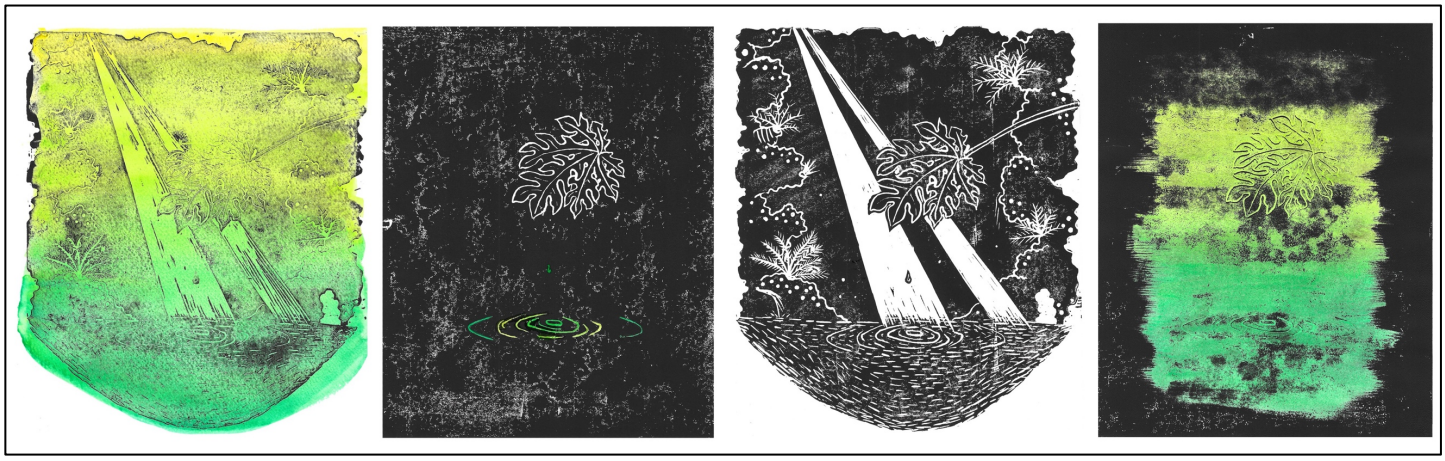

Fig. 3.1: *Impressions of a Memory Fading: The Dark Green of Wet Papaya Leaves,* by Julian Currents. Series of four mixed media linocut prints with watercolor, 9 x 32 inches, 2021.

II: *Lanmè pa Kenbe Kras*: The Sea Does Not Hide Dirt

> *The sea does not hide dirt. It does not keep secrets. The sea was both hostile and docile, the ultimate trickster…You could make love in it and you could surrender to it, and oddly enough, surrendering at sea felt somewhat like surrendering on land, taking a deep breath and simply letting go.*
>
> Edwidge Danticat, *Claire of the Sea Light*

Another of Danticat's novels addresses the relationship between water and light and is more explicitly set in and around the shallows. *Claire of the Sea Light*, published in 2013, is a

similarly emotionally tumultuous narrative of mixed temporalities set in Haiti. While the main plotline takes places only over the course of a single day, the novel repeatedly reaches back into the past in order to trace all present characters through their histories to the moment in which the novel's present tense is taking place. The novel opens with Nozias, a poor and widowed fisherman living in the small town of Ville Rose, who witnesses a rogue wave "measuring between ten and twelve feet high" (Danticat, *Claire* 3) overtake his friend Caleb's boat in the early hours of the morning of his daughter's seventh birthday. The village comes together in search parties to attempt to locate the drowned friend while Nozias reconsiders a decision he has tried to make every year on his daughter's birthday—whether it is time to give her to a townswoman who has the financial means to give her a better life. When his daughter Claire realizes this plan, she runs away, but returns later that same night when the town pulls not Caleb's body, but someone else's, from the sea.

The thematic relationship between water and light in *Claire of the Sea Light* is inescapable. The book is divided into two parts, with four chapters in each, and while the perspective of narration shifts with each chapter, the point of origin of each chapter always traces back, however adjacently, to Nozias's daughter, Claire. The first chapter in part one, titled "Claire of the Sea Light," is mirrored by the last chapter in part two, titled "Claire de Lune," suggesting a sort of thematic chirality. While the novel is about many people living separate lives in a small town on the coast of Haiti, all of these characters are interconnected and deliberately tied back to Claire by virtue of the structure of the narrative. But while Claire is a central figure in the novel, existing as an axis towards which the varied plots skew, it is tricky to name her the novel's protagonist, as we are only given a small portion of the text through Claire's internal

perspective. The novel does a lot of work to deprioritize any one character as primary, creating a horizontal narrative network of interrelated characters—an ecology in and of itself.

Before I address the emotional and symbolic ecologies of this text, however, it is important to highlight the deliberate ecocritical awareness in *Claire of the Sea Light*. Written half before Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake, and half afterwards,[103] the novel directly addresses the harsh passage of time and modernity's effect on the ecological networks of Haiti itself. It is an intersectional ecocritical text that addresses suffering anthropogenic ecologies parallel to nonlinear emotional ecologies, using the metaphor of light in water to facilitate survival in the face of dynamic ecological decline. Throughout the novel we are presented with evidence of Haiti's waterways in various states of collapse. Species die out, rivers become uncontained and dangerous, and locals are priced out of their own homes to make way for coastal vacation mansions, "many of which were occupied only part of the year because their owners lived in the capital or abroad" (Danticat, *Claire* 149). The battering of land and sea is directly reflected in the social and emotional ecologies of the novel: parents watch their children and spouses die, families diagnose and treat secrets with long trips to Miami and years of silence, and violence is normalized as a daily lived experience. As the literal terrain becomes unsteady, so too does the emotional terrain.

Establishing unstable ecologies occurs early in the novel, especially those involving waterways. In fact, the primary plot point around which much of Claire's narrative occurs is due to a collapsing ecology. Nozias is a fisherman by trade but struggles to support both himself and Claire is because the local fishing spots are brutally overfished out of necessity. We read early in the novel that "lapèche, fishing, was no longer as profitable as it had once been," and that,

[103] "The author mentions in an interview that she wrote the first half of the novel before the 2010 Haitian earthquake; she pens the second part of the novel after that calamity" (Montgomery 317).

> it was no longer like in the old days, when he and his friends would put a net in the water for an hour or so, then pull it out full of big, mature fish. Now they had to leave nets in for half a day or longer, and they would pull fish out of the sea that were so small that in the old days they would have been thrown back…You could no longer afford to fish in season, to let the sea replenish itself. You had to go out nearly every day, even on Fridays, and even as the seabed was disappearing, and the sea grass that used to nourish the fish was buried under silt and trash. (Danticat, *Claire* 9)

This passage is not a metaphorical longing for days gone by, nostalgia over romanticized memories past. It is an explicit explanation of what happens when capitalism becomes ecologically unsustainable. Despite the fact that local fisherman "knew deep in [their] gut that it was wrong," they are still forced to "keep baby conch shells or lobsters full of eggs" (9); their formerly sustainable practice of fishing has become unmanageable, both for them and the ocean. The seabed is eroding, and the shallows are filled with silt and trash.

In part two of chapter one, entitled "The Frogs," the reader is taken back to "ten years before" (41) Gaëlle Lavaud—the townswoman to whom Nozias attempts to give his daughter—finally agrees to adopt Claire. "The Frogs"[104] takes place during a particularly hot summer during which Gaëlle is pregnant. As Gaëlle's pregnancy continues and the summer rains increase, she begins to worry about flooding, that "the rivers near her house might swell again, bringing mudslides down from the hills" (51-52). The text even tells us that her house is the only one left in this flood zone, since "newer yet shabbier" houses had been taken by the flashfloods "year after year" (52). Her husband Laurent holds occasional meetings with other people in the

[104] In the early pages of this chapter, we learn that "it was so hot in Ville Rose that year that dozens of frogs exploded" (41). Gaëlle, "who was more than six months pregnant…feared that, should the temperature continue to rise, she too might burst" (41), suggesting an internalized copoiesis with the frogs—an implicit understanding that where a nonhuman ecosystem is burdened by rising temperatures, a human ecosystem is not far behind. This segment also directly addresses a very real contemporary ecological concern in Haiti. "Haiti's recognized as having the highest proportion of threatened amphibians in the world," says S. Blair Hedges, director of Temple University's Center for Biodiversity and lead author of the study. "And that's largely from the deforestation" (Sharples). By part two of the novel, "the town, like many other coastal towns, no longer had any frogs—something that French herpetologists had linked to the increased possibility of seismic activity and freak waves" (Condé 133), and a schoolteacher reads a poem to her students about the increasing dangers of the sun on an already parched and frogless environment.

community, "warning them that the rivers were swelling in response to the lack of trees, the land erosion, the dying topsoil" (Danticat, *Claire* 52), but has trouble convincing anyone that it is worth leaving the trees in place, due to everyone's need for charcoal. Considering that this novel is set not much earlier than it was published, it is important to note that Haiti's struggle with tensions between the threat of deforestation and the local need for charcoal as a primary source of heating and cooking is a very real and complex contemporary problem.[105]

While *Claire of the Sea Light* presents the literal effects of anthropogenic climate change more deliberately than many of the texts I've addressed thus far, I am interested in the metaphorical ecologies of this novel, and the ways in which light and water illuminate them. While the main cast is fairly expansive, my close reading will predominantly focus on Nozias, his daughter Claire Limyè Lanmè Faustin, and his deceased love, Claire Narcis, for whom his daughter is named. If, as I have suggested, light operates as a marker of the linear passage of time with water refracting and redirecting that linear travel, I also suspect that water interferes with the inevitability and permanence of death.

The relationship between life and death is as omnipresent and multidirectional in this novel as light and water, and the intersections of these two thematic couplings is vital to the

[105] Researching this phenomenon proves deeply frustrating, as an overabundance of articles have been published by white non-nationals who have a westernized, first-world perspective with no postcolonial contextual awareness. An essay by Georges Michel, however, published the same year as *Claire of the Sea Light*, does an excellent job of picking apart the complex issue of contemporary deforestation in Haiti. In an attempt to counter the articles in mainstream media who "present peasant Haitians as real vandals who chop down trees maliciously or for pleasure" (Michel 282), Michel addresses the primary reason Haiti still uses charcoal—that it is locally produced, preventing Haiti from needing to rely on importing propane at prices they cannot control—and proposes a new method for creating charcoal that would render it much more sustainable: destructive distillation, or pyrolysis. He further proposes using a specific tree that happens to grow very well in the ample barren, deforested land in Haiti, the mesquite tree. With a concentrated effort to grow mesquite trees in large-scale crop farms, much in the same way Haiti grows pigeon peas, "traditional charcoal production and chopping timber grown wild on the hills and in river basins would soon stop" (284). This process, he suggests, "would also allow [Haiti] to regenerate our mangroves which are one of the cleanest natural areas, helping reduce the greenhouse gas emissions" (284). While more recent studies still predict disastrous consequences from ongoing deforestation, this is a complex ecological and social issue that requires locally sustainable solutions.

text's structure. The novel begins in the morning with a watery death—the loss of Caleb in the wave—and ends late at night with implied life—the location of another potentially drowned man and the community search party "breathing him back to life" (Danticat, *Claire* 238). Already we see something of an inversion of temporalities, where sunrise brings death and the dark of night suggests life.[106] The surprising sources of light in this novel are important to note, as most scenes which appear illuminated to the reader are not lit by direct sunlight. If "the ecology of light is vital to the question of otherness" in its ability to "enable apprehension of the other" (Deloughrey, *Radiation Ecologies* 470), it is integral to assess the profound impact of light on the watery temporal ecology of this novel. While the temporal impact of watery light is a persistent theme in Danticat's text, I would like to focus on two tracks of refracted temporal otherness: the way in which the timelines of characters' lives are redirected and the way in which the timeline of the novel itself is redirected. Both redirections occur at the intersection of light and water, and both are thematically dependent on the metaphorical and literal shallows.

The novel opens on young Claire's seventh birthday, but the impetus of the plot depends on multiple disrupted pregnancies—the watery shallows of the body, so to speak. Early in the novel, as Nozias is participating in the search for Caleb, he thinks back to the night that his pregnant partner chose their future daughter's name. They go out night fishing early in her pregnancy, and she decides to go for a swim, "her body part[ing] the moonlit surface of the sea" (Danticat, *Claire* 33). As he paddles their boat after her,

> …he saw what she had swum out to observe. Surrounding her was a dazzling glow. It was as though her patch of the sea were being lit from below…she was in the middle of a school of tiny silver fish, which were ignoring her and feeding on gleaming specks of algae floating on the water's surface. (33)

[106] Not unlike the inversion of day and night present in *The Farming of Bones*.

In this moment, as she floats in the school of fish, she is illuminated: a light, however indirect, sourced from the sun. Not unlike the scene in *The Farming of Bones*, we have a scene in which light should supposedly be absent, but is not. In *The Farming of Bones*, light creeps into the watery cave and stays—here, light is reflected by the moon onto the bodies of night swimming fish, creating a submarine glow. Assessing the intersection of light and water for its refracted temporal redirection, this scene establishes young Claire as a character before she is ever born. This is a moment in which the future is reaching back into the past, illuminating itself. "If it's a girl," she tells Nozias after getting back into the boat, "Limyè Lanmè. Sea Light. She cleared her throat and in a louder voice added, Claire like me. Then Limyè Lanmè. Claire of the Sea Light" (Danticat, *Claire* 35). The sea's light takes precedence in her choice of naming, a middle name before a first. Sea light becomes the bridge between herself and her future child, but also the differentiation between them.

Claire Limyè Lanmè's naming is important because her narrative arc is anchored to it. More than once, her name is addressed by various characters in the text, described both as "buoyant" (118) and as a "kind of name that had the power to make the sun rise" (119), reminding the reader again of the intersection of light and water. When Claire is born her mother dies in childbirth, giving her the moniker of *revenan* throughout the novel. "These types of children," the novel warns, "can easily follow their mothers into the other world" (16) and must be anchored with the living by removing them from their place of birth for a short time, lest they "spend too much time chasing a shadow they will never reach" (16). The tension between light and shadow throughout the novel is temporal, where light is equated to the daughter Claire and shadow attached to her deceased mother and her watery womb. Her mother swims in the darkness, but the light of her future daughter illuminates the scene. Her mother's watery womb

cannot survive but her illuminated daughter does. The only moments in which these two can narratively interact is in these moments of watery light.

In terms of the novel's refracted temporal progression, I will pivot the focus of this close reading to address metaphor of the Anthère lighthouse. Referenced repeatedly in this novel, including directly after the scene in which Claire's mother decides on her daughter's name, the Anthère lighthouse is a symbol of temporal redirection and interruption, a reminder to the inhabitants of Ville Rose of a time that no longer exists. The lighthouse, "around which [the] entire neighborhood had been built" (Danticat, *Claire* 149), was designed and constructed by Gaëlle's grandfather many years before the start of the novel. By the time the novel begins, it is already decommissioned, but was so well-built, however, "that it refused to rot" (150), leaving it a constant visual marker for the community long after its usefulness had expired. In its utilitarian role, a lighthouse is a beacon of hope, a signal of safety and respite for those at sea during storms or dark nights. It is a source of light when no others exist, a steadfast and unmoving construction of nonverbal communication. But where the Anthère lighthouse once provided respite to ships caught at sea, "now [it] was placed in rescue mode only when someone was missing, or in remembrance mode when someone was dead" (150). In its decommissioned state, it speaks only to a past tense, an absence. This communication with an absence, however, is vital to reading the end scene of the novel.[107]

As Claire runs away, she climbs Anthère Hill, noticing that "the higher she climbed…the brighter the stars became. The moon seemed larger, more silver than white. The air was much cooler and the sound of the waves faded, though it did not fall away completely" (231),

[107] While most of the novel is spent exploring the social ecologies of Ville Rose, the reader does not hear directly from young Claire herself until the very end of the text, when she runs away from Gaëlle and her father while search parties look for Caleb and his boat.

reminding the reader again of the relationship between light and sea that Claire embodies. As she continues up the hill, she notes other sources of light, each connected to a familiar community member: sparks coming from Msye Xavier's metal forgery tools "looked like tiny fireworks" (Danticat, *Claire* 232); a girl staying with Madame Josephine, "illuminated by the cooking fire and the lamp hanging from a post in the outdoor kitchen." In direct conflict with Claire's decision to run away and live alone on the dark the hillside, "these familiar people and the fires that made them visible to her, these points of light, now seemed like beacons calling her home" (232). Just as she pushes the idea of return from her head, she sees more lights—the lamps of a search party now looking for her, calling her name. A girl who has spent much of her young life chasing the shadow of her mother now must make a choice between light and darkness, between staying and going.

As she stands alone on the dark hill, a "warm burst of air brushed past her, rising…from the sea" (235). This sensation reminds her of the repeated experiences she refers to as rèv je klè, or waking dreams, in which she sees "an extra shadow circling" (236)—the atemporal presence of her absent mother reaching back for her. Just when the audience is unsure how Claire will proceed, she looks down the hill back at the beach where her Nozias, Gaëlle, and the other community members are, and sees Gaëlle running towards the sea with a lamp. Everyone bunches together at the water's edge holding their lamps, "forming a circle as if they were a sun," and Claire notes that "something felt different" (236). "In the middle of the lamp circle, half of which was now in the water, she saw someone pull a man in a red shirt out of the sea" (236). In this moment, Claire shares a strange temporal kinship with the lighthouse. Both the lighthouse—the manmade sea light—and Claire (of the Sea Light), are bearing witness to endangered life safely reemerging from the sea despite their absence. The lighthouse exists in an

ambivalent temporal state—decommissioned but refusing to rot; and Claire exists in a similar state—caught not only in between Nozias's and Gaëlle's custody but caught between the "sun" light of her community and the shadow of her mother. She sees here that the light *is* her community, united together in a circle of lamps providing the exact guidance out of the shadows that Claire needs. Where the lighthouse has no agency over its liminality, Claire does. It is in this moment that she makes the decision to stop chasing the shadows and to return to the light of home "just one last time" (Danticat, *Claire* 238). While I would hesitate to directly equate Claire with the lighthouse in this final scene, the temporary parallel experience they share and their liminality, caught between light and dark, sea and land, is vital to the reading of this novel. The newly built wealthy community may have rendered the lighthouse irrelevant[108], but this passage reminds us that the link between nature and culture has nothing to do with coastal townhouses and vacation villas, but rather the imitate relationship between a community and their surrounding ecologies. The lighthouse may no longer be able to rescue those in the dark, but Claire can use this copoiesis to rescue herself, and in this refracted temporal space she chooses to return to the light instead of reaching back towards the shadows.

[108] By the time the novel begins, it is already decommissioned, as a "fancy neighborhood…sprang up on the hill" behind the lighthouse and "the lights from the homes becoming beacons themselves" (149).

III: *Why are we drowning in a shallow sea?*: "Eco-nomic" Waters[109]

If you bed on a coral way in a shallow sea feeling the weight and wonder of two hundred million years of living sand, you are probably a Lucayan or a Bahamian born again.

Marion Bethel, *In a Shallow Sea*

In 1992, the Casa de las Américas literary awards saw an unprecedented influx of Bahamian authorship represented. One year later, a collection of Bahamian writing was assembled by Cuban scholar Ileana Sanz Cabrera entitled, *From the Shallow Seas: Bahamian Creative Writing Today*. With a foreword by Cuban poet Nancy Morejón and introduction by Ileana Sanz Cabrera herself, the collection is a diverse compilation of poetry, prose, histories, and pieces that are an amalgam of all three. The introduction details Sanz Cabrera's investment in the compilation, explaining that "the first anthology of Bahamian literature came out in 1983, ten years after the country's independence. By then, literatures from most of the Caribbean territories – including the English ones – had become a recognizable entity" (Sanz Cabrera 11). The first collection, simply entitled, *Bahamian Anthology*,[110] "were intended to form an image of the country and its people" (11)—an introduction to a national literature culture as yet unseen on an international stage. It introduced a series of issues and concerns, "the dearths [Bahamians] have to cope with, the voids they are compelled to fill, the issues they have to clarify" (11). *From the Shallow Seas*, Sanz Cabrera explains, is an expansion of that collection, a pointed investigation of these topics that formed a national Bahamian literary body, twenty years post-independence.

[109] "The eco-nomic tides are changing and iguanas can be seen, I hear, only on Cat Island and San Salvador, the 'new world' dollar Guanahani. By the time I discover Guanahani, make my landfall there, it will be less scrub brush, more a tourist reservation. Where will the iguanas go?" (Sanz Cabrera 21).
[110] Assembled by the College of the Bahamas.

A secondary intention behind this collection, Moréjon tells us in the foreword, is the deliberate incorporation of Bahamian literature into the larger Caribbean canon from which it has been historically excluded.[111] "From the archipelago that witnessed the arrival of the first Europeans in the New World,"[112] *From the Shallow Seas* is vital to the understanding of the Bahamas as an integral facet of the larger Caribbean and its body of regional literatures. The authors in this collection "proclaim that they belong to a larger community, the Caribbean, and acutely define and analyze their integration in this context"; "they want to assert that they are and what it feels like to be a Bahamian in the heart of the Gulf Stream" (Sanz Cabrera 7). In terms of my desire to expand definitions of circum-Caribbean literature based on the relationship between environment, identity, and time, the intentions behind this anthology perform important labor by drawing clear parallels between "the exaltation of the beauty and lushness of the islands" and "the recreation of an environment which validates communal values" (11). In other words, this anthology takes the primary themes of national and cultural identity introduced by the 1983 anthology and pushes them further, in an "urge to correct and reveal a history from an autochthonous perspective; the reconnection with a past to clarify the present" (12).

From the Shallow Seas, divided unevenly between a brief initial prose section followed by a much longer poetry section, opens with a series of pieces by Marion Bethel entitled, "In a Shallow Sea," "On a Coral Cay," "Of Guanahani," and "Surviving a Shallow Sea." Though these

[111] I address Haitian and Bahamian authorship along these same lines of exclusion, as Haiti and the Bahamas have both experienced a suspicious exile from the corpus of Caribbean literatures. The relationship between these two countries is nuanced and longstanding, with several periods of heavy immigration from Haiti to the Bahamas. Haitians first began seeking refuge in the Bahamian island chain during the political upheaval of the Haitian Revolution in the late 1790s: "between 1957 and 1981, Haitians escaping the political violence of the Duvalier dictatorships also fled to the Bahamas. In 1962, there were 10,000 Haitian migrants in the Bahamas, according to author Keith Tinker – about 15% of the country's total population" (Louis Jr.). Most recently, Haitians have sought refuge in the Bahamas after major natural disasters and in search of better work opportunities.

[112] The year in which the West often "remembers" Christopher Columbus landing in the Americas—1492—was the year in which he landed in what we now refer to as the Bahamas. The indigenous Lucayan (branch of Taíno) people referred to the island on which he landed as Guanahaní.

pieces fall under the "prose" category of the anthology, they are really "prose which incorporate [] poetry—recourse to genre integration is characteristic of oral tradition" (Sanz Cabrera 12). Unsurprisingly, a year later after this anthology was published, Bethel's own poetry anthology was published—titled, *Guanahani, My Love*—incorporating these prose pieces reformatted into more standard-appearing poems with new or altered titles. *From the Shallow Seas*, however, presents these concepts in a more raw form, a delicate balance between poetry, prose, folk histories, internal and national interrogations, a resistance against generic traditional forms that mirrors the resistance in her work.

The first piece, "In a Shallow Sea," opens with an epigraph sourced from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, informing (or reminding) the reader that "All men live enveloped in whale lines" (17)[113]. The quiet, omnipresent danger introduced by this epigraph prepares the reader for a passage that compacts layers of history, definitions of national identity, and aching questions of belonging. Following the epigraph is an italicized poetic rendering of a fable representing "the Lucayan Arawak view of the origin of the sea and islands," originally recorded in the early 1500s by Peter Martyr d'Anghiera[114]. It tells the story of a man who lived on a single island, whose only son dies; in mourning, he burns him within a "great gourd" (17). Months later, he revisits this gourd, and on opening it, discovers that "many great whales and monsters of the sea" pour out. After telling others on the island that the gourd contains the sea, four brothers

[113] Melville's novel would continue on to say, "… but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever present perils of life" (Melville 306). The chapter of *Moby Dick* from which this line is borrowed focuses on the literal and symbolic dangerous of "whale lines": the specific treatment and coiling of rope used to anchor a harpooned whale to the whaling vessel. This rope coiling process allowed the ship to contain many fathoms of carefully coiled rope on a comparatively smaller ship but was incredibly dangerous because it was so carefully coiled that an unspooling whale line may not be immediately visible or audible to a crewman, and if uncareful, he could quickly become entwined in it and cast overboard. Thus, whale lines are rendered as the ever-present quiet dangers threatening life that we do not come to recognize often until it is too late.
[114] An Italian-born historian in the service of Spain during their earliest years of Spanish imperialism. His documentation of Spain's earliest contact with the Americas was published in his 1530 text, *De Orbe Novo*.

visit the gourd "in hope to have many fishes" (Sanz Cabrera 17), but when the four brothers see the man who had told them about the gourd approaching, they drop it, thinking he would assume they were stealing. The gourd breaks open, spilling its oceanic contents and flooding so much of the island that only its mountains remain—the peaks of which make up the archipelago of the Bahamas. In a collection of writings interrogating the national identity of the Bahamas in terms of its relationship to economic and environmental exploitation, incorporating this fable at the onset of the investigation—with an epigraph sourced from a novel about the relationship between modernity and the exploitation of the natural world—provides a powerful thematic introduction.

The prose piece continues with a paragraph of four conditional clauses that denote the identity of a Lucayan, or "Bahamian born again" (18). All intimately invested in the natural ecosystems of the shallows, this paragraph concludes, "if you bed on a coral cay in a shallow sea feeling the weight and wonder of two hundred million years of living sand, you are probably a Lucayan or a Bahamian born again," inviting the reader to assess whether or not these experiences are familiar, whether or not they are, as proposed, a Bahamian. Following this paragraph, there are seven stanzas of a poem that begins with the twice repeated line, "We are more water than land" (18), reminding the reader not only of the biological truth that humans are roughly 75% water, but of the identitarian politics of the Bahamas—an archipelago of roughly 700 coral cay[115] islands surrounded by water. These stanzas are repurposed in Bethel's 1994 anthology under the title, "In the Shallow Seas" (without the prose or fable attached), and describe a deep and abiding copoiesis with the shallows themselves, telling the reader: "we are reefs and banks, rocks and brush/ we are cobalt seas of blue and green" and reminding them that

[115] "A coral cay is an island formed from sediments derived from the reef on which it sits and swept by refracted waves to a focal point on the reef flat where they are deposited" (Smithers).

"the flat land is not ugly/ in a shallow sea/ the water is shamelessly beautiful" – the very kind of corrective narrative that Morejón proposed. What I find most interesting about these two publications (the 1993 and 1994 versions) however, is in their differing endings. In the 1993 text, the "prose" piece ends with the stanzas,

> Valleys of a sea mountain
> deep channels hide
> in a shallow sea
>
> Why are we drowning
> in a shallow sea? (Sanz Cabrera 19)

In contrast, the 1994 publication of these stanzas reads,

> We are drowning, we are
> drowning valleys of a sea
> mountain deep deep channels
> hide in the shallow seas. (Bethel, *Guanahani* 3)

In both versions, the speaker is aligning themselves, however tangentially, with the channels and valleys of the island chain, submerged past the shallows of the sea. But where the 1994 publication seems almost resigned to this state of drowning, the 1993 version ends with a pleading question. Why *are* we drowning?

The following prose piece, "On a Coral Cay," provides some insight to these queries. "We no longer whale or wreck, privateer or pirate, or run rum as the eco-nomic tides change" (Sanz Cabrera 20), the text tells us. Here, Bethel continues her interrogation of the Bahamas as a site of historical exploitation that requires ocean access. Whether purging the depths for whales or shipwrecked salvages, war-related or unaffiliated pirating of goods, or the illegal transport of rum from the Bahamas to Florida speakeasies during Prohibition Era United States[116], the evolution of economic ecologies—or eco-nomic tides—has always relied on Bahamian access to

[116] For more, see "Florida and Rumrunning during National Prohibition," by Carter III.

the sea. But where these past economies have fallen out of trend, Bethel maintains that the ocean-adjacent exploitation economy persists in the form of "a tourist plantation and a banking estate" (Sanz Cabrera 20). The text continues to refer to the Bahamas as an "air-conditioned service economy" in which Bahamians are rendered "proud house servants" (20). In terms of national economies—and by extension, national identities—the Bahamas has transitioned from one state of exploitation to another, trading in piracy for off-shore banking and rum running for tourism.

The third piece in the anthology, "Of Guanahani," speaks more intimately to Bethel's home, and more explicitly to the point and purpose of her work. She continues in repeating lines like "in a shallow sea" and "on a coral cay," reminding the reader of positionality, of adjacency to the sea. Here Bethel's text parallels the changing of "eco-nomic tides" with the passage of time, suggesting that they are one in the same in a place that has historically known nothing but exploitation. The iguanas that once lived plentifully across Guanahani "can be seen…only on Cat Island and San Salvador" (21), marking the very real loss of biodiversity that inevitably accompanies the ravages of capitalism. Bethel addresses the Lucayans, the indigenous people of the Bahamas, mourning not only their absence, but the knowledges that were lost along with the people. "Guanahani consciousness and feeling," she asserts, "are far below sea level, too far, where we see only dollars and pesos as direction signs, we still believe in the gold and silver myth" (21). It is finally here that we see where the shallows are weaponized, where they symbolically stand in not for metaphorical reconciliation or subjectivity, but as a barrier between people on land and the depths, where the indigenous consciousnesses are just out of reach. These are the "oft-touristic surfaces" to which Valérie Loichot gestured, where the light of the shadows doesn't refract, but instead, reflects off of dollars and pesos, off of gold and silver myths. If light

is the passage of time and water the medium, the introduction of gold and silver, however metaphorical, interrupts even the diasporic travel of time by reflecting light back up towards the surface, distracting the viewer from the indigenous consciousness of the depths.

This piece, the most explicitly prose piece of the set, continues on to construct a kind of imagined spiritual bridge between the speaker and the Lucayans, imagining them "appreciating this sun-baked, mud brown and dry green land far more deeply than" (Sanz Cabrera 21) the author does, or can. "What I carry with me from the Lucayans," Bethel writes, "is their deep knowledge of these cays and seas. I want to boat with a Lucayan skill from cay to cay, to know these rocks like a true-true Bahamian" (21-22). In a text that mourns a lack of connection to indigeneity, that rails against a history of exploitation economies, and pushes forward towards constructing a sense of national identity unrelated to service industries, Bethel constructs her own internal sense of national identity—one founded in the internal forms of resistance modeled by her indigenous ancestors.

> …I still struggle to appreciate and acknowledge fully the undoubted advantages of modern technology, to reconcile the industrial advancements with the destruction of human life and waste of the earth's resources, to understand what the modernization has meant and continues to mean for us as human beings in a shallow sea on a coral cay… (22)

This piece concludes up by addressing Bethel's intentionality behind reclaiming indigenous terminology as protest against placenames invented and normalized by European colonizers, asserting, "As for the word 'West Indian' to denote peoples of the Caribbean colonized by the British, I do not consider myself a West Indian. It is a grand misnomer. I have come to accept Caribbean or Antillean for my regional identity" (23). The piece finishes, notably, with two stanzas of poetry, the final one reminding the reader of what was, that,

> In a shallow sea on a coral cay
> there was conch, cassava, corn and iguanas

And Lucayans!
And cotton too! (Sanz Cabrera 23)

Marion Bethel's final piece in the anthology, entitled "Surviving a Shallow Sea," is short, less than half a page, and fluctuates in form. Neither strictly poetry nor prose, Bethel uses this space to destabilize the proposed identity of the Bahamas even as she has constructed it. Sets of poetic lines alternate with rhetorical questions and prosaic musings, but ultimately bring the reader back to the relationship between the shallow sea and the depths where this Guanahani consciousness exists: "The Lucayans know well that these cays and islands are the flattened tops of a submarine mountain. They knew that even in these shallow seas there are deep deep channels—the valleys of the mountain" (24). The final lines of the piece are the doubling of one poetic line: "In a shallow sea the fertile valley is not hidden" (24). Here, Bethel repeats, almost as if to herself, that despite the shallow sea that seems to reflect every historical exploitation of her home, the fertile valley—containing all the Lucayan's "spirit" and "wisdom" (22)—is not permanently out of reach, permanently obscured. It is just beyond the shallows, still visible for those willing to look.

In Edwidge Danticat's novels, shallow waters are basins of suspended time, moments of liminal temporal respite from the traumatic whiplash of linear history. Amabelle's interactions with calm shallow waters are intimate, almost luxurious, as she feels the water around her body connecting her to both memories and self. Claire, on the other hand, embodies the shallows that Amabelle must immerse herself in; Claire *is* the suspended time, the liminal shallows between the shadowy depths of her mother long since gone and her still living community uniting on the shore. Shallows seem to be acting here as a space of relational awareness between past and present. Marion Bethel, however, observes that where the shallows could be a place of relationality between the staunchly resistant and environmentally engaged Lucayans and the

contemporary Bahamians who feel Bethel's same disconnect from the land and histories on which they stand, the "dollars and pesos" reflecting the sunlight are a barrier, a distraction. Unlike the glittering fish that reflected the moonlight with Nozias and Claire, the glittering coins disrupt the natural refraction of the shallows, preventing intimate temporal connections. For bethel, surviving the shallow sea means swimming down past the shallows, past the dollars and pesos, and pulling up what might be drowning in the depths.

Fig. 3.2: *Impression of a Fertile Valley: Not Hidden,* by Julian Currents.
Linocut print in black and gold ink, 8 x 8 inches, 2021.

Conclusion: Misplaced Shallows in a "Water Barrel Economy"[117]

not one of us understood
how the water got into the
sealed places that she did;
the unopened containers—
shut drawers, the basement,
the closed-up vessels—we
cried and cried for months—
even now writing, I well up.

Celia A. Sorhaindo, *Hypotonic*

In September of 2017, Hurricane Maria hit the northeastern Caribbean as a category five storm causing catastrophic damage to Dominica, Puerto Rico, and St. Croix. In an already dangerously active hurricane season with "17 named storms, 10 hurricanes, and six major hurricanes" (NOAA, *State of the Climate*), the 2017 season experienced the highest accumulated cyclone energy (also known as ACE)[118] since 2005 and accrued the most damage of any season on record.[119] The majority of news coverage addressing Hurricane Maria in the United States focused on the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, the horrifying death toll on the island and subsequent lack of U.S. aid; the storm was one of the costliest in U.S. history, causing about $90B worth of damage across Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and South Florida. The shocking extent of damage caused in Puerto Rico raised concerns of "insufficient personnel training" and a "mishandling of information gaps" prior to the storm, which "greatly diminished public trust

[117] A line from Celia A. Sorhaindo's poem, "Hurricane PraXis (Xorcising Maria Xperience)" describing the painful ironic absurdity of having to collect rainwater for drinking after a hurricane floods one's home.
[118] A metric used to express the amount of energy used by a tropical cyclone during its lifetime.
[119] These statistics are hard to track for a number of reasons, not only because inflation and relative population wealth changes over time, but also because most researchable figures primarily measure total financial damage caused to U.S. states/territories. A more standardized method of calculating costs of hurricane damage involves using Landsea and Pielke Jr.'s equation for "normalized damage," which takes into account inflation and the per-capita wealth of storm-damaged areas. For more, see "Normalized hurricane damage in the continental United States 1900–2017" by Weinkle, et al.

and the government's ability to effectively manage public health messaging."[120] Hurricane Maria was uniquely dangerous for a number of reasons, not the least of which being the speed at which it gained strength. The storm was "one of the most rapidly intensifying storms in recent history, intensifying to a category 5 hurricane, roughly 24 hours after being upgraded from a tropical storm."[121] Maria left over 3000 dead in its wake.

But before Hurricane Maria ever touched down in Puerto Rico as a category 4 storm, it ravaged the island nation of Dominica. Severe rainfall ahead of the hurricane caused significant flooding and landslides even before the storm hit the island, with local news sources warning residents of "life-threatening surf and rip current conditions and coastal flooding" (Dominica News Online). Maria made landfall as a category 5 storm with sustained winds of 165 mph, the most severe winds to ever hit the island in its recorded history and the strongest storm to hit Dominica since Hurricane David in 1979.[122] The winds alone caused damage to nearly every home on the island, including that of the Prime Minister.[123] The storm left 98% of buildings on the island damaged or destroyed[124], including hospitals, schools, airports, seaports, shelters, and private residences. Dominica's infrastructure was leveled, leaving powerlines down, bridges collapsed, main roads in pieces, and important rural roads that connected isolated villages to the capital completely unnavigable. Maria also left Dominica's ecological landscape brutalized, one

[120] A study conducted by the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health found that "an estimated 2,975 people died during the six-month period after Hurricane Maria. The same report identified gaps in the communications and death certification systems on the island." The same study found that "the [Puerto Rican] government was unprepared for the widespread infrastructure failures caused by Hurricane Maria. Emergency plans in place were appropriate for a Category 1 hurricane and thus vastly underestimated the storm's impact." For more, see article on study published by GW Public Health.
[121] For more, see the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) by the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica.
[122] For more, see "Maria 'potentially most catastrophic hurricane to hit Puerto Rico in a century': Governor" by Shapiro, et al.
[123] "The winds have swept away the roofs of almost every person I have spoken to or otherwise made contact with…The roof to my own official residence was among the first to go and this apparently triggered an avalanche of torn away roofs in the city and the countryside" (Shapiro, et al.).
[124] For more, see "Hurricane Maria aftermath: Children's education on hold in Dominica." by Knight.

CNN crew stating after a flyover that "nearly every tree was touched – thousands snapped and strewn across the landscape – and the island was stripped of vegetation. The rainforests appear to have vanished" (Phipps).

Celia A. Sorhaindo, a native Dominican, left home with her family at the age of 8 to move to the United Kingdom, returning to Dominica in 2005. A longtime poet and presence in the Dominican literary community,[125] Sorhaindo's poems have been printed in many journals and small presses, with one of her poems being longlisted for the UK National Poetry Competition for the 2017-2018 year. Her first pamphlet of published poetry, *Guabancex*, was published February of 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the West in full force. *Guabancex* is comprised of sixteen poems, all written in the wake of Hurricane Maria's devastating landfall in Dominica. In a recent interview with Jordan Hartt of Kahini, Sorhaindo explains that while her own home sustained comparably low-grade damage from flooding, her 85-year-old grandmother's house lost its roof and suffered "extensive damage to both inside and outside her home" (Hartt). Once the roads were passable, she went to stay with her mother while the country attempted to recover. Sorhaindo remembers that in the immediate aftermath of the storm, she struggled with "complicated—sometimes paradoxical and conflicting—emotions and feelings," composing and compiling the poems that would become *Guabancex* as a way to "work through some of that mental chaos and confusion" (Hartt). She additionally notes that "what gets portrayed on the news when a catastrophic event occurs, can be very different to the lived reality of the people going through the experience" (Hartt), and that this poetry collection was an

[125] "I was an organising committee member of the Nature Island Literary Festival for a few years from 2009 (unfortunately a physical festival has not proved viable since 2016), and from 2014 to 2017, was the Dominica Link for Hands Across the Sea, a US based non-profit organisation which aims to help raise child literacy levels in the Eastern Caribbean" (Sorhaindo, *About*)

attempt to bridge some of that gap, a kind of supplement or corrective to more mainstream narratives[126].

Guabancex was published as a paperback pamphlet by Papillote Press in Dominica. The cover features a closeup black and white photographic image of the central core of a hurricane, as seen from above, with the author's name and book's title at the bottom of the cover. The hurricane image takes up the whole of the cover, with the outermost storm bands extending beyond the bounds of the books' edges. It is comprised, in other words, entirely of hurricane. The title of the text is borrowed from the indigenous Taínos and their zemi/cemí Guabancex, a spirit or deity who "was responsible for bringing on the heavy rains and winds of the hurricanes, which happened when she was angry" (Guitar 1020).[127] In Sorhaindo's interview with Jordan Hartt, she addresses the titled of her text, describing Guabancex as the deity "associated with all natural destructive forces, including hurricanes. She's known as 'one whose fury destroys everything,' but she's not only the goddess of disaster, she's also the goddess of rebirth and renewal" (Hartt). The poet also notes that,

> Even though there is no evidence the Taíno reached as far as Dominica, it seemed an appropriate title for the book and a way of honoring the Taíno memory and the memory of all the indigenous people who perished due to colonization. Also, we have an indigenous population here in Dominica called the Kalinago and people often aren't aware of this. (Hartt)

Not unlike Marion Bethel's gesture towards to Lucayans, Sorhaindo also reaches back towards an indigenous consciousness in an attempt to more fully understand and engage with the shifting ecologies around her.

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[126] Not unlike the collection of Bahamian authorship functioning as a corrective to incorporate Bahamian literature into the Caribbean cannon, or even *The Farming of Bones* functioning as an expansive corrective to the often silenced, confused, or unclear extent of horrors committed during the Parsley Massacre.

[127] The text continues, "Guabancex had two assistants, cemís named Guatauva and Coatriquie, who were responsible for announcing her arrival and gathering together the waters" (Guitar 1020). Other sources cite Guabancex as "the goddess of weather, water, and wind" (Voss 759), or "mistress of the winds" (Schwartz 7).

Celia Sorhaindo's collection is unique in the way that it centers the post-hurricane experience. Hurricanes, or large literary storms of any kind, are thematically rich, bombastic presences and texts featuring famous storms—my mind considers Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, or even Shakespeare's *The Tempest*—focus primarily on the sublime horror of the storm itself rather than the unique experience of time immediately after surviving such a storm. Sorhaindo's collection, however, pushes back against this kind of narrative. It instead focuses on the keen sense of displacement that a hurricane leaves in its wake, both literal and temporal. It focuses on the aftershocks of a storm, on the slowness of recovery and the less sensational but just as traumatic post-storm life. It unsettles preconceived notions of the hurricane experience, the experience that continues to happen even after the news cameras turn off. In fact, the very first poem in the collection, entitled, "a poem filled with words not metaphors," explicitly addresses the reader in an attempt to correct any preconceived notions they might have on opening a poetry collection about surviving a hurricane. The 14-line poem opens, without classic form, formal punctuation, or even capitalization, "im not going to sit here and paint a heavy hurricane picture for you to/ visualise in pretty clever metaphor words will never carry you to what its like…" (Sorhaindo, *Guabancex* 1). Even now, quoting this text proves a challenge, as each line features enjambment and the entire poem is bereft of punctuation—an effect which I am certain was not lost on Sorhaindo when writing. The poem explicitly addresses the speaker's firm desire for the reader to walk away from this collection *knowing* they still know nothing about the experience of a hurricane. "…i dont/ want some reader to come here think/ this world of words was literal/ think this blank ink represents black feeling/ or that this white page feels anything" (1). Here, the poet draws attention to the explicitly raced experience of a hurricane as well, pushing back against the romantic narrative that a white

audience could ever truly understand "black feeling," and certainly not from just reading it on a page. The poem concludes, "this is what the hurricane left me with/ go out and experience it for your self/ metaphor the world however you want" (Sorhaindo, *Guabancex* 1). Sorhaindo is not interested in creating a voyeuristic experience for the reader—this is not that kind of text.

Throughout this chapter, I've looked at various Caribbean shallows both in their naturally occurring form—at the edge of the shore—as well as in various metaphorical capacities. I've imagined what kinds of things can be learned peering through them, with redirected light to guide our metaphorical eye. Maybe the shallows are abstract and displaced, and maybe the intended refraction cannot take place because the shallows are filled with coin, but the shallows are still there, still a window into another timespace. But what happens when the shallows get stirred up and muddied, rendering them impossible to see through? What happens when the shallows aren't even in the ocean where they belong, but instead, inside of one's home? Soaking through one's memories and belongings? Celia Sorhaindo's collection *Guabancex* offers a kind of response. The very next poem in the collection, entitled "Hypotonic" [128], addresses exactly this phenomenon. The title of the poem itself draws reference from a biological phenomenon in which a cell membrane is surrounded by a solution with a lower ratio of solute to water. This discrepancy creates osmotic pressure on the cell membrane that the solution is in. In response to this osmotic pressure, water molecules outside of the cell are pushed through the cell membrane into the cell itself, prompting the cell to expand or even rupture the cell membrane itself and explode.

[128] Referring to the physiological phenomenon of "having a lower osmotic pressure than some particular solution (usually that in a cell, or a bodily fluid)" (OED).

The poem "Hypotonic," which I quoted in its entirety in the epigraph to this conclusion, addresses the way this phenomenon plays out in a home that experiences flooding during and after a storm. "not one of us understood," the poem begins, "how the water got into the/ sealed places that she did;/ the unopened containers—/ shut drawers, the basement,/ the closed-up vessels…" (Sorhaindo, *Guabancex* 2). In preparation for a hurricane, it is common practice to seal important objects, documents, anything worth preserving, into closed water-tight containers. But somehow, water under pressure always seems to find its way in. The semi-permeably cell membranes—the "unopened containers" and "shut drawers" fill up with water despite all attempts to prevent it, leaving the speaker as the hypotonic cell: "we/ cried and cried for months—/ even now writing, I well up" (2). This poem, however short, is a powerful depiction of post-hurricane time. Even the structure of the poem itself, eight tight lines all around the same length, makes the poem appear on the page to be the same kind of tightly sealed container addressed in the poem. And the poem, as we see, is soaked. Despite all efforts of protection and preparation, there is nothing that can really keep a hurricane out of one's home, nothing that can really prevent the shallows from rising out of the sea and into a space where they are not welcome. Sometimes the only appropriate response is crying, to let the salty shallows back out of the cell in the form of tears.

Sorhaindo's poem "Ajai Alai" even more explicitly addresses the contentious relationship between hurricane waters and time. This poem is much longer than the previous two I've addressed, with long lines riddled with enjambment taking up the entire page, uncontainable. The poem is about the pain of thinking you've prepared for a storm and then being faced with the reality that there is little anyone can do in the face of such ecological strength. In the poem, the speaker places themselves in their house as the hurricane bears down on them: "…I realise I have

been impressively naïve/ again about the boundaries beyond boxed imagination;/" (Sorhaindo, *Guabancex* 6). A couple lines down we read, "This, this, bulging-wall/ force, squeezing water through thread-vein cracks in wood,/ breaking out, breaking in, breaking us—is unimaginable" (6). This is the same bulging-wall force described in "Hypotonic," the unstoppable pressure of water getting in where it is unwelcome. The speaker continues on, describing the abject horror of being in a house as it is ravaged by a storm, breaking and crumbling and filling with water. "I do not know what time is doing but decide to stay here/ with him and push and push against this wall, until…" (6), here the speaker trails off with an ellipsis and then begins a new thought on the next line. Where otherwise, shallow waters may have been a visual portal, a window into another time, here the waters are everywhere, coming in as rain and coming up as flood waters. They are not crystalline clear, shot through with alterior perspectives—they are not reflective or refractive or even littered with shimmering coins. Here, water obscures time. There is no direction of light in these waters—time is immeasurable here. The poem ends with the line, "The unimaginable beating down in time time time with me…" (6). The watery timespace is the unimaginable, completely obscuring meaning making in any form, linear, refracted, or otherwise.

The final poem in the collection, entitled "Hurricane PraXis (Xorcising Maria Xperience)" is the kind of poem that deserves an entire essay written about it. The stunning nine-page piece is made up of a seemingly endless series of evaluative statements describing the actions and feelings of "we" in the wake of a major storm, from the seemingly trivial to the indescribably sublime. There is not nearly enough space or time to address this poem as I would like to, but I cannot finish this chapter without focusing on it, however briefly. The piece begins,

we are grateful to be alive we are stunned to be alive
we wade through dirty water we mop water mop water mop water
we wipe up water from places we did not imagine water could go
we use every single towel/absorbent cloth in the house
we have no house left (Sorhaindo, *Guabancex* 24)

The poem continues with these disconcerting deeply emotional statements that always seem to inevitably be refuted by a final contradictory statement, "we laugh we laugh hysterically/ we cannot imagine ever laughing again" (24). Not unlike the process of recovery, the lines build and build, searching for certainty and stability, only to be subverted by themselves once again. Water flows through this text as it would through a flooded house—surprisingly, and wholly unwelcomed: "we have leaks everywhere" (25). The poem continues like this in a timeless frozen horror—things resurface, are discovered to be lost, buildings collapse, buildings have been collapsed. "we drink rum we drink gin and tonic we have no ice we have no water/ we boil dirt water we do not trust water sanitizing tablets" (26). Water is no longer falling from the sky, but is still everywhere it shouldn't be and nowhere it needs to be: "we learn to wear hats/rubber boots inside when it rains". The poem continues,

we devise clever ways to get rid of water inside our houses
we devise clever ways to stop water from getting inside our houses
we pray for rain we pray for sun we pray for rain to stop (26)

The speaker runs through the never-ending rollercoaster of complex and contradicting temporal experiences in such a timeless space—the seeming absurdity of a curfew, the temporality of watching mold grow on walls, the attempt to "compare this one to other hurricanes we have experienced", despite the fact that "we have never experienced anything like this before" (27). The speaker talks about rations arriving, about endlessly standing in lines, about the feeling of powerlessness, exhaustion, and loss inherent in such a storm. The final page reads as almost a list of emotions, all contradicting the last, lined up to remind the reader that after a hurricane, time is

not linear. Time is not an arc or a refraction. Hurricane time is one long moment in which infinite things happen simultaneously. The poem ends with a series of the way in which this hurricane has forever changed the way the speaker thinks, learns, sees. The lines of the poem disconnect and break apart even more than they have in the bulk of the poem, until they are almost difficult to read—mirroring the difficulty with which anyone could stitch together coherent thoughts after such a significant loss.

Sorhaindo's collection, *Guabancex*, reminds us that in every sunlit cave, for every point of light in a dark coastline, with every beam of refracted light or economically exploited Bahamian beachfront, water is a disruptive temporal force that doesn't stay put. The atemporal horror of life post-hurricane is one directly related to the presence of water in places where it doesn't belong—muddy shallow waters filled with debris and sewage and death. As anthropogenic climate change increases the surface temperatures of the world's oceans, each new hurricane season brings with it unprecedented damage, stronger storms, and worse flooding. *Guabancex* is a breathtaking portrait of what happens when a very real storm affects a very real group of people. When considering the shallow Caribbean waters and their oft-touristic surfaces, it is vital to remember what happens when those surfaces are pushed to their ecological limits.

4 “Wind and Shore are my close companions”: Intertidal Temporalities

A being dedicated to water is a being in flux.

Gaston Bachelard

I am nine years old and lying on my back on the rocky coral shore, gasping for breath, forgetting everything I just had to quickly remember about escaping rip currents. Hot saltwater streams from my eyes and nostrils, and it is hard to tell what is ocean and what is tears.

I am thirteen years old and digging my fingers into the unstable sand as I pull myself out of a barrel wave intent on sucking me back into the brine. I feel coarse grains accumulate painfully under my fingernails and scrape the flesh from my knees. My heart is pounding so assertively I can feel my pulse in my palms.

I am sixteen years old and running my hands over the freshly swelling knot on the back of my head. It is 2005 and several major hurricanes have hit Key West already. We were lucky with Katrina, but Wilma is on her way now. Keeping tradition, we walk to White Street Pier to watch the storm surge. An unobserved wave slips behind me and pulls my feet out from under me—as I hit the pier, another wave rushes over me, filling my mouth with sand and flecks of turtle grass.

Every time I have almost drowned, it has been in shallow waters.

"Breathing in unbreathable circumstances is what we do every day in the chokehold of racial and gendered ableist capitalism. We are still undrowning."[129] It is hard to remember almost drowning much in the same way that it is hard to remember almost dreaming. The boundary between land and sea, between sleeping and waking, is obscure, intangible, and overwhelming. Our minds keep secrets from our bodies, and just so, the ocean keeps secrets from the shore. I like to think about the sea in terms of this relationship—often we think of the ocean as being separate from us, from land, from the shore. Inaccessible and difficult to articulate. Dark and cold and other. But these secrets are shared, and then they are, it happens at the shore.

The *shore* here, is that moment just as you are waking up, that moment just as the wave breaks over the sand. The shore is the space where the window between temporal worlds is left cracked, where the subconscious touches the conscious and where the oceanic abyss[130] caresses exposed terrestrial sands: a stage upon which the intangible approaches the tangible. Sometimes that approach is gentle—a memory, a dream, or a gently rising tide—other times, it arrives as a nightmare, an invasion, a hurricane. It is this meeting place—this shore and its inherent permeability, the movement of waves and their impact and implications—that I am most interested in. In this final chapter, I address an aesthetics of active, moving thought, of place articulated through this movement, and what that movement means for us as we continue living through the Anthropocene. Where the symbolic temporal weights of mangroves, conch shells, and even the shallows were brought to bear through an analysis of physical aesthetics, I argue that intertidal temporalities can only operate on the grounds of constant movement and agitation,

[129] "…And by we, I don't only mean people like myself whose ancestors specifically survived the middle passage, because the scale of our breathing is planetary, at the very least" (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 2).
[130] "In actual fact the abyss is a tautology: the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green" (Glissant, *Poetics* 5).

of an inherent lack of fixity, resolution, or permanence of any kind. When a wave crashes, it brings with it all of the depths of the ocean and lays those depths bare to observe, to be touched by. Reading this theme of constant agitation through the lens of a temporal ecology prompts critical interpretations that not only allow for a sense of collapsing and regrouping, but require it. The crashing wave, then, may be revolutionary, its resultant spray protective, and its recession marked by deeply held reflections on the self.

My framing of intertidal temporalities draws significant influence from tidalectics[131] and critical ocean studies. In her 2009 monograph *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey examines the ocean as a "metonymic history for the millions of Africans who were transported across the Atlantic" (DeLoughrey, *Routes* 52), taking up Derek Walcott's position of the ocean as a repository for Caribbean history, as Caribbean history[132] itself. By localizing maritime space, DeLoughrey's text expands previous networks of thought which understood the ocean as a spatial mechanism by rendering the ocean as a temporal force, as a contender against the more "temporally inflected discourse of terrestrial knowledge" (54). Here we see a critical application of Edward Kamau Braithwaite's supposition that "unity" in the Caribbean is "submarine."[133] *Tidalectics*, Brathwaite's response to the rigid and exclusive Hegelian dialectic, rejects the notion of dialectic, which is three–the resolution in the third," in favor of his coined concept, "'tide-alectic' which is the ripple and the two tide

[131] Where Kamau Brathwaite's theory of "tidalectics," functions as an analytical framework based on what he describes as "the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic…motion, rather than linear" (Mackey 44), DeLoughrey and Flores engage tidalectics as "a kind of submarine immersion and oceanic intimacy that is constituted by an entangled ontology of diffraction." (DeLoughrey and Flores, 138).
[132] "Where are your monuments, your battles, your martyrs? / Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, / In that grey vault. The sea. The sea / Has locked them up. The sea is History" (Walcott 364).
[133] "…The unity is submarine / breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments / whole" (Brathwaite, *Caribbean Man* 1).

movement" (Naylor 145). Not unlike Glissant's expansion of the rhizome into the mangrove, or indeed Wright's renegotiation of the chronotope to suit a diasporic narrative, *tidalectics* confronts the Eurocentric presumption of convenient synthesis and instead privileges the recursive, expansive "ripple and two-tide movement" for a Caribbean application. To DeLoughrey's point, "tidalectics foreground historical trajectories of dispersal and destabilize island isolation by highlighting waves of migrant landfalls into the Caribbean" (DeLoughrey, *Routes* 51), thereby establishing a counter-narrative to rigid, racist, and colonial ideas of ethnic and linguistic nationalism. Reflecting on the sea as an unfixed, fluid site of history, tidalectics embrace the plurality, diversity, and inherent lack of fixity lauded by more contemporary anti-colonial Caribbean critics.

In terms of locating intertidal temporalities in a context of more recent oceanic scholarship, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Tatiana Flores observe in their 2020 essay,

> there is now a rich maritime grammar developing across the disciplines as scholars examine the ocean as a space of transnational capital and shipping, of plastic waste and regimes of disposability, as a visible marker of climate change, and as an agent in sea level rise and in environmental crises ranging from tsunamis and hurricanes to coral bleaching and ocean acidification. (DeLoughrey and Flores 133)

DeLoughrey and Flores expand on the existing maritime grammar by performing a series of visual analyses of Caribbean fine art through the tidalectic lens of diffraction, addressing the capability of seawater to literally and metaphorically distort the visual appearance of an object or body submerged. But where many of the aforementioned fields of thought are directly tied to the "narratives of extinction, apocalypse, alterity, and precarity" (133) of the Anthropocene—all concepts which seem intrinsically linked to a notion of disrupted time—the ocean is largely left out as an active agent of temporal disruption itself. Where DeLoughrey and Flores broaden Brathwaite's concept of tidalectics to focus on the visual repercussions of tidal movements—on

the ocean as a lens of visual distortion—I am interested in the ocean's movements themselves and what temporal disruptions look like at their terraqueous coastal intersections. These intertidal temporalities and the sociopolitical space they construct in Caribbean women's literature suggest that the energy transfer inherent in a wave breaking on the shore can be read as a vital instance of temporal disruption.

Ocean waves occur as the result of the "outward manifestation of kinetic energy propagating through seawater."[134] In other words, waves are not so much the visual display of moving *water* as they are of moving *energy*. Caused by various combinations of wind speed, duration, and the distance the wind is traveling, waves are most typically classified either by their initial cause – Kelvin waves are caused by weakened winds in the central Pacific Ocean, whereas capillary waves are caused by light breezes traveling across water surfaces at low speeds— and by their subsequent behavior—breaking waves, for example, are characterized by their "breaking" state of collapsing on themselves. Deepwater waves and shallow water waves are also distinct from one another, both in cause and behavior. Since the ratio of water depth to wave height is a strong indicator of where and how the wave is occurring, the depth of the water and the presence of shoreline is significant to the quality and behavior of the waves. Deepwater waves, which have no objects of resistance to interrupt their travel, often have the energy to travel much greater distances. Shallow water waves, on the other hand, are heavily influenced by the presence of the ocean floor and occur only in water "shallower than one-twentieth the wavelength" (Maury Project). Because the speed of a wave is a function of the water's depth, shallow water waves can travel much faster than deep water waves. It is by these same

[134] In reality, the water in waves doesn't travel much at all. The only thing waves do transmit across the sea is energy. (NOAA, *What causes ocean waves?)*

mechanics that tsunamis are so devastating, as their wavelength-to-ocean-depth ratio qualifies them as a short wave, allowing them to gain tremendous speed.[135]

In terms of shallow water waves, I am most interested the idea of the wave as it breaks. A breaking wave, also known as a "breaker," is formed when a wave approaches the shore and its travel is disrupted by the resistance created by the sloping of the seafloor. The seafloor slows the momentum of the trough of the wave while the crest continues at its original speed, causing the crest to lean forward until the wave eventually collapses onto itself, breaking. There are four subcategories of breakers—spilling, plunging, collapsing, and surging—the former two of which are caused by varying seafloor steepness, while collapsing waves are a combination of spilling and plunging, and surging waves don't have time to formally break because the temporal transition from deep to shallow water is too brief. Regardless of the type, however,

> research work on breaking waves can be divided into three categories: those concerning waves (1) before, (2) during, and (3) after breaking. Although up to now significant advances have been made in understanding the processes leading to the breaking, there are still some aspects of these questions unanswered: in particular, question (3), namely, what happens after breaking of those waves. (Chen et al. 2395)

While the essay cited above by Geng Chen, Robin Ming Chen and Yue Liu is much more invested in the mathematical physics of a breaking wave than my critical literary purposes demand, I appreciate the mystery that a seemingly simple wave holds for scholars even as recently as 2018. For my part, I too am interested in what happens before, during, and after a "wave" "breaks" in Caribbean women's writing—however abstract my understanding of *wave* and *breaking* may be. Where Antonio Benítez-Rojo suggests "the culture of the Caribbean . . . is not terrestrial but aquatic . . . [it] is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of

[135] "In the deep ocean, a tsunami can move as fast as a jet plane, over 500 mph, and its wavelength, the distance from crest to crest, may be hundreds of miles" (NOAA, *Tsunamis*).

waves, of folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity" (Benitez-Rojo 11), I would counter that perhaps it is both, and that difference is significant.

The intertidal, or "littoral," zone is the area on a shoreline where water meets the land between high and low tides. Tidal ranges—the difference between high and low tide—are impacted by a variety of factors including the earth's tilt and the shape of the body of water experiencing the tide: they may be as high as fifty feet, as in the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia[136], or as small as ten to twenty centimeters, in places like the Caribbean Sea[137]. Whether a king tide[138] or a microtide[139], however, the intertidal zone is inherently defined by hosting the constant interaction between ocean and land. Known as home for a rich and abundant diversity of life—including but not limited to mangroves and conch shells[140]—the intertidal zone is anything but still or quiet. Intertidal temporalities, in the same way, are constantly in motion—surging, crashing, spraying, regrouping, and slowly shifting the very boundaries between land and sea.

[136] The Bay's tides officially measure over 15 m (50′ in height), but the incoming tide is not a 50′ wall of water. It takes 6 hours for the tides to change from low tide to high tide. That means it takes more than an hour for the tide to rise 10′ vertically" (Bay of Fundy Tourism).
[137] "Analysis of tidal characteristics from 45 gauge locations indicates that the Caribbean Sea has a microtidal range, for the most part between 10 and 20 cm" (Kjerfve 4243).
[138] "The king tide is the highest predicted high tide of the year at a coastal location. It is above the highest water level reached at high tide on an average day. King tides are also known as perigean spring tides" (Environmental Protection Agency).
[139] "Barriers along coasts with a tidal range of less than 6 ft are classified as microtidal, and those on coasts with a tidal range between 6 and 12 feet are known as mesotidal. Barriers are not usually found along macrotidal coasts (tidal range greater than 12 ft)" (US Army Corps of Engineers).
[140] "The Common Florida Crown Conch abounds in the intertidal areas of Florida and Alabama, usually in the shade of mangrove trees" (Abbott 136).

Intertidal temporalities are first and foremost concerned with relation, with the travel of energies from the depths of the ocean to the edges of the shore; they are embodied by the recursive confrontation between "our terrestrial modernity" (DeLoughrey, *Heavy Waters* 708) and the sea as history. The unique displays of temporal disruption that occur at the intertidal zone are likewise invested in the analysis of movement: agitation, collapse, spray. When Brathwaite observed that the "hurricane does not roar in pentameter,"[141] he was addressing the insufficiency of imperial language to convey a Caribbean experience through poetry. Having lived through several myself, I can confirm his aural observation, but I remain curious about *what* it is that the hurricane is roaring. If the sea *is* history, what does it mean to feel copoietic with the waves? Or to watch history surge and break over and over again onto a shore? What does it mean to be able to inhabit an intertidal temporality even when the ocean is nowhere within view? And when we reframe these questions through the lens of anthropogenic climate change, what does it mean to watch the biodiversity of intertidal zones rapidly depleted or moved?

In this final chapter, I approach three authors on their engagement with intertidal temporalities. Merle Collins, a Grenadian poet, performer, educator, and activist, published a collection entitled *Lady in a Boat* in 2003. Drawing its name from the nutmeg riddle—"a lady in a boat in a red petticoat" (Collins, *Lady* 5)—this collection reflects on the memory of those who died during the Grenadian revolution, constructing intimate portraits of the dead while demanding accountability of the living, "Can you call their names? Who are/ their parents?...How to pretend not to know/ of the raw wound in a na-/ tion divided?" (Collins, *Lady* 42). Collins's collection is alive with symbolic ecologies, all of which fluidly surge around the text's central revolutionary wound. Nalo Hopkinson, a Jamaican-born Canadian writer of

[141] "…And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm that approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience" (Brathwaite, *Roots* 265).

speculative fiction, often incorporates Caribbean language, history, and culture into her novels even when they are set elsewhere or elsewhen. While her two novels *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and *Midnight Robber* (2000) are set in very different places—the former in a dystopian Toronto, Canada and the latter split between two future-set planets called Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree—they both incorporate general themes and specific scenes of temporal disruption. These specific scenes, I argue, reflect the aesthetics of intertidal temporalities despite their distant-future-oriented settings, and tie these novels back into a larger tradition of diasporic Caribbean literature. The final author I will address in this chapter is the Guyanese poet Grace Nichols. While an abundance of her work reflects the intricate emotional ecologies of the Caribbean, it is her 2005 collection, *Startling the Flying Fish*, that I find most compelling in terms of intertidal temporalities and her close companions of "Wind and Shore" (Nichols, *Startling* 10). My readings of Collins, Hopkinson, and Nichols, then, reflect the life cycle of a crashing wave: the initial impact, the resulting spray, and the pull from shore.

I: Always Returning, Ev-er Traveling: Waves of Revolution in Grenada

You know/ hurricane develop in/ secret? Not a whisper in/
breeze till wind with its rumour/ shake roof in October

Merle Collins, *Lady in a Boat*

Merle Collins was born in Aruba in September of 1950[142] and returned to Grenada with her parents soon after her birth. Earning undergraduate degrees from the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica, a master's degree in Latin American Studies from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and a PhD from the London School of Economics that focused on "Caribbean Politics and Government,"[143] Collins was deeply involved in politics leading up to and including the Grenadian Revolution (1979—1983), only leaving the country in 1983 once the U.S. invaded. Having "always been interested in history, politics, and the culture" (Wilson 96), Merle Collins's literature reflects her significant political and cultural passions; the first poem for which she was well known was written while working at the National Women's Organization and engages callaloo[144] as a metaphor for Grenada's revolution. Performance too is an important facet of Collins's life and work—her first collection of poetry was published in 1985 while she was a member of the performance group African Dawn.[145] Personally invested in

[142] Collins was born only one year before Grenada's constitution was changed to allow all adults to vote. "In Grenada in 1951, with major constitutional change allowing for universal adult suffrage, there were, for the first time, no property or income qualifications for voters. Everyone over twenty-one, women and men, was eligible to vote" (Collins, *What Happened?* 37).
[143] "I mean, technically, it is a PhD in Government. The actual research is about Grenada from 1950 up to 1979 when the Revolution took place" (Wilson 95).
[144] "So, yes, I did quite a bit of work, particularly within the NWO, National Women's Organization. When we put on something in my local group, that was the first time I worked with a group on a public presentation, and that's when I wrote a poem called 'Callaloo,' really talking about everything that was going on in Grenada and comparing it to a callaloo soup" (Wilson 96).
[145] "African Dawn was a group that did poetry and music. I first met African Dawn in London, in 1980. I joined the group in '85 and members of the group were from various places—Senegal, Zimbabwe, someone from Sierra Leone, someone from Uruguay, me myself from Grenada. It was for me just a tremendous experience when I saw them perform, blending poetry with music. I spoke to them afterwards and told them that I was really excited by their work and they told me that they had heard me perform and they were excited too. So in order of that mutual

anticolonial politics,[146] Collins struggled for years to articulate her feelings on the revolution and its end. In her 1995 essay, *Grenada—Ten Years and More: Memory and Collective Responsibility,* Collins reflects on the events of 1983 and the "the lingering sense of horror" (Collins, *Ten Years* 72) that remains in the cultural memory of that year. As complex as political revolutions inherently are, she notes, "that formal political organisation and the international repercussions of the Grenada events have had much publicity. Less attention has been focused on the emotional and psychological effects on the Grenadian people of the events of October 19th, 1983" (75). To understand why the Grenadian Revolution—the "most advanced effort to bring socialism to the English-speaking Caribbean"[147]—became globally politically sensationalized, it is important to know the context of the revolution and what brought about its end.

Grenada is a small volcanic island nation located near the tail end of the Lesser Antilles, with St. Vincent to the north and Trinidad and Tobago to the south. Originally populated by peoples from South America[148], then observed, named and "claimed" by Christopher Columbus in 1498 and Amerigo Vespucci in 1499, Europeans did not attempt to settle until 1609[149] when English colonizers were driven out by the indigenous Carib people. It wasn't until 1649 that the French established a settlement on the island that there was a permanent European presence. Conflict immediately broke out between the French colonizers and indigenous communities and

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excitement we decided to get together. We performed a lot throughout Britain and Europe on tours and such" (Jackson).

[146] "I don't like involvements in political situations around the world generally. So, I generally oppose it. Where Grenada was concerned…I still cannot say that I welcome invasion because I am conscious of how that kind of invasion can put people in a subservient role. I oppose any colonialism, British colonialism, so I don't want to see another chop down situation. It is in that sense that I cannot welcome invasion" (Jackson).

[147] "As the single most advanced effort to bring socialism to the English-speaking Caribbean, regionally the Grenadian Revolution stands only after the Haitian Revolution of 1804, and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 in the scope and degree of change brought to political institutions" (Heine 3).

[148] "Colonization estimates for 26 islands indicate that the region was settled in two major population dispersals that likely originated from South America" (Napolitano).

[149] "According to documents written much later, in the reign of the English King, Charles II, by Major John Scott, a group of London merchants had backed an expedition in 1609 to make the first attempt at acquiring and settling Grenada…ships returned from Trinidad on 15 December 1609, eight months later" (Steele 35-36).

persisted until 1654, when the remaining indigenous survivors fled the island. The French continued their occupation, establishing an economy of indigo and sugar cane, until the British captured the island in 1762 during the Seven Years' War. The island was fought over by the French and English for years until the English effectively "won" in the late 1700s. As the slave trade was outlawed within the British Empire in 1807, and slavery was outlawed in 1833, indentured laborers were brought in from India to offset the subsequent labor shortage. In 1843, a merchant ship passing through from Indonesia introduced the nutmeg plant to Grenada, founding a national industry that at one point would produce forty percent of the world's nutmeg. Today, that estimate has dropped to roughly twenty percent (Grenada trails only second to Indonesia), but still provides roughly thirty percent[150] of the island's population with income. But while the trees can grow up to seventy-five feet, they have relatively shallow root systems, and "between 2002 and 2004, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Ivan and Emily, 555,000 nutmeg trees (more than 90 per cent) were destroyed. By 2011, nutmeg production was twice as high, but recovery was still less than 15 per cent of pre-hurricane volumes" (Ewing-Cho).

After decades of increasing political unrest and activism against the repressive laws of the British monarchy, Eric Gairy founded the Grenada United Labor Party as a trade union and pushed for better working conditions throughout the nation. As Grenada gained internal political momentum, Gairy served as Premier of the Associated State of Grenada from 1967—1974. When the country officially gained independent from the United Kingdom, Gairy—"widely regarded as an eccentric and authoritarian leader"[151]—served as the nation's first Prime Minister

[150] "Nutmeg, dubbed 'black gold' by locals, was introduced from the East to Grenada in 1843. Currently accounting for around nine per cent of Grenada's total harvested area, the crop provides income to approximately 30 per cent of the island's population" (Ewing-Cho).

[151] "Sir Eric Gairy, 75, widely regarded as an eccentric and authoritarian leader during his 12-year term as Grenada's prime minister, died Aug. 23 at his home in Grand Anse in southern Grenada. Though the immediate cause of death was not disclosed, Sir Eric had been in ill health since having a stroke last year. He also had diabetes and glaucoma" (Washington Post).

until 1983. The 1970s in Grenada were a politically turbulent time and opposing political parties, including the Marxist-Leninist New Jewel Movement—led by Maurice Bishop—pushed back against Gairy and his personal militia, known as the Mongoose Gang. Despite Gairy's comments to the contrary—that they were "just some unruly young fellows from [his] union"[152]—the militia's moniker originates from Gairy claims that he first hired these young men as part of a World Health Organization project[153] to reduce the mongoose population in the country: i.e.: just as the mongoose was brought to the Caribbean to eradicate the rat population, so too was the Mongoose Gang set on citizens deemed antithetical to the state. Promoted by Gairy to the title of Special Reserve Police or "police aides," the Mongoose Gang terrorized Grenadians in plainclothes uniforms, often carrying "thick pieces of wood"[154] instead of guns.

While Eric Gairy was visiting the United States 1979, Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement—also known as the New Joint Endeavor for Welfare Education and Liberation—overthrew Gairy's increasing corrupt government in a bloodless coup, suspending his constitution, and installing The People's Revolutionary Government (PRG), which remained until 1983. Bishop described life under Eric Gairy's erratic regime[155] as

> a total dependence on imperialism, a reality that meant extreme poverty, characterized by massive unemployment, with more than half of the work force out of work, high

[152] "'The Mongoose Gang, Mr. Gairy said, was 'just some unruly young fellows from my union.' He added: 'They were always fighting in the rum shops so I got them jobs in a World Health Organization mongoose eradication project here. The name stuck. But a private army? Ridiculous'" (Prial).
[153] Originally brought to the Caribbean to eradicate rats from sugarcane plantations, the mongoose quickly became an invasive species in the region and posed a health risk as a carrier of rabies.
[154] "The Associated Press released historic footage on its reporting on the political crisis in Grenada in 1974 on the eve of the island's attainment from Independence from Great Britain in 1974. The report highlights the notorious secret police charged with crushing dissent against Sir Eric Gairy" ("Grenada Police Screener").
[155] In an interview in 1980, Bishop also explained, "we inherited a situation of absolutely no planning. It was anarchy. In the 1918 budget there was $15 for an economist for the whole year. When we pressed in parliament, we were told that was a token provision in the event they found an economist. There was no planning. Gairy believed he was a mystic. He seemed to believe he had a direct line to God and that's how the problems of the country got solved" (New Internationalist).

> malnutrition, illiteracy, backwardness, superstition, poor housing and health conditions combined with overall economic stagnation and massive migration.[156]

Focusing on aggressive social, economic, and agricultural policies that would increase literacy and wages across the country, the PRG also developed close ties with Cuba—a nation which had experienced their own revolution only two decades prior—in order to provide free medical consultations. Internal tensions within the PRG were brought to a head when Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard had Maurice Bishop placed under house arrest on October 19, 1983. A crowd of his supporters staged a massive protest and freed him, and while reports of that day are still contested by historians and Grenadians alike, Coard was complicit with a military takeover that resulted in Bishop and many of his cabinet members[157] being assassinated[158].

In the United States, the Reagan administration had been closely monitoring the development of an increasingly communist Grenada, and despite the fact that their international airport was "planned by the British and Canadian government, assisted by Cuban construction workers and a Miami-based dredging firm" (Edmonds), Reagan spun the construction project, condemning Grenada as "a Soviet-Cuban colony being readied as a major military bastion to export terror and undermine democracy" (Shearman 661). Following Bishop's assassination, a letter sent to the U.S. on October 23, 1983 from Eugenia Charles, the leader of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and then-Prime Minister of Dominica—a letter which now-

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[156] "…Such a situation was intolerable and as such the progressive forces of our nation got together in March 1973, under the leadership of our Party the New Jewel Movement, in order to take power so as to revolutionise our economy, our politics and our society" (Marcus 49).

[157] "Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, Minister of Health Norris Bain, Minister of Education Jacqueline Creft, Minister of Foreign Affairs Unison Whiteman, trade unionists Fitzroy Bain and Vincent Noel, businessmen Evelyn Bullen and Evelyn Maitland, Production Manager of the Marketing and National Importing Board (MNIB), Keith Hayling, member of the People's Revolutionary Army, Dorset Peters, and Grenadian civilians including high school and other students, were killed at Fort Rupert, situated on the hillside near to the hospital in St. George's, the capital" (Collins, *What Happened?* 19).

[158] "The military seized power on the Caribbean island of Grenada today in a bloody confrontation that killed Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and several of his Cabinet members, the official Radio Free Grenada announced" (Cody).

declassified CIA documents strongly suggest was penned in exchange for a $100,000 "donation" from the CIA (Regan Presidential Library)—observing that "the capability of the Grenada armed forces is already at a level of sophistication and size far beyond the internal needs of that country" and requesting "a peacekeeping force with the assistance of friendly neighboring states to restore on Grenada conditions of tranquility and order so as to prevent further loss of life and abuses of human fights pending the restoration of constitutional government" (The New York Times). On the morning of October 25, 1983, the United States and a coalition of six other Caribbean nations launched a full-scale invasion of Grenada.

Condemned only a week later by the United Nations General Assembly as a violation of the "norms of international law,"[159] the invasion—"which previously had been described as a surgical operation with few casualties" (Atkinson)—left at least 160 Grenadian soldiers and 71 Cubans dead, dozens more wounded, and hundreds captured as political prisoners. Like many United States military operations, there are still many details of these years that remain unknown; "it has been suggested in various publications that the United States government may in fact have been instrumental in developing the subjective conditions for the Grenada crisis."[160] But between losing their revolutionary leader and being immediately invaded by and international military operation, citizens of Grenada retreated internally, reticent to express support for either Bishop's party or Coard's interference. Ultimately, Collins states,

> There are no winners, except perhaps the Government of the United States. Ten years and more after the Grenada events, these considerations are important because they have influenced the psyche of Grenada and the entire Caribbean, because growing up in Grenada and throughout the Caribbean now there is a generation which was not even born during the conflict but which is influenced by the silences and the intensity of emotion regarding the subject of the conflict. (Collins, *Ten Years* 75)

[159] "The prevailing view, however, was that the invasion violated the norms of international behavior for which the United Nations stands. Most countries rejected U.S. arguments that the action was justified in order to save American lives, restore order to the island and prevent the export of Marxism from it" (Berlin).
[160] "…(Clark, 1987; Nitoberg, 1984)" (Collins, *Ten Years* 75).

This is the sociopolitical positionality from which Merle Collins writes. Having turned twenty-four the year Grenada gained independence, twenty-eight when the New Jewel Movement stepped into power, and just barely thirty-three when Maurice Bishop was assassinated, Collins has lived a life framed by the events of that time. It is no surprise, then, that the experience of disrupted time plays a significant role in her work.

Merle Collins's 2003 poetry collection, *Lady in a Boat*, was published twenty years after the invasion. With a title directly referencing the Grenadian export of nutmeg[161]—and all of the implications therein—this publication is a haunting, lingering memorial: of place, of people, and of memory. In a country where "parents and grandparents have often dealt with the trauma by burying it deep, saying, "That gone,"[162] Collins asks,

> What makes us keep talking about these traumatic events, or remembering them, even when it appears we cannot sensibly discuss them? Does it make sense to remember what might have been? Can the past, traumatic and otherwise (if there is much otherwise), help map the way to the future? …If young people, representing the elusive future, have to be part of the change envisioned, doesn't it make sense for them to know and discuss details about the past? (Collins, *What Happened?* 16)

As I've noted many times throughout these chapters, the pattern of recurring trauma is a common trope explored in literature of the African diaspora, often originating out of the intergenerational trauma of the Atlantic Slave Trade. But what does literature look like when it explores a more recent trauma? A lived-through trauma? A trauma one can still remember clearly? It took Merle Collins twenty years to publish a collection of poetry about the revolution in Grenada, and *Lady in a Boat* makes it very clear as to why. This collection is about Grenada and its intimate social

[161] "*Riddle/* Lady in a boat/ With a red petticoat/ *Answer*/ Nutmeg" (Collins, *Lady* 5).
[162] "They look instead to a future without much political involvement for them or, they must sometimes hope, for their children. Some parents who were involved in demonstrations as 18-year-olds in the Seventies would perhaps not encourage their children to do the same, fearful because of the painful lessons of their own youth" (Collins, *What Happened?* 15-16).

ecologies, the networks of life and loving that were ruptured and destroyed in 1983. These ecologies are deeply invested in "counting time" (Collins, *Lady* 15), in "Mean time, night time descending" (20); they express concern and anguish over "collective pain" (25), over inconsistent and misremembered narratives,[163] and what counts as "easy tributes to the dead" (22). And throughout this collection, Collins draws an immediate connection between the emotional ecologies of Grenada and its literal ecologies. The speaker compares their father's malignant cancer to invasive "vines curling" (13) and "choking the crop" (14) of his life; the poem ends with the sun—his life—being "swallowed by the sea" (14) on its setting. Collins presents us with a text in which the ecologies of Grenada itself respond to the events of 1983. "They say the land upset, sea/ *bazoodee* and every fruit,' every flower in distress" (31), Collins writes. "They say it was like the root/ of that year rot in the ground…morning glo-/ry waking wrong time of the/ day, opening itself in// the evening when the sun sink-/ ing into the sea" (31). Collins even evokes the famous mimosa pudica—or shame bush[164]—as a metonym for the silence that enshrouds the country. "Study shame bush," she writes, "let we see you do that reading/ you will understand the silence people keeping" (52). These symbolic ecologies are bound up in the temporality of a broken revolution.

In terms of intertidal temporalities, I am most interested in the poems in this collection that address the sea as an agent of temporal disturbance. For Collins, the sea appears as a regular in this ecological cast—sometimes rendered as a passive receptor for the sinking sun, and other times less so. In the poem, "Roll Call," for example, "the sea kicks, rumbles,/ fumes its own

[163] As the speaker and her mother discuss the speaker's now dead father, it is clear they remember him differently and her mother's "eyes declared [her] Judas" (Collins, *Lady* 25).
[164] "*Mimosa pudica* L. (Mimosaceae) also referred to as touch me not, live and die, shame plant and humble plant is a prostrate or semi-erect subshrub of tropical America and Australia, also found in India heavily armed with recurved thorns and having sensitive soft grey green leaflets that fold and droop at night or when touched and cooled" (Ahmad 115).

tributes to those/ who could see horizon where// others just saw endless surg-/ing seascape" (Collins, *Lady* 42). Here the sea itself pays memorial tribute to fallen revolutionaries who saw beyond the literal and metaphorical horizon. In "October All Over," however, Collins renders the events of October 1983 as an out-of-season hurricane. Drawing its title from a rhyme designed to teach its reciters proper caution during hurricane season,[165] "October All Over" leaves the reader with an empty hollow fear, reminding them that "*that* [emphasis mine] hurricane sea-/ son was cool as a cucumber" (33), that "even the warning from time/ wasn't sounding urgent" (33). Using enjambment to visually rupture notions of "re-member", of "sea-son", of "ra-dio", Collins pushes the reader to understand how memory, time, and communication were *all* broken by the violent end of Grenada's revolution. While the Atlantic Hurricane Season officially runs from June 1—November 30,[166] those who have lived through such seasons know most are over with by the time October rolls around. But this year, Collins, reminds us, was different: "You know/ hurricane develop in/ secret? Not a whisper in// breeze til wind with its rumour/ shake roof in October" (34). The hurricane of that October destroyed the island: "wind was rage, was ri-ot" (34). The speaker then explains that the rhyme must have been misinterpreted—that one could "lis-//ten to a rhythm all the/ days of your life and never/ get the form and the turn// and the meaning of the thing that it saying" (35). The rhyme then, becomes a gradually increased state of warning, leaving the reader in October when, indeed, all was over.

Throughout the collection, the sea stands in for an *elsewhen*: it receives the speaker's father when his cancer finally takes him; it kicks and rumbles[167] in recognition of those who saw

[165] "June, too soon;/ July, stand by; August, look/ out, you must; September, re-// member; October, all o-/ ver" (Collins, *Lady* 33).
[166] "The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30. The Atlantic basin includes the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico" (NOAA, *Tropical Cyclone Climatology*).
[167] See "Roll Call", mentioned above.

it as more than a surging seascape. Most notably, it represents an antithesis of shelter and safety. In "Voices and Journeys," Merle Collins positions the sea as an alluring, loving force:

> Sea, always returning, ev-
> Er travelling, whispering
> Instigator of a fur-
>
> Tive flight from mountain, from green
> And shaded shelter. (Collins, *Lady* 73)

The sea, for Collins, whispers, pulling her from the shaded shelter of the mountain, which she equates to "teaching" and "shaping" (73)—a foundational knowledge. The sea, meanwhile, is always traveling, always returning, and always "there is longing" (73) and "wanting" (75). Where the mountains grow strong trees and have "decisive/ boundar[ies]" (73), the sea "winks at [her]// to make a wish" (73-4). The sea is given active verbs: it "blusters" the speaker to Venezuela, it "maps" her to Jamaica, and "rocks" (74) her in Trinidad; where the north star is invoked as a constant, the mountain tells the speaker that the "sea turns, shuffles, sighs, flows/ and thunders," that she should "*Know the ar-/rogance of wandering*" (74). A warning issued, a tension identified.

As the poem progresses, the tension between mountain and sea increase alongside the internal tensions of the speaker and their home: the "sea rushes back to shore and/ I watch, I wait, wondering" (75). Caught between the foundational, ancestral knowledge of the mountains and the seductive futurity of the sea, the speaker can "feel the revolution/ rolling," can "hear the guns and/ sense the reeling" (75); just as Grenada struggled between past and future, so too is the mountain "still/ in shadow" while the sea rumbles ominously. The once clear boundaries between the "light and shadow" of life collapse as the sea is "growl-/ing, impatient, thundering,/ foaming", and while the speaker leaves to "choke on the salt of strange/ and distant seas," "still in/ [their] head that sea, that thunder-ing" (75). It matters not where the speaker travels—the

tensions between past and future follow, thundering. As with 1983, the poem ends in a series of increasingly desperate questions as the speaker attempts to reconcile past and future.

Reading this poem as representative of an intertidal temporality, we see the recurring approach of the sea, the active fluidity of its movements. But where this reading becomes intertidal is in its incremental shifts, its destabilizing of predictable terrain. Throughout the poem, the reader questions the intentions of the sea, first asking "why/ this blue always calling? What/ is love and why this wanting?" (Collins, *Lady* 73). But each time this question is asked, it changes slightly. The second time, the speaker asks, What is/ love and why this wanting to/ leave? (74); the third, "what is love and why this want-/ing?" (75); and finally, we are asked, "where is love and what is/ wanting" (75). Not only does the location of the enjambment change—and with it, the meaning of each line—but the question itself evolves over time. Where the first question positions "why" and "what" before the line breaks, suggesting a straightforward inquiry as to the nature of love and desire, each subsequent repeat changes slightly. The second question attaches the sense of "wanting" to leaving; the third disrupts this question further by placing a line break in the middle of the word "want," suggesting a fallibility in the speaker's desire. Ultimately, we are asked what wanting even is, what wanting looks like.

Feminist theorist Astrida Neimanis has argued that "water extends embodiment in time—body, to body, to body. Water in this sense is facilitative and directed towards the becoming of other bodies" (Neimanis 3). Near the end of *Lady in a Boat*, there is a short poem called "Sometimes in the Morning" in which the speaker addresses the waking moment.

> Sometimes in the morning,
> Before mouth noise chase away knowing,
> Sea murmur sweetness against rock,
> Whispering loud to interpret dreams. (Collins, *Lady* 88)

The poem continues on to illustrate the sea "rolling" into the speakers dream and murmuring—"like is the sea know the meaning" (Collins, *Lady* 88)—before the "mouth erupt and you can't tell what was dream, what was wake." Here, the line between ocean and subconscious is gone: "wake" is plurally positioned as the sea, as antithesis to dream (wake/awake), and even as Sharpe's critical conception of the wake. The speaker notes that the subsequent "shouting and slapping between rock and sea" is so loud that it drowns out "the murmuring that happen/ in the rock-whispering morning" (88). In terms of Neimanis's claim, Collins's collection engages the sea to extend the embodiment of a revolutionary Grenadian consciousness. The ever-moving sea bears witness to an "out-of-season hurricane"; it rages in tribute to memorialize lost lives; it represents an alluring futurity while interpreting the buried dreams of the subconscious. But anyone who has experienced almost drowning knows, it isn't the biggest wave crashing that knocks you over—it's the much smaller one right after that, the wave you don't even notice, reaching from the depths to snatch your ankles out from under you. It wasn't the wave of revolution that caught the freshly minted nation of Grenada off guard, but the relentless battering, the shouting and slapping, of every subsequent wave.

III: *A Curtain of Fog*: Ancestral Sea Spray in Distant Caribbean Futures

They were trapped in a confining space,
being taken away from home like the long time ago Africans.
Tan-Tan's nightmare had come to life.

Nalo Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*

When a wave breaks, it folds over forward on its own momentum, crashing onto the shore. But waves do not remain cohesive, singular units of energy holding their aqueous vehicles

together—as a wave crashes, it fractures into millions of much smaller particles that project through the air, carried by momentum and wind. These smaller particles, known broadly as sea spray, play a vital role both in the tidal zone ecologies of the Caribbean coast as well as in the chronopelagic ecologies of Caribbean texts. Just as these once deep-sea particles are projected forward through time and space, so too am I interested in the future-oriented misty ecologies that engage this trop of dispersed water. Jamaican-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson is a writer of Black speculative and Afrofuturist fiction, editor of related anthologies, and a professor in the Creative Writing department at UC Riverside in California. The majority of her novels follow women-identified protagonists and draw heavily from Caribbean language and cultures, incorporating reference to diasporic religions, histories, and oral storytelling practices of the diaspora. Growing up between Guyana, Trinidad, and Canada, Hopkinson was raised in a deeply literary environment by her mother, who worked as a library technician, and her renowned poet, playwright, and performer father.

While Hopkinson's work absolutely draws from the traditions of science fiction, her texts depart from the genre on several key points. Novels such as *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber*, for example, are both "very conscientious about placing characters within family relationships, which is not characteristic of science fiction" (Farabee). These novels, like Hopkinson's others, also undermine the traditional "heroic mode, where not only does someone solve their own problem, they save the world," when in reality, according to the author herself, "Nobody does" (Farabee). Here we see the collectivity and community-oriented culture of the Caribbean pushing back against the white western isolationist "heroic mode" narrative, firmly situating protagonists within a community to which they are held accountable—and those communities are not always among the living. What I find uniquely compelling about these

novels is the way in which they "treat the spirit world with the same rigor and respect other writers bring to rocket science or molecular biology" (Farabee). Nalo Hopkinson renders "the spirit world" as operational in much the same way that traditional science fiction incorporates rocket science and molecular biology, suggesting that for her characters, these two seemingly disparate networks of knowledge can be equally impactful. Along these lines, I am interested in the way that the operational technology of the spirit world is represented through dispersed water, and what these manifestations tell us about intertidal temporalities.

After a wave crashes on a shore, it produces sea spray, small oceanic aerosol particles ejected into the air. Largely originating from tiny bubbles bursting at the ocean's surface, these miniscule particles are a rich source of both organic and inorganic materials,[168] and have a significant influence over our global ecological environment as they are "emitted over nearly three-quarters of our planet" (Schiffer et al. 1617). Sea spray has been increasingly studied in the context of global warming, as their ability to "scatter[] incoming solar radiation and act[] as seeds for cloud formation" (1617) suggests promising futures for slowing global warming. It is becoming clear, however, that these models only really work under "relatively pristine preindustrial conditions" (Liu). Recent studies show, however, that due to anthropogenic pollution, these sea spray aerosols are "souring" at rapid rates, with even "the smallest particles becom[ing] 100,000 times more acidic than the ocean within two minutes."[169] Human-generated pollutants, not the least of which include perfluoroalkyl (PFA) substances and other "forever chemicals," are nearly impossible to break down and persist indefinitely both in the human

[168] "Ocean biological and physical processes produce individual SSA [sea spray aerosol] particles containing a diverse array of biological species including proteins, enzymes, bacteria, and viruses and a diverse array of organic compounds including fatty acids and sugars" (Schiffer, et al.)
[169] "The finding, according to Angle, is chemically important because the properties and reactivity of aerosols change with particle acidity. For example, the harmful pollutant sulfur dioxide is oxidized to sulfate more quickly at the interface of acidic aerosols. The sulfate can go on to act as a cloud seed in the atmosphere" (Dillon).

body[170] and in the environment. “Most Americans have been exposed to PFAS, especially perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). They’re used in day-to-day products like nonstick pans, fast food wrappers, and cosmetics” (Bugos). A bill was introduced in the United States congress in only November of 2021 that would empower the Food and Drug Administration to ban PFAs in food containers and cookware, despite the compounds being allowed elsewhere. When air bubbles in the ocean containing PFAs burst, they disperse these compounds into the air in aerosol form, allowing them to travel long distances and circulate globally. Recent studies conducted in Norway suggest that “because sea spray can travel far distances inland, this is also likely to be a route for PFASs to be transported, and potentially return, to terrestrial regions from the ocean” (American Chemical Society). All of this is to say that, when sea spray operates as it *could* have, it functions as a protective layer between the earth and the sun’s radiation; within the bounds of global capitalism and anthropogenic climate change, it circulates our own pollution back onto us in concentrated aerosol form.

In terms of a metaphorical sea spray, I am interested in what it means to encounter protective, aerosolized water in a narrative setting—especially within the bounds of the kind of science fiction that respects the spiritual realm as highly as the scientific one. Much in the way water might reroute the direction or directions of light by way of refraction, creating spaces for narratives that are not exclusively linear or singular, fog, and the way in which it disperses and obscures the direction of light, creates unique symbolic opportunities for what I’d like to call temporal backscatter. In very basic scientific terms, backscatter is the reflection of particles back

[170] A recent study conducted by ecotoxicologists at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the Netherlands “analysed blood samples from 22 anonymous donors, all healthy adults and found plastic particles in 17. Half the samples contained PET plastic, which is commonly used in drinks bottles, while a third contained polystyrene, used for packaging food and other products. A quarter of the blood samples contained polyethylene, from which plastic carrier bags are made” (Carrington).

towards their point of origin. For example, if you were to roll a handful of marbles at a wall, backscatter would be the marbles' return. In a more practical setting, we can identify and remotely measure wave breaks exclusively through their microwave backscatter—in other words, the aerosol particles of ocean reflect the sun's radiation back towards it.[171] While fog and sea spray are not equivalents, I suggest that by deliberately incorporating fog as a visual marker and narrative device at key moments, Hopkinson's novels construct two different instances of dispersed, backscattered time, with significant dichotomous outcomes and implications for the texts they inhabit.

Time travel, in the literary narrative sense, relies on the presumption of discreet futures and pasts that remain elusively separate, removed, *elsewhen*, until the protagonist travels to meet them. Popularized by H.G. Wells's 1895 novel, *The Time Machine*, mechanical possibilities of the science fiction genre manifest this literary trope by means of operational technologies, that is, technologies that physically and literally engage the idea of fictional discreet pasts and futures in order to construct commentary about the real-life present. Anti-colonial thought, however, has long argued in direct confrontation of the Euro-centric logics of these discreet temporalities. Bonnie Barthold, for example, argues that Western discourse, and its subsequent body of literature, uniquely relies on the understanding of "progress [as] a linear, forward movement," placing an emphasis on "progress and change" (Barthold 14) that aligns our understanding of the value of time with contemporary capitalism. The end result, she suggests, is that "those who are economically dispossessed are often dispossessed of time as well" (15). One response to this temporal dispossession has materialized through the productive capabilities of the Black speculative fiction and Afrofuturist literary traditions, in which authors interrupt and critique

[171] "For radars transmitting at microwave frequencies, breaking (or nearly breaking) waves generate much stronger returns than would be expected based on existing scattering models" (Haller).

Western linear temporalities by emphasizing cyclical time and notions of return. Examining the genre of science fiction as a tradition born of the Industrial Revolution[172]—a socioeconomic transition that could not have been financed, according to Trinidadian historian and politician Eric Williams, without the Atlantic Slave Trade—the mechanical technologies that signify "progress" in the Barthold-Marxist sense are indeed the very same technologies that have been "historically brought to bear on black bodies" (Dery 180).

The specific intervention of the Black speculative fiction and Afrofuturist tradition, then, is to draw attention to the ways in which these progress-bound technologies are limited in their imaginative capacities by the capitalist ideologies that produced them. The act of time travel, whether by mechanical or narrative means, is necessarily rendered by the Black speculative tradition as a false signifier for presumed progress and can be engaged as a rhetorical device for critiquing not only the present based on an imagined future, but for critiquing the past which brought us to the present tense in which the device is being deployed. This subversive engagement with one of the narrative staples of science fiction constitutes what critical theorist and filmmaker Kodwo Eshun refers to as a "chronopolitical intervention" (Eshun 289), that is, an intervention into the politics of time.

For my analysis, both selected scenes from Nalo Hopkinson's novels involve explicit temporal displacement. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, young protagonist Ti-Jeanne and her romantic partner Tony flee town to escape Tony's gang, shrouded in a protective fog that renders them invisible. In *Midnight Robber*, young protagonist Tan-Tan Habib is kidnapped by her father as he escapes prison for having murdered his wife's lover. They leave their home planet in a pod and travel through foggy temporal dimensions to reach the same planet in an alternate universe.

[172] For more on this relationship, see H. Bruce Franklin's *Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century.*

Understanding these scenes through the lens of an intertidal temporality highlights the significance of dispersed water as a facilitator of diasporic narrative time travel, while privileging the "preindustrial conditions" (Liu) of indigenous knowledge and the "spirit world" over progress-bound technologies and "rocket science" (Farabee). This privileging of indigenous ancestral knowledge is reflected by the presence of fog effectively subverting or reinforcing the intended purpose of the architectural sites in which they appear. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, this site is Toronto's abandoned crematorium chapel; in *Midnight Robber*, it is a municipal jail.

Brown Girl in the Ring follows the young protagonist Ti-Jeanne in a speculative dystopian Metropolitan Toronto in the aftermath of a devastating economic collapse that results in the economic elite fleeing and walling in the city center. Times are hard, and after the birth of her baby, Ti-Jeanne must move back in with her spiritualist and ancestral medicine practitioner grandmother, Gros-Jeanne—affectionately referred to as "Mami"—on the outskirts of the city center. Not long after giving birth, Ti-Jeanne begins to experience horrifying visions of death, which she finds out are a hereditary marker for women in her family signifying an ability to communicate more directly with ancestral spirits. Ti-Jeanne is deeply unsettled by this revelation and decides to leave town with Tony, the father of her child; but because of Tony's involvement with a local gang, they must leave in secret. Mami conducts a spiritual ceremony in the city's abandoned crematorium chapel, during which Ti-Jeanne meets her "father spirit," Prince of Cemetery. Prince of Cemetery promises to hide Ti-Jeanne and Tony in an ancestral fog which will render them invisible as they escape. Mami tells Ti-Jeanne,

> Price of Cemetery promise that when you walk out this door, he go hide your living body halfway between here and Guinea Land. That way nobody go see you." "Guinea Land?" she asks. "Every time a African die," Mami intoned, "them spirit does fly away to Guinea

> Land. Is the other world, the spirit world. You carry that flower that Tony give you, and nobody go be able to see he, either. (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 104)

Later in the scene we read,

> "Ti-Jeanne gave Baby to her grandmother. She stepped out into the clear night. Mami said, "Hold Tony hand!" A fog sprang up from nowhere. It crept quickly up over her and Tony and gave a soft blur to everything they looked at. Mami stepped out, dandling Baby. She peered around her. "Ti-Jeanne? Tony?" "We right here, Mami." But her grandmother appeared to neither see nor hear them, even when Ti-Jeanne waved her hand right in front of her face." (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 105)

To frame this scene in terms of theory, I turn to a concept originally used to explain the seemingly haphazard compression of real and imagined pasts, presents, and futures in Ishmael Reed's 1972 novel, *Mumbo Jumbo*, a concept Tamiko Fiona Nimura describes as "pendulum chronology." Nimura engages this term in a corrective response to a narrative technique she suggests has been wrongly classified as anachronism—that is, a "wrongly placed" (Nimura 93) compilation of temporalities. What Nimura alternatively argues is that this compilation operates as a deliberate coalition of carefully chosen temporal moments with the explicit project of confronting both "monolithic narratives of history" as well as "an understanding of unidirectional time itself" (93). This coalition, then, functions as a rhetorical collection of vital historical moments that comprise what Nimura identifies as a metaphorical Fanonian dialectic.

This pendulum dialectic, Nimura suggests, "moves between not just one past and one future, but among multiple pasts, multiple presents, and multiple futures along the same continuum…syncretically taking what is relevant from each period, generatively engaging the binaries of past and present yet refusing any easy synthesis of thesis and antithesis" (90). It is difficult to imagine this pendulum chronology in a Caribbean context without also imagining a gentle wave washing back and forth across a shore, or indeed of Brathwaite's tidalectic, two-tide movement. Backscattered water, rendered in this scene as fog, functions as a symbolic

manifestation of intertidal pendulum chronology: it provides protective support both from distant ancestral pasts in Guinea Land *and* contemporary familial relations, in order to preserve two parents and their (future-oriented) child as they attempt to escape present-moment violence. Mami is accountable to this community of the dead, and her accountability renders the ancestral fog protective by positively subverting the intended purpose of the setting. Summoned by Mami in an abandoned crematorium chapel—an establishment constructed for the mourning the incinerated dead—the presence of fog marks a moment in which the living bodies in present time—Ti-Jeanne's, Tony's, are protected rather than destroyed. In this intertidal temporality, the individual liquid particles of fog, of surging ancestral sea spray, cover Ti-Jeanne and Tony in a supportive coalition of diasporic temporal disruption and provide a safe way forward by honoring relationships with the past.

Midnight Robber, on the other hand, renders dispersed water differently. Tan-Tan, a young child, lives with her father, Antonio—the mayor—and mother, Ione, on the technologically-advanced future planet called Toussaint. Ione has been having an affair, and during a Carnival performance fight, Antonio accidentally murders the man his wife has been sleeping with. As he is being taken to jail, Tan-Tan sneaks into the trunk of the car and comes along in hopes of rescuing him. On Toussaint, when someone commits a particularly heinous crime, they are sent via interdimensional travel to a prison planet called New Half-Way Tree with armed guards; on arriving at the jail, Antonio—a man characterized by his repeated escapes from accountability—makes a hasty decision to take Tan-Tan and escape Toussaint alone using an unsupervised interdimensional pod. This is when fog first appears.

> The first shift wave hit them. For Tan-Tan it was as though her belly was turning inside out, like wearing all her insides on the outside. The air smelt wrong. She clutched

> Antonio's hand. A curtain of fog passing through the pod, rearranging sight, sound. Daddy's hand felt wrong. Too many fingers, too many joints. (Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber* 73-74)

The passage continues, describing the temporal veils as liquid in nature, "slow like molasses" (74), it "washed over them" (75). The fog, decidedly *not* the "soft blur" we see in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, is too thick, too opaque, too hot. To calm his daughter, Antonio half-sings the lyrics to a Guyanese folk song about violent river rapids:

> "That one is a old sailor song," he mumbled, almost as though he wasn't talking to Tan-Tan, but just to hear his own voice. "Itanami was a river rapids. People in ships would go through it like we going through dimension veils. Itanami break up plenty vessels but them long ago people never see power like this half-way tree." They were trapped in a confining space, being taken away from home like the long time ago Africans. Tan-Tan's nightmare had come to life. (Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber* 74-5)

The veils signify the violent jumps from one temporal location to the next, jumps that scramble sensory input, that disfigure bodies. They which call to mind what Tan-Tan's father is convinced is the discreet past in which "long time ago Africans" were forcibly transported in slaving ships. Dislocated from this discreet past but still haunted by it, Tan-Tan experiences severe psychological and physical pain while experiencing this temporal fog.

While the novel is thoroughly identified with references to what would be, at the time of its setting, distant Caribbean and Yoruba pasts—from duppies to douens, from Mami Wata to Anansi—Antonio, and his class of elite politicians, regularly advocate for the embrace of celebratory cultural practices of these histories while silencing and negating the painful histories that often contextualized them. When Antonio flees Toussaint to New Half-Way Tree, an alternate version of their home planet intended exclusively for the relocation of convicted criminals, he assures his daughter that they are escaping danger, leaving a bad past for a better future. Their arrival, however, reveals their new home as a place of back-breaking manual labor, unregulated violence, and brutal lawlessness: a large-scale replication of a penitentiary. Despite

the technological time travel and all its presumed progress, they have arrived in a place not much better than the one they left. Unlike Ti-Jeanne, who experiences a fog summoned through a deep connection to indigenous ancestral practices, Tan-Tan's future-oriented fog is suffocating and dangerous. Without accountability to a community, ancestral knowledge is rendered useless, and the fog represents impending danger. Ultimately, *Midnight Robber* works to tease out possible productive and destructive capabilities of technology until the only thing the reader knows for sure is that time is anything but unidirectional and technology's liberatory capacity extends only as far as the intentions of society that uses it. Progress-bound technologies will always fail when they are carceral in nature.

III: The Footprints of My Own Arrival: Tidal Wash in the Chronopelago

Sea right here on your lipshore
is where I Cariwoma must come
to reacquaint with all of me.

Grace Nichols

Grace Nichols was born in Georgetown, Guyana, in 1950—the same year as Merle Collins. Spending her early years in a small coastal town with her parents, the family moved back to the capital when she was eight. Nichols earned an undergraduate degree in communications from the University of Guyana and moved to England in 1977, where she currently resides with her partner in East Sussex along the southern coast of England. Her first poetry collection, *I is a Long Memoried Woman*, was published in 1983—the same year

Grenada's revolution was forcefully concluded—and was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Nichols has a prolific publication history and is often included in anthologies and GSCE syllabi across England, and in December of 2021, it was announced that Grace Nichols would be awarded the English Queen's gold medal for poetry. In response, Nichols stated,

> In my own work I've celebrated my Guyanese/Caribbean/South American heritage in relation to the English traditions we inherited as a former British colony. To poetry and the English language that I love, I've brought the registers of my own Caribbean tongue. I wish my parents who use to chide me for straining my eyes, as a small girl reading by torchlight in bed, were around to share in this journey that poetry has blessed me with. (Knight, *"Grace Nichols"*)

Though gaining later recognition as an author of children's literatures, Nichols's earlier texts are rich and lyrical portraits of Caribbean women's life. Often skillfully blending Guyanese Creole with standard English, and drawing from her rich ancestry of African, Indian, and Amerindian culture and knowledge, Grace Nichols's work also presents a stunning series of portraits of abstract temporalities.

While there seems to be a strange lack of scholarly writing about Nichols's poetry, Andrea A. Davis's 2022 publication *Horizon, Sea, Sound: Caribbean and African Women's Cultural Critiques of Nation*, does the vital work of positioning Nichols's work within a larger context of the plurality of Caribbean lineages. Emphasizing "the role of Amerindian peoples as witnesses to the terror of Indigenous conquest, enslavement, and indentureship, and their function as guardians of the land and sea" (Davis, *Horizon* 79), *Horizon, Sea, Sound* considers the ways in which "the dispossession of Indigenous Amerindian women in the Caribbean has taken place alongside the dispossession of African and Indian women" through an analysis of "the vast reach of 'the shifting frontline' of the horizon" (77) in Caribbean women's literature. Though Davis's text assesses a variety of Caribbean women's literatures for their use of the trope of the horizon, I am most interested in her analysis of the ways in which Grace Nichols

"resituate[s] African, Indian, and Amerindian women's presence to the region as a dual relationship to land and sea" (98).

Grace Nichols's 2005 publication, *Startling the Flying Fish*, is a fluid, flowing collection of poetry. Each poem's title is simply the first line of the poem, and while they are identified in the table of contents for the sake of locating individual poems throughout the text, the title lines are not privileged on any pages and are printed as the first lines of the poem, allowing the reader to continuously read from page to page without any explicit typeface-prompted breaks. Exclusively narrated by the poetic figure of Cariwoma, "the keeper of memory and seer of the future—both Amerindian ancestress keeping guard over the land and sea, and the Caribbean diasporic mother watching her children disperse across the world" (Davis, *Horizon* 98), *Startling the Flying Fish* reads as more of a hauntingly beautiful but disquieting eulogy. Throughout the collection, Cariwoma mourns not only the boundless loss of Indigenous, Indian, and Black life throughout the region, but the loss of language, culture, and time. In response, Davis's text, *Horizon, Sea, Sound*, performs the important critical exploration of the trope of "Caribbean horizons of betrayed hope" (99) and highlights themes of memorialization and the compulsive "chronicling of the history of Caribbean conquest" (99). "For Cariwoma," Davis suggests, "memories wash ashore like soundwaves, the ocean holding sacred truths for those willing to listen and hear" (99). These soundwaves allow Cariwoma to decipher and restore ancestral knowledge—such as the original Taíno and Kalingo names of the Caribbean islands and the "so many forgotten gods and tribes" (Nichols, 40)—as an act of reconciliation and commemoration.

Where Davis's analysis approaches the concept of time—through notions of memorial, history, and return—it never seems to explicitly address it. As Cariwoma embodies the lands, seas, and skies of the Caribbean, descriptions of the sea and its intertidal temporalities abound.

Throughout Nichols' collection, we hear Cariwoma musing over the knowledge that "the sea/ does not always keep up/ this front of blue serenity" (18); or "sitting on the ark of a balcony/ facing Atlantic/ ocean-spray a heady overture of kisses", appreciating the "classic" combination of the sea's "pauses and crashes" (19); or "bathing in the misty cauldron of Sea" as a "kind of ancestral back-pay" (75) for her ancestors who labored in the hot fields. Here we see the sea placed in necessary and explicit conversation with time, as Cariwoma reminds us that the sea is never constant, as she celebrates its stops and starts, and as she uses it as a space to recoup time lost to centuries of exploited labor. Sea-time here is seductive, bold, and unpredictable, an antithesis of terrestrial labor. In *Horizon, Sea, Sound,* Andrea A. Davis states her critical goal as, "attending to the trope of the sea within and beyond a Middle Passage epistemology," in an attempt to "move toward a conceptualization of not only what it means to live in relation to the catastrophic past, but also what it means to live in relation to place—to consider what happens after one reaches land, the means by which survival may be possible under ongoing conditions of conquest" (Davis, *Horizon* 79). If we are to understand diasporic return as "not as a physical or symbolic journey, but rather as a personal recognition of one's histories as a series of intersection and relational stories that together account for one's shared being in a still evolving place and time" (77-78), it is vital to consider the intertidal zone: of what happens *as* one reaches land, in addition to before and after.

Early in the collection is a poem beginning, "Wind and Shore are my close companions" (Nichols 10), and while this poem is also mentioned in Davis's analysis for its positioning of water as a "continuous remembering" (10), I am more interested in the deliberate spatial relationship Nichols highlights between land and sea. Beginning the poem by introducing Wind and Shore as proper nouns, as close companions, prompts the reader to read Cariwoma here as

Water, as she asks, "who knows move than me/ the songs of the drowning?" Repository not only for Indigenous and Indian Caribbean memory, but African too, Cariwoma would have born witness to many drownings—to many bodies changing state from living to dead. A transitory temporal force, Cariwoma both communicates to the living, whispering "through the artifacts of my shells[173]", and to the dead, offering a "treatise/ of continuous remembering"—speaking both forwards into and backwards through time. Casting "rocks" as "memorials" and "weeds" as "altar-places", Nichols portrays the tidal zone as an ever-moving back and forth of intimate communion, of holy exchange in a space of constant renegotiation. "Nightly," Cariwoma tells us, "I dance with my/ children in the dancehalls of the deep"—even in the heavenly[174] mansions of her sea-house, there is constant motion, temporal surf upon the shore.

The last two poems of this collection call back to remind us of the tripartite identities of Cariwoma—wind, shore, and sea; African, Indian, and Amerindian. The poem beginning, "Sea right here on your lipshore/ is where I Cariwoma must come/ to reacquaint myself with all of me" (Nichols 87), positions the ancestress as both the speaker addressing Sea, and as Sea herself. The imagery invoked by Nichols's use of the word *lipshore* adds yet another dimension of communicatory symbolism, collapsing boundaries between body, land, and sea while simultaneously reinforcing the connection between the mouth, communication, and the tidal zone. In terms of "a personal recognition of one's histories as a series of intersection and relational stories" (Davis *Horizon* 77), Cariwoma must return here to herself, to "reacquaint" herself with all of her. "Right here on your shifting sands" is where Cariwoma must "face up/ to life's cosmic exclamations."

> So come Sea, make we catch up
> On all the labrish since you last see me—

[173] Note the reference here to conch shells, presumably.
[174] "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2, KJV).

> Let me hear once more your mouthwash
> echoes in my own voicespeak. (Nichols 87)

Cariwoma is anxious to catch up with Sea, to exchange gossip accrued since the last time Sea saw her—since the last tide? Since the last hurricane? How long *have* they been apart? *Mouthwash* and *voicespeak* work here as compound words much like *lipshore*, collapsing the literal spatial boundaries between words and creating new meanings at their juncture—an intertidal significance. The lipshore, then, is the stage upon which the mouthwash—communication in the form of tidal waves—echoes. That it is Cariwoma's own voicespeak only makes sense, as she and Sea have always also been one in the same.

Cariwoma begins the final poem by "sing[ing] of Sea self" (Nichols 88), reveling in the beauty of Sea's "turquoise dress" and the shadowless beauty of its horizon/hem, unburdened by ships. "Just as the straight rising sun/ Sea memory is as clear/ as a desert island," she tells us, reminding us for a final time of the intimate connections between the ocean and history. "And I am on the edge/ of this new world/ awaiting the footprints of my arrival", the poem ends. A literal rendering of this scene would be difficult to imagine—how does one exist on the edge of anything waiting for themselves to arrive there? The temporalities constructed here appear to be deeply contradictory. The edge of a new world suggests a state of being unexplored, a "not yet—while "awaiting" suggests she's been there for some time. She isn't even waiting for herself to arrive, but awaiting the *footprints* of her own arrival, suggesting a perfect past tense of having already arrived and leaving behind evidence of the arrival. Cariwoma has both already been there for some time and has also never been there before while waiting to see that she has already come and, presumably, gone elsewhere. But an intertidal reading of this scene understands the edge of the new world as a shore, a place where time is constantly churning, surging against the shore and crashing, spraying dispersed time into the wind, pulling back from the shore and

circulating to revisit. An intertidal reading understands that Cariwoma has always been in a state of recurring arrival.

Conclusion: Still Undrowning

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's name is invoked regularly across literary analyses of poetics, most especially in those which overlap with marine studies. His text, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*—first published in 1942 in French and translated into English in 1983—investigates the metapoetics of water and its multivalent manifestations. Expanded on for decades by critics[175] who have taken this work to task for its deeply gendered approach to the dichotomy of sea and land—having referred to nature as an "immensely enlarged, eternal mother" (Bachelard 115), for example—this essay has influenced many subsequent texts about the metaphorical capacities of the sea, and indeed the "rich maritime grammar" to which I currently speak. While his 1942 text does not speak to the nuances of gendered, raced, or diasporic literature, the influence his work still holds over many of the fields to which I am indebted, and I import the following:

> One cannot bathe twice in the same river because already, in his inmost recesses, the human being shares the destiny of flowing water. Water is truly the transitory element…A being dedicated to water is a being in flux. He dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away. Daily death is not fire's exuberant form of death, piercing heaven with its arrows; daily death is the death of water. Water always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death. In innumerable examples, we shall

[175] Stacy Alaimo, among others, has warned against falling into metaphors of fluidity that collapse the boundaries between the human and ocean, as "such origin stories," she suggests, "revel in a prelapsarian innocence, as they skip over a wide swath of human history in which humans slaughtered ocean creatures and destroyed ocean ecologies" (Alaimo, *New Materialisms* 283).

> see that for the materializing imagination, death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite. (6)

Christina Sharpe reminds us that the kidnapped Africans who did not make it to their new colonial shores, who died at sea and were lost to the waves, were preserved in part in the "hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; in sodium and chlorine" (Sharpe 19) of the ocean. "This is what we know about those Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage; they are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time" (Sharpe 19). Residence time, Sharpe tells us, is "the amount of time it takes for a substance to enter and leave the ocean," and "for human blood, which is salty, that time is 260 million years" (Davis *Horizon* 91). To Bachelard's credit, however metapoetic his intent, his claim rings true here. Reflecting over the words and works of Merle Collins, Nalo Hopkinson, and Grace Nichols, I think back again to Alexis Pauline Gumbs's claim that "breathing in unbreathable circumstances is what we do every day in the chokehold of racial and gendered ableist capitalism," that we are all "still undrowning."[176] Is this the daily death which Bachelard obliquely observed?

So, what *does* the process of undrowning look like? For Gumbs, constructing an answer to this question begins in an understanding of copoiesis with the sea and its inhabitants. It begins with listening, breathing, and remembering, with collaboration and vulnerability—all of which are also chapter titles in her 2020 text. In each chapter-bound lesson, her audience is called to confront violence occurring on a global scale by holding space for the sea's intimate, interspecies ecologies and the knowledges produced therein. Throughout *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Gumbs identifies kinships with a variety of marine mammals—from humpback whales to dolphins to narwhals—celebrating the lessons that can and should be

[176] "…And by we, I don't only mean people like myself whose ancestors specifically survived the middle passage, because the scale of our breathing is planetary, at the very least" (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 2).

learned from such kinships. Oscillating between reveling in the abstract poetic and fearlessly confronting the immediately material, Gumbs reminds us all that "the actual suffering and endangerment of marine mammals on the planet right now is caused by the extractive, destructive processes and consequences of capitalism" (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 101), and that, even more importantly, "a deadly system doesn't have to seem like its targeting you directly to kill you instantly" (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 103). My mind wanders to Melville again, and his warnings about whale-lines, as Gumbs relents that the reason capitalism does not end this week is because we are all entangled in it, like a whale in a net. And "you don't have to save the whales," she tells us, "but at least look at the ropes" (104). Undrowning, then, begins with identifying the system that drowns us.

The unique pain of this identification, Gumbs tells us, is in "what it means to bear the constant wounding of a system that says it's about something else entirely" (103). It is difficult to think about the Grenadian revolution and its violent end without thinking about this kind of wounding—to know the imperially-backed conclusion to what could have been. It is difficult to know that whatever internal intensions existed in the New Jewel Movement, that the external interference of the United States and its allies to rebrand the NJM's work as dangerous when it was actually just anti-capitalist, cemented the decades of silence that Merle Collins's poetry mourns. "To bear the constant wounding of a system that says it's about something else entirely" is to finally achieve colonial independence only to have the United States military invade under the premises of restoring peace. To bear the constant wounding is to live far in the future of a dystopian Toronto where the "economic base collapsed" and "investors, commerce, and government withdrew into the suburb cities, leaving the rotting core to decay…fear of vandalism and violence keeping 'burb people out" (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 4). To bear the constant

wounding is to exist as a tripartite spiritual ancestress and still be plagued by the sight of "Columbus/ I discover in a breeze/ still startling the flying-fish/ in search of the Indies" (Nichols 23). It is never about restoring peace; it is never about evading vandalism or violence; it is never about "searching." It has always ever been about the system of ropes.

Reading for intertidal temporalities reminds us of this discrepant space, of the thing it is never about and the thing it really is. "The space between the idea of something and its reality," Kincaid reminds us, "is always wide and deep and dark."

> The longer they are kept apart—idea of thing, reality of thing—the wider the width, the deeper the depth, the thicker and darker the darkness. This space starts out empty, there is nothing in it, but it rapidly becomes filled up with obsession or desire or hatred or love-sometimes all of these things, sometimes some of these things, sometimes only one of these things. The existence of the world as I came to know it was a result of this: idea of thing over here, reality of thing way, way over there. (Kincaid 37)

It is difficult not to import her entire essay here, as she immediately applies this logic to Christopher Columbus. "An unlikable man, an unpleasant man, a liar (and so of course, a thief)," she imagines Columbus "surrounded by maps and schemes and plans," confronted with the reality—the materiality of indigenous peoples already living and thriving across the ocean—of what he sought. "That the idea of something and its reality are often two completely different things is something no one ever remembers," Kincaid helpfully reminds us, "and so when they meet and find that they are not compatible, the weaker of the two, idea or reality, dies. That idea Christopher Columbus had was more powerful than the reality he met and so the reality he met died" (38). The meeting of the two, idea of thing and reality of thing, occurs at the shore.

For all three authors I address here, the multivalent ancestral indigenous knowledges of the Caribbean are constantly moving, living, breathing inside the sea. The confrontation between idea and reality is the wave crashing onto the sand, and new waves are crashing all of the time. In a place where daily lived experiences are indeed bound up by the system that says it's about

something else entirely, it is impossible to fill the space between the idea of something and its reality because there is no space—every day brings the lived reality of that idea. Every day, there are people in Grenada who wake up silently replaying the events of 1983. Every day, there are young children who carry the memories and inhabit the fears of "long time ago Africans,"[177] despite being separated from them by centuries. Every day, people across the Caribbean live and move and breathe in constant renegotiation with their own identities, ancestries, legacies of European colonialism—"tribes decimated/ scattered/ yet still blooming in pockets// like hidden forest flowers" (Nichols 38). A crashing wave is not about moving water, it is about transferring energy. Whether that wave comes in the form of anti-capitalist revolution, warnings about the misleading potentials of progress-bound technologies, or internal investigations of self and community, intertidal temporalities, and the energies they address, it will always be crashing on the shore.

[177] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber* 75.

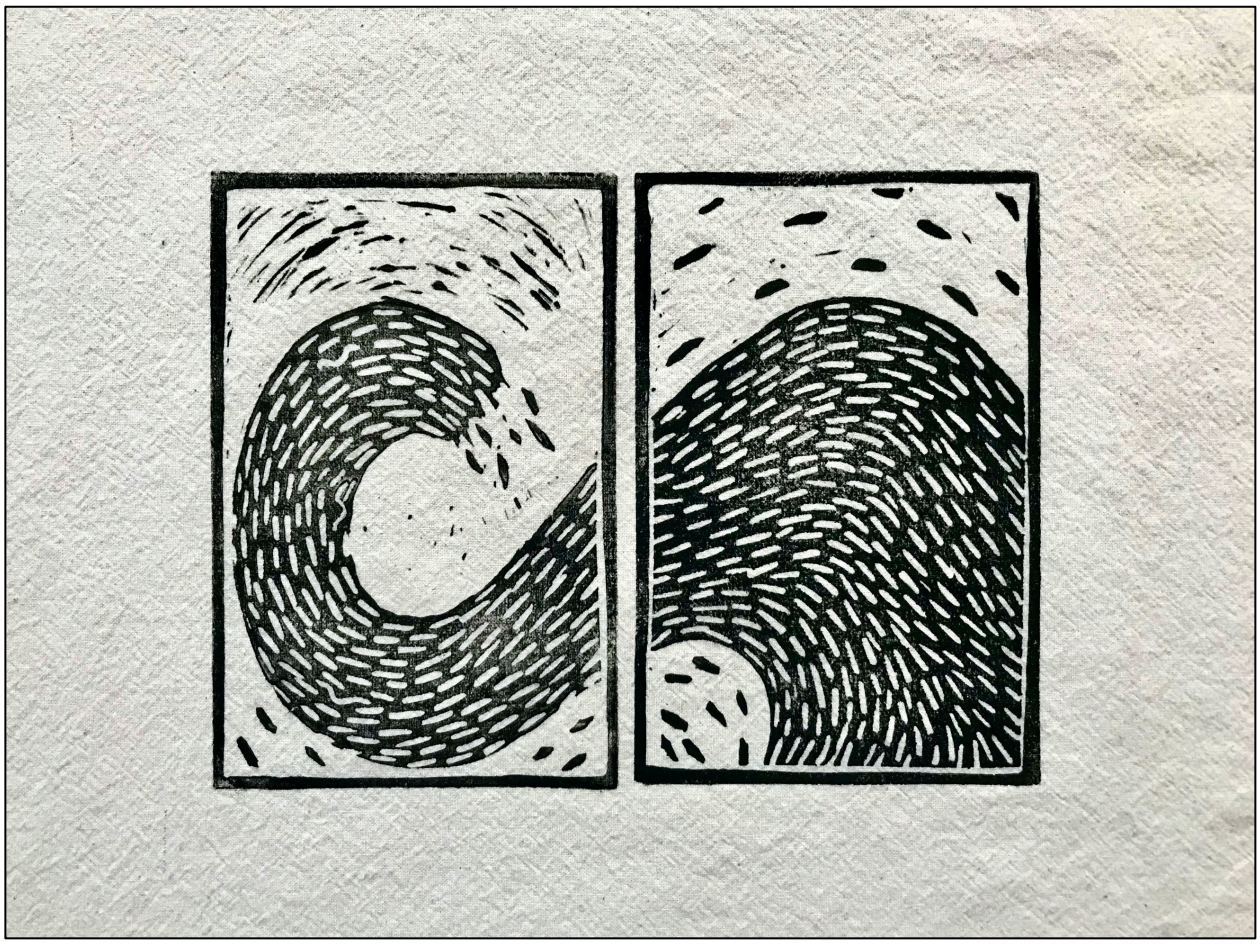

Fig. 4.1: *ev-ver*, by Julian Currents.
Linocut print in black ink on cotton.
The cotton here was material taken from the tote bag issued to me at the inaugural
International Gullah Geechee and African Diaspora Conference in Conway, South Carolina, March 2019.
ev-ver was printed in 2022.

Conclusion: *Creativity at the End of Time*

When we heal ourselves we heal landscapes.

Jessica Hernandez

On November 12, 2021, *The Guardian* published an opinion piece by Nigerian author Ben Okri in which he issues an artistic call to arms in the face of anthropogenic climate change, to "develop an attitude and a mode of writing" that he refers to as "existential creativity"—in other words, "creativity at the end of time" (Okri). Okri posits that while we, as a species, have observed times of heightened crisis throughout our history, that he "can't think of anyone who had the data that it was coming, who had the facts pouring at them every day, and yet who carried on as if everything were normal" (Okri). While I would hesitate to agree fully with this observation—certainly poems like Ilya Kaminsky's *We Lived Happily During the War* come to mind—Okri's call acknowledges the acute experience of living with a twenty-first century-level saturation of information, information that both reveals the extent of damage we have wrought *and* the networks of oppression established to deliberately prevent the meaningful change of the individual. Okri's main concern in this essay is that our inability, as humans, to imagine our ending as a species is preventing us from actively preventing it. So just as Alexis Pauline Gumbs calls on us to "look at the ropes," so too does Ben Okri ask us to reevaluate how we assess and describe our surroundings. In this plea for existential creativity, for a "new philosophy for these times, for this near-terminal moment in the history of the human" (Okri), asks us, "if you knew you were at the last days of the human story, what would you write? How would you write? What would your aesthetics be?" His answer, as an author, demands that,

> everything [he] write[s] should be directed to the immediate end of drawing attention to the dire position we are in as a species. It means that the writing must have no frills. It

> should only speak the truth. In it, the truth must be also beauty. It calls for the highest economy. It means that everything [he] do[es] must have a singular purpose. (Okri)

In reading Okri's call to action, I pause for a moment to consider his intended audience. *The Guardian*, an English publication, reached roughly "27 million individuals in the United Kingdom in the months from April 2019 to March 2020" (Watson) across its many platforms. Readership demographic statistics also show that 60% of readers identify as politically progressive, 57% have a degree or doctorate qualification,[178] and that an overwhelming 85% of readers are part of the ABC1[179] social demographic, meaning they are considered "very affluent" with an "average household income [of] £59,764, that's 53% higher than the average GB family income" (The Guardian). When you overlay these statistics with the fact that readers of *The Guardian* are more likely to be women, "with nearly 15 million monthly female readers in the United Kingdom from April 2019 to March 2020"; that the publication is more popular "among older adults than younger ones" (Watson); and that, while the results of the 2021 UK Census have yet to be released, 2011 UK census results reflect the fact that roughly 80% of the population in England and Wales were white British"[180], we are looking at a news source that is most commonly read by older, progressive, wealthy, educated white women. This is important knowledge to keep in mind.

In her 2022 monograph, *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes Through Indigenous Science*, Jessica Hernandez—an environmental scholar of Maya Ch'orti' and Zapotec

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[178] "Guardian and Observer readers re also a well-educated audience; 57% have a degree or doctorate qualification and they are 2.5 times more likely to" (*The Guardian*).

[179] "ABC1" corresponds to a set of demographic designations originally established by Britain's National Readership Survey (NRS) to socially codify people of different income and earnings levels, reportedly for the benefit of market research, social commentary, lifestyle statistics, and statistical research.

[180] "According to the Office for National Statistics, there were approximately 64.6 million people living in the UK in mid-2014. Of these, 56.2 million (87.2 per cent) were White British. The most recent Census in 2011 highlights that in England and Wales, 80 per cent of the population were white British. Asian (Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, other) 'groups' made up 6.8 per cent of the population; black groups 3.4 per cent; Chinese groups 0.7 cent, Arab groups 0.4 per cent and other groups 0.6 per cent" (Institute of Race Relations).

ancestry—confronts the extensive damages of White settler colonialism on the environment and proposes future-oriented ecological repair through the implementation of long-held Indigenous practices of holistic land, water, and forest stewardship. In her assessment of white supremacy and the multivalent sectors of power it exerts over the globe, she explains,

> white supremacy upholds whiteness's superiority, and this is the set of ideologies that settler colonialism continues to uphold within our Indigenous landscapes. This means that if you are white, you have more power over managing our natural resources, and this is why it is not a surprise to Indigenous peoples that environmental policy makers, scientists, organization leaders, and others who have a seat at the table and lead this table are white. (Hernandez 42)

This phenomenon, she explains, is *ecocolonialism*, a tripartite system of violence that entitles white people to govern over Indigenous natural resources without consulting the Indigenous peoples of that land, enables the "severe altering" of Indigenous landscapes, leading to climate change, and results in the displacement of Indigenous communities who are often the first to experience the effects of climate change. Part of Hernandez's proposal for repairing the damages done by ecocolonialism is to transition the way we consider knowledge away from a Western practice of systems thinking—a mode of thought that "separate[s] everything into either systems or boxes" (122), effectively dissociating them from their interactive components—towards a more holistic Indigenous ways of knowing that acknowledge broad networks of thought and celebrate their inherent interconnectedness. There is no real hope for systems thinking to ever be an effective method of environmental management that can be rendered inclusive of Indigenous communities, Hernandez argues, because "they are governed by those who hold on to power and privilege provided within the systems under settler colonialism" (123). While "gaining experience with working or facilitating a research project that includes Indigenous communities has advanced many careers" (126) and despite the fact that "80 percent of the world's biodiversity is sustained by Indigenous peoples" (128), the ongoing violence enacted against

Indigenous land and water protectors is either ignored[181] by the state—wherein "the governments fail to provide Indigenous communities with resources to help them find the culprits behind their murders"—or directly funded[182] and maintained by state force.

Ultimately, Jessica Hernandez understands the premise of healing Indigenous landscapes as a deliberate practice of holistic restoration that requires "relationship building and asking for permission" (Hernandez 214); "once we understand our positionality," she argues, "we can take actions to dismantle the systems that either oppress us or benefit us" (212). In other words, Hernandez is also asking us to "look at the ropes" (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 104). *This* is why I find the presumed audience of Ben Okri's *Guardian* essay to be so compelling. Okri cannot be speaking to Indigenous communities, or to communities of color; those communities have sensed the "end of time approaching" (Okri) for centuries. When he asks, "how else can one explain the refusal of ordinary, good-hearted citizens to face the realities of climate change" (Okri), he cannot be describing the Indigenous communities and communities of color who have been actively resisting ecocolonialism since the arrival of European invaders in the Americas. When he states at the conclusion of his essay that "we can only make a future form the depth of the truth we face now," Okri is speaking to the white, wealthy, educated readership of *The Guardian*, calling them in to a conversation that has been in progress for a long time.

The problems we are facing now as our world continues to suffer the long-term effects of Western imperial expansion maybe new, but the solutions to these problems are not. The region

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[181] "Attacks against Indigenous human rights defenders have shown an alarming surge over the past three years. UN Special Rapporteur Vicky Tauli Corpuz has called this trend a 'global crisis,' denouncing persistent impunity against those who commit these crimes. Of this list, only one of 28 murders have been investigated conclusively and perpetrators brought to justice" (Cultural Survival).

[182] "With this bill [HR1374], America would be blurring the line between corporate and state, sanctifying the channeling of private funds into the hands of already violent and well-funded police and military forces…Ultimately, America could also be engaging in the state-sponsored public murders of water protectors. As recently reported by *Democracy Now!* water protector and land back attorney Bruce Ellison has obtained documents indicating that 'lethal force' could be deployed to suppress Indigenous activists resisting pipelines" (Harper).

of the Caribbean, as we know it today, was forged from these problems and this violence. The communities who were already there, decimated when Europeans arrived, and the people stolen from their homes and transported forcefully to these islands have always known what *creativity at the end of time* means. They have known what it means to be "on a ship heading towards an abyss while the party on board gets louder and louder" (Okri)— "to bear the constant wounding of a system that says it's about something else entirely" (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 103). Writers from the Caribbean, most especially those who live at the intersections of multiple overlapping systems of oppression, have been writing creative existentialism for decades. To push back against Okri here, a "new existentialism" is not what we need—postcolonial artists have been "dedicat[ing] [their] lives to nothing short of re-dreaming society" (Okri) for as long as their publications have existed. What we need is a new lens through which to read and analyze what already exists—a temporally-inclined lens that understands time not as a set of systems that sometimes touch, but as a holistic and extensive interconnected web of experiences that do not behave systematically.

Mapping a chronopelago, for me, has been about this exact pursuit. Literature that speaks as though the concept of disrupted or artificially accelerated time is a new phenomenon deliberately overlooks the ample archives of literatures by peoples whose temporalities have been ruptured time and time again. It is these literatures, narratives that understand the experience of disrupted time and who have resisted and survived and celebrated regardless, to which we must turn for guidance moving forward. Maryse Condé's absent mangrove teaches us about the power of community in the face of despair and loss; Tiphanie Yanique's and Safiya Sinclair's conch shells teach us to listen to nature when spoken words don't seem to be working; Marion Bethel and Edwidge Danticat allow us to renegotiate the possibilities of historically one-

dimensional symbols of death and fear to enable release, relief, and an expanded understanding of self; and Merle Collins, Nalo Hopkinson, and Grace Nichols remind us of the power of a crashing wave—of the connection between embracing one's identity and putting that knowledge to use. Understanding our positionality, just as Jessica Hernandez and indeed Alexis Pauline Gumbs explain, is only the first step in dismantling the systems that either oppress us or benefit us—the first step in untangling the ropes—but it is an absolutely necessary step. As the Anthropocene pulls us along us with ever-increasing urgency, it is the responsibility of those privileged among us—myself included—to consider the time we have left and how best to use it, and to adopt the ecological knowledges that the networks of oppression which have historically benefitted us have long worked to obscure and suppress.

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