University of California, Santa Barbara

From Messiahs to Mangroves:
Towards a Caribbean Eco-Epistemology

A dissertation submitted in partial
satisfaction of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Comparative Literature

by

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for Alex, for everything

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Aimons toujours ! Aimons encore !
Quand l'amour s'en va, l'espoir fuit.
L'amour, c'est le cri de l'aurore,
L'amour, c'est l'hymne de la nuit.

— Victor Hugo

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ABSTRACT

From Messiahs to Mangroves: Towards a Caribbean Eco-Epistemology

by

David A. Vivian

In light of its (post)colonial history and unique geographical features, the Caribbean is primed for a multidisciplinary approach that considers ecology alongside economics, and culture alongside history and politics. This dissertation thus argues that both the climate crisis and the Caribbean demand an intersectional approach to gain a deeper understanding of our fraught relationship with the environment and its flora and fauna. In the process, I develop the neologism "eco-epistemology" as a term that insists on the fundamental linkage between knowledge and environment. Moreover, the concept helps elaborate the underpinnings of a Caribbean literary corpus that frequently foregrounds other-than-human nature as an essential component of understanding a self often envisioned as multiple and mosaic.

The Caribbean eco-epistemology I tease out from a reading of diverse writers and theorists recognizes that understanding the human and other-than-human relation also means understanding how capital and empire have conceived it and transformed it, with accumulation and exploitation envisioned as inexhaustible processes. As such, the postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach is well-positioned to approach Caribbean literature and theory and sketch the eco-epistemology underpinning its various texts. Via what might be termed the "tropical sublime" of the writers and artists that I examine, Caribbean literature and theory articulates a less hierarchical and anthropocentric vision of the world. Challenging the supposed singularity of Western civilization are texts as dense and intransigent as the

thickest mangrove forests—in their rigorous interrogation of identity, they privilege interconnectedness as the primary means of understanding humanity and its relation to other-than-human nature. Rather than taking up an exceptional position somehow *outside* of nature, and/or at the unequivocal summit of a "great chain of being," Caribbean writers frequently locate the human *within* nature.

This dissertation thus engages at length with literature as a means of deepening our understanding of the human and other-than-human relation and as a tool for creating new possibilities in post/colonial environments—and not only in the Caribbean, but in the world at large. As Amitav Ghosh succinctly puts it, "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination." Literature can help fill the gap as a privileged space for imagining new realities and thus new—and, ideally, improved—iterations of the human and other-than-human relation. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to trace a movement from messiah to mangrove—from miraculous saviors to rhizomatic ecology—by interrogating various strands of environmental thinking and proposing a Caribbean eco-epistemology, as drawn out through the PCE approach, as a compelling addition and complement, one that leads us toward a more just and fulfilling relationship with the natural world.

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Preface

George Orwell famously wrote that "poverty annihilates the future."[1] The specter of climate change similarly tears away at our sense of a stable, livable future. Sadly, recent studies affirm that this causes intense anguish for both parents[2] and the youngest among us.[3] This eco-anxiety is only compounded by the difficult economic conditions facing the majority of the people on our planet. Today, in the Global North, our convenience seems commensurate perhaps only with our consternation. Homo sapiens, likely for evolutionary reasons, are rather prone to the continually ossifying calcifications of habit. Unfortunately, the ways of life that we have adopted are utterly unsustainable—if the global population lived like the U.S., we would need at least five more earths.[4] In the face of the challenge before us, we need radical thinking. In however small a way, this dissertation aims to contribute on this front, as its subject—the Caribbean and its literature—helps nourish a reimagining of our world in search of a better one. One objective is thus to help overcome what Timothy Clark describes as the "disjunction between the destructive processes at issue and the adequacy of the arguments and measures being urged to address them."[5] This may be an ambitious goal, but how can we—morally, ethically—lose sight of it if we are to succeed—even a little—in our confrontation with the climate crisis?

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[1] *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933).

[2] Nearly eighty percent of adult respondents to a poll conducted at the University of Chicago in March 2023 said they "do not feel confident" that their children's generation will be better off than their own (*WSJ/NORC* Poll March 2023).

[3] Hickman, et al. "Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey." *Planetary Health* (*The Lancet*) 5.12 (2021): e863-e873. The authors write that they "were disturbed by the scale of emotional and psychological effects of climate change upon the children of the world, and the number who reported feeling hopeless and frightened about the future of humanity" (e873). The same is true of adults as well, according to a World Economic Forum-Ipsos poll from September 2022.

[4] Based on data from the National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts (https://www.overshootday.org/how-many-earths-or-countries-do-we-need/).

[5] *Ecocriticism at the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 140.

Introduction

From Messiahs to Mangroves

> There isn't one absolute truth, but truths.
> — Édouard Glissant[1]

> La complexité logique de *l'unitos multiplex* nous demande de ne pas dissoudre le multiple dans l'un, ni l'un dans le multiple.
> — Edgar Morin[2]

> Let it also be borne in mind how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life; and consequently what infinitely varied diversities of structure might be of use to each being under changing conditions of life.
> — Charles Darwin[3]

While they often strike the global imagination first and foremost as tropical paradises perfect for honeymoons and photoshoots,[4] the low-lying islands of the Caribbean[5] will continue to serve as a bellwether for the increasingly frequent and forceful weather events fueled by climate change.[6] Like the United States (lest we forget), the Caribbean is a product of colonialism and imperialism, its environmental crises and responses similarly stoked and

[1] From Manthia Diawara's documentary *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation* (2010) and published as "Conversation with Édouard Glissant aboard the Queen Mary," trans. Christopher Winks.
[2] "Le défi de la complexité." *Chimères* 5/6 (1988).
[3] In Appleman, p. 120 (Ch. IV of *The Origin of Species*, "Natural Selection; or the Survival of the Fittest").
[4] Somewhat surprisingly, the Caribbean outranks the global average when it comes to per capita greenhouse gas emissions. This is, less surprisingly, due largely to the tourism industry. See Ewing-Chow, "The Environmental Impact of Caribbean Tourism Undermines Its Economic Benefit," *Forbes*, 26 November 2019.
[5] This dissertation will also incorporate Guyana—namely, through the work of Wilson Harris—into "the Caribbean." The former Dutch and British colony was one of the four founding members of the organization Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
[6] See, for example: Lal, Harasaw and Takahasi 2002; Mimura et al. 2007.

constrained by runaway capitalism. The indigenous peoples who once inhabited the islands—the Caribs and Arawaks—were all but extinguished by Europeans.[7] The subsequent presence of two exogeneous entities—colonists and the African slaves they imported—created the dynamic cultural mixing (commonly called "creolization")[8] that both typifies the Caribbean and, in many ways, resists simple categorization. Colonization effected a palimpsestic identity among the imported slaves because "cultures were not simply destroyed but rather layered on top of each other" (Young 174). Indeed, there is little "natural" about Caribbean history following European contact in 1492 and the subsequent incorporation of the Americas into the "world-system" (Campbell and Niblett 3); Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé goes so far as to call the Antilles an "artificial creation of the capitalist system" (qtd. in Malena 5). And as the ongoing chlordecone crisis attests,[9] a (now neo)colonial relation endures between continental France (*l'Hexagone*)[10] and the periphery (the "*départements d'outre-mer*," or DOM,[11] of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and other island territories).

In light of its (post)colonial history as well as its unique geographical features, the Caribbean is primed for a multidisciplinary approach that considers ecology alongside

[7] And each other—the Caribs also drove the Arawak from the Lesser Antilles, a reminder that colonialism was by no means a fifteenth-century invention of Europe (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).
[8] There are many terms for this dynamic and the supposed identity it creates: transculturation/transculturality; *mestizaje/metis*; *métissage/métis*; hybridization; *créolisation*; *créolité*. This dissertation will not use *créolité*, as defined by Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Jean Bernabe in their *Éloge de la créolité* (1989), nor will it much spend time on the négritude/antillanité/créolité/creolization debate, which has already been carried out extensively for the past thirty-plus years in Caribbean studies. Instead, I will generally opt for "creolization." (Plus, as Antonio Benítez-Rojo has said, "every intellectual venture directed toward investigating Caribbeanness is destined to become an unending search" ("Acknowledgements," 2nd English edition to *The Island That Repeats*).)
[9] I will turn to the chlordecone crisis in Guadeloupe and Martinique in my conclusion.
[10] This moniker refers to the rough shape of France's geography in Europe and is thus used as shorthand to refer to this part of France (and often in juxtaposition with the Caribbean territories and other former colonies).
[11] I will generally avoid the term *d'outre-mer* because, as Patrick Chamoiseau has argued, it implies that *l'Hexagone* is the fundamental center and establishes a relationship of dependence ("Les clichés selon Patrick Chamoiseau," France Télévisions, 2012).

economics, and culture alongside history and politics, as reflected in Glissant's "call for a worldwide ecopolitics" (Bongie 73). This leads me to view the Caribbean, with Martinican theorist Malcom Ferdinand, as permitting "a conceptualization of the ecological crisis that is embedded within the search for a world free of its slavery, its social violence, and its political justice," or what he terms "a decolonial ecology" (3). This dissertation will thus argue that both the climate crisis and the Caribbean demand an intersectional approach to gain a deeper understanding of our fraught and fractured relationship with the environment and its flora and fauna. For example, how are we to properly assess the colonial legacy of the Caribbean's monoculture plantocracy without recognizing that it "violently altered the natural and social environment" (Cilano and DeLoughrey 78)? And how are we to understand this drastically changed natural and social environment without consideration of the twin forces of empire and capital?[12] As Amitav Ghosh observes,

> capitalism was never endogenous to the West: Europe's colonial conquests and the mass enslavement of Amerindians and Africans were essential to its formation. Nor was it based mainly on free labor—not even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when many of the raw materials required by Western factories were produced by non-White workers under conditions of coercion, if not outright slavery. (2021: 119)

As such, this dissertation develops a complementary union of postcolonial studies with ecocriticism—what I term the postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach (and explore at greater length in Ch. II)[13]—to close read an array of Caribbean fiction as well as an eclectic

[12] With Amitav Ghosh, I recognize wholeheartedly that, while "capitalism and empire are…dual aspects of a single reality, the relationship between them is not, and has never been, a simple one" (87).
[13] References to chapter numbers will henceforth be abbreviated as "Ch. [roman numeral]" when given parenthetically.

body of environmental and philosophical literature.[14] While the fictional oeuvre is fairly specific—primarily francophone Caribbean literature[15]—the resonances are vast. As the PCE approach insists, this is no happy coincidence, but rather the result of globalization and climate change continuing to reveal the extent to which all life on the planet is inextricably interconnected. To confront such a massively large and complex issue, it behooves us to pursue ambitious theory and praxis that cuts across disciplines—as Félix Guattari argues, the climate crisis necessitates "transversal" thinking to contend with three interrelated ecologies, i.e. social, mental, and environmental.[16] Given our contemporary world is one "of insistent, inescapable continuities, animated by forces that are nothing if not inconceivably vast," the climate crisis, post/neocolonial relations, and the Caribbean and its literature all demand hybrid, multidisciplinary approaches (Ghosh 2016: 62).

It is in this polyphonic spirit that this dissertation frequently engages with ontological and epistemological concerns. More specifically, it explores distinctly Caribbean ways of understanding the planet and our relationship with it, our being-in-the-world. As such, I will deploy the terms *eco-ontology* and, to a far greater extent, *eco-epistemology*. I have developed the neologism "eco-epistemology" to insist on the fundamental linkage between knowledge and environment and how Caribbean literature tends to foreground nature as an

[14] My work follows in the footsteps of the following texts, all of which combine ecocritical and postcolonial perspectives: Lawrence Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005); Ursula K. Heise's *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* (2008); Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010); Mukherjee's *Postcolonial Environments* (2010); Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011); and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011).

[15] Or what Régis Antoine called *littérature franco-antillaise*: the francophone literatures of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Haiti.

[16] *Les trois écologies*. This is also a fundamental tenet of sociology dating to Emile Durkheim, who argued in *Pragmatism and Sociology* that "The organic world does not abolish the physical world and the social world has not been formed in contradistinction to the organic world, but together with it" (69-70; qtd. in Foster 396).

essential component of understanding the self,[17] a self always already envisioned as "multiple" and "mosaic."[18] And, as stated above, to properly comprehend the climate crisis, it is vital to wield a hybrid, multidisciplinary approach that re-assesses those *idées reçues* that compose "the familiar furniture of the mind"[19] upon which our assumptions lazily rest. At its core, eco-epistemology is a heuristic framework that "consider[s] relation rather than fixed entities, transformations rather than stability, [and] dissymmetry rather than analogy" (Lowe and Manjapra 26). This interrogative, relational mode coheres with the dominant strain of Caribbean theory—as evinced by writers such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Édouard Glissant—which aims to question hegemonies and thus decenter and de-hierarchize. As Glissant reminds us, it is possible to "exchang[e] with the Other without losing or distorting [ourselves]" (qtd. in Diawara 6). This stands in stark contrast with the traditional colonial and capitalist view of other-than-human nature, casting it as a dangerous Other to be tamed for commodification and consumption. This is the essence of runaway capitalism, which "instrumentaliz[es] everything it encounters—the earth's resources, your time and abilities (or 'human resources')—in the service of future profit" (Burkeman 133). And on the colonial perspective, Aimé Césaire offers this succinct equation in his *Discours sur le colonialisme*: "colonisation = chosification" (1955: 19). Critical to these two historically intertwined systems is the unequivocal acceptance that humans stand unchallenged at the summit of the

[17] One prominent example being Aimé Césaire's rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, de-sacralizing it as *Une Tempête* and emphasizing a Caliban who accepts his identity and rejects alienation by valorizing nature (and himself) in the process.
[18] Raphaël Confiant, *Aimé Césaire*, p. 266. Or, as Glissant argues in his *Discours antillais*, "Qu'est-ce que les Antilles en effet ? Une multi-relation" (249).
[19] I owe this formulation to John Dewey (from his 1909 essay "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," in *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Philip Appleman).

earthly "great chain of being," which ultimately alienates humanity from a nature that we imagine as something *outside of us* rather than *part of us.*

On the contrary, Caribbean literature commonly resists such Western, market-based views of the relationship between humans and other-than-human nature, instead offering a less anthropocentric perspective that allows for a more symbiotic understanding of both human and extra-human. Amerindian and creole beliefs underpin this perspective, and many of them share a striking consonance with deep ecology and object-oriented ontology (explored at length in Ch. IV). This human decentering framework adopted by many of the Caribbean authors under study tends to opt for opacity and ambiguity rather than dogmatism and pretenses to certitude. They generally manage to "de-Otherize" nature without exoticizing or fetishizing it, suggesting an ecology that recalls its etymological origin—*oikos*, which, in ancient Greece referred to the idea of home (including family, house, and property).[20] Caribbean literature and theory, when discussing nature, tend to view it in this sense of "*eco*logically," with human communities tightly wound into its fabric, akin to what Jason Moore terms the *oikeios* (i.e. "socioecological relations and conditions"). In this sense, Caribbean eco-epistemology "qua *oikeios* stands in sharp contrast to scholarly vernaculars of *environment* and nature as one pole of a Cartesian binary" (Moore 2011: 5). Fittingly, the Caribbean islands stand open on all sides, gesturing toward the wider world and embodying Glissant's "chaque île est une ouverture" (1981: 249). Together, the islands form the very "image of the rhizome… fractured, reaching outward" (Mitsch 56), and subsequently the site

[20] The "eco" of "ecology" is *oikos*—yes, long before this word would also come to signify a yogurt company now owned by Danone, it served in Ancient Greece as the term for "household" or "family." It also gives us "economy," and, indeed, ecology and economics both emphasize the interconnectedness of everything, everywhere. (Ironically, the CEO of Danone, Emmanuel Faber, was ousted after making the environment a focal point of the company's mission.)

of a both insular and open self, one whose "doubleness perfectly conveys the ambivalences of creole identity" (Bongie 18).

Yet these islands' unique geographical and climatological situation now means that they also face the greatest existential threat that humanity has known since, arguably, the Black Death (1346-1353). The climate crisis poses such an epistemological and representational challenge that it requires the development of new paradigms and a rewriting of conventional narratives to effectively combat it. Indeed, faced with an increasingly undeniable catastrophic present, few can argue in good faith (or with good sense) that our past and present behavior toward the earth is tenable. In the longue durée, the hubris of a hegemonic anthropocentrism has driven a seemingly blatant disregard for this *oikos* we all share. Without an imminent and radical revision of past and present approaches to how we inhabit the earth, a frightening future awaits. Already, in 2021, an extreme climate event impacted roughly one in every three people in the United States.[21] Such disruption, following current climate models, will only increase as glaciers melt, oceans rise and acidify, and droughts, fires, and floods wreak greater and greater havoc. The situation is so dire, and our failure to effectively act so pronounced, that Amitav Ghosh envisions a future that will refer to our current period as "the Great Derangement."[22] We thus need, ironically, a *dérangement* ("disruption") of our deranged anthropocentrism.

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[21] Kaplan, Sarah and Andrew Ba Tran. "Nearly 1 in 3 Americans experienced a weather disaster this summer." *The Washington Post* Sept 4 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2021/09/04/climate-disaster-hurricane-ida/

[22] This also serves as the title of his 2016 book, which emerged out of the Berlin Family Lectures at the University of Chicago:

> In a substantially altered world, when sea-level rise has swallowed the Sundarbans and made cities like Kolkata, New York, and Bangkok uninhabitable, when readers and museum-goers turn to the art and literature of our time, will they not look, first and most urgently, for traces and portents of the altered world of their inheritance? And when they fail to find them, what should they—what can they—do other than to conclude that ours was a time when most

Part of what this dissertation will aim to show is how the Caribbean stands as both a historically crucial foundation for—and example of—global colonization, which conquered not only land but also bodies and minds. In fact, the Caribbean islands' insular character enabled, as Diana Loxley argues, a "simplification of existing colonial problems and thus an ideological process of wish-fulfillment" (qtd. in Bongie 80). This destructive ideology depended on a racist and misogynistic anthropocentrism that envisioned white European men as the de facto rulers of the world. Should we need reminding, this ideology itself rested on enforcement by utterly brutal means, including amputation, decapitation, and other forms of mutilation and murder.[23] Perhaps the greatest early-modern critique of the consequences of Eurocentrism, along with that of Bartolomé de las Casas,[24] comes from Michel de Montaigne, who rightly lambasted the hypocrisy of European disgust with the discovery of cannibalistic tribes in what is modern-day Brazil.[25] While Montaigne's critique undoubtedly subscribes to a Manichean perspective that pits a utopic (i.e. natural) "New World" against a dystopic (i.e. unnatural) "Old World" (and also reinforces the "noble savage" trope),[26] he nonetheless succeeds in castigating his fellow Europeans for their jingoistic blindness, a blindness that seriously diminishes their capacity for meaningful critique because "chacun

> forms of art and literature were drawn into the modes of concealment that prevented people from recognizing the realities of their plight? Quite possibly, then, this era, which so congratulates itself on its self-awareness, will come to be known as the time of the Great Derangement. (2016: 11)

[23] As legalized, for example, in the French *Code noir*. I discuss this in more detail toward the end of this introduction.

[24] A Dominican priest and historian, the Spaniard de las Casas wrote his tract *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indas* and had it sent to (then Prince) Philip II in 1542.

[25] The Carib people of the Lesser Antilles arrived from the mainland of what is now South America and were also cannibalistic in many cases (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

[26] "[I]l n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage... Ils sont sauvages, de même que nous appelons sauvages les fruits que nature, de soi et de son progrès ordinaire, a produits, là où, à la vérité, ce sont ceux que nous avons altérés par notre artifice et détournés de l'ordre commun que nous devrions appeler plutôt sauvages" (129).

appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage." Calling out the worst tortures carried out during the European Wars of Religion, Montaigne contends that

> il y a plus de barbarie à manger un homme vivant qu'à le manger mort, à déchirer par tourments et par géhennes un corps encore plein de sentiment, le faire rôtir par le menu, le faire mordre et meurtrir aux chiens et aux pourceaux (comme nous l'avons non seulement lu, mais vu de fraiche mémoire, non entre des ennemis anciens, mais entre des voisins et concitoyens, et, qui pis est, sous prétexte de piété et de religion), que de le rôtir et manger après qu'il est trépassé. (135)

The corporeal violence that Montaigne notes here tears apart the living body in a brutal dismemberment, the type of disaggregation so typical of colonial violence, and which led Monique Allewaert to her concept of the "parahuman."[27] As he observes, such cruelty far outweighs that of consuming the dead body of an enemy warrior. In contrast with most of his fellow citizens,[28] Montaigne thus welcomes the alterity of the cannibals for the precious perspective afforded them by way of their ignorance of European custom. The negative structure of this definition may not fully give these tribes their due, but it nonetheless stands out as a remarkable digression from the orthodoxy of the Renaissance that laid the groundwork for the increasingly monstrous imperialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[29]

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[27] I return to Allewaert's work on the parahuman at greater length in Chapter Four.

[28] Another notable exception, along with de las Casas, is Shakespeare, whose Edmund roundly assaults the idea of cultural relativism:

> Thou, Nature, art my goddess. To thy law
> My services are bound. Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me… (*King Lear*, I.ii.1-4)

[29] As Gideon Lewis-Kraus argues, the standard European framework "recast indigenous critics as innocent children of nature, whose views on freedom were a mere side effect of their uncultivated way of life and could

As discussed, an overt anthropocentrism undergirded this globalizing imperialism, instrumentalizing nature as an Other to be exploited for human benefit. Such disregard for other-than-human nature is part and parcel with a way of thinking that also saw fit to subjugate indigenous peoples and African slaves. In his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955), Aimé Césaire unequivocally associates colonization with the degradation of civilization ("civilization," of course, being the infamous, ostensible goal of colonization). Unfortunately, much of the modern world has inherited and continues to perpetuate the physical and ideological violence of colonization and imperialism. A contextualized understanding of our relationship with the earth benefits from a recognition of what these dogmatic forces have effected on an epistemological and ontological level; at the same time, a careful examination of post- and neocoloniality reveals the centrality of climate in matters of identity and social justice. For these reasons, this dissertation deploys the PCE approach to carry out a reading of Caribbean fiction and theory that attends to socioecological concerns.

Via what might be termed the "tropical sublime" of the writers and artists that I will examine, Caribbean literature articulates a more horizontal and less anthropocentric vision of the world.[30] Challenging the supposed singularity of Western civilization are texts as dense and intransigent as the thickest mangrove forests—in their rigorous interrogation of identity, they privilege interconnectedness as the primary means of understanding humanity and its relation to other-than-human nature. Rather than taking up an exceptional position somehow *outside* of nature, and/or at the unequivocal summit of a "great chain of being," Caribbean

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not possibly offer a serious challenge to contemporary social thought" ("Early Civilizations Had It All Figured Out," *The New Yorker*, Nov 1 2021).

[30] Darwin himself, in his 1837-38 notebooks, writes that "If my theory true, we get first a *horizontal* history of earth within recent times" (77).

writers frequently locate the human *within* nature. Despite significant economic and sociopolitical hardships, much Caribbean literature succeeds, following Eric Prieto, in "document[ing] the often dire material conditions of economically marginalized populations while also paying tribute to the cultural vitality and transformative potential of the communities they have formed" (2016b: 166).[31] In this way, climate crises are understood through the prism of the *oikos*, starting horizontally and rhizomatically branching out, continuously creating, shaping, and reshaping new relations. The mangrove and its rhizomatic roots thus closely mirror an approach that understands ecocriticism and postcolonial studies as interconnected ways of making sense of the morass that is our present-day climate reality.

But what if our current representations and epistemologies of the human and other-than-human nature relation (our imagination, *tout court*) are largely stuck in orthodox modes of thinking, ones far too prey to received ideas and traditional modes of representation? A primary interest of this dissertation is thus to demonstrate how Caribbean literature—and narrative, writ large—helps us think about ecology and the climate crisis in more productive ways. As scholars such as Rob Nixon, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and Ursula K. Heise have amply shown, however, representing climate crises poses significant challenges.[32] It is much easier said than done to craft compelling and coherent narratives that eschew a singular focus (often on the hero/savior figure, as delved into at length in Ch. III) in favor of representing collectivities. Climate change itself defies representation as the product of innumerable

[31] From his review of Stanka Radović's *Locating the Destitute: Space and Identity in Caribbean Fiction*, published in *New West Indian Guide* 90 (2016): 166.
[32] See, for example, Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2013), DeLoughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (Duke University Press, 2019), and Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

individual processes interacting in countless complex ways. And whatever the ostensible simplicity of its subject, narrative must always "flatten out" the complexity of reality. It could be argued, then, that literature that recognizes this complexity and density, as well as the interconnected character of the human and other-than-human relation, will more accurately represent our experience of climate change. Caribbean literature responds to this task through an often-heterodox representation of climate crisis and response.

Before delving more deeply into this problematic, however, I will first provide an overview of pertinent strains of environmental thought in modern and contemporary climate discourse. I will also discuss the debate surrounding the nomenclature of the Anthropocene and its many variants, including their relevance for the Caribbean perspective. These sections will provide important context for the Caribbean eco-epistemology that I will then aim to develop and define.

Environmentalism(s)

A significant advantage of the postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach is that it provides a privileged vantage point from which to critique the weaknesses of various environmentalist movements and strains of thought. This section will thus provide an overview of many environmentalisms to move toward a synthetic approach, one that not only finds expression in Caribbean literature and theory, but also operates as a corrective to the shortcomings of these various ways of thinking about—and acting upon—other-than-human nature. In doing so, I will sharpen my own definition of Caribbean eco-epistemology, which was briefly sketched out above.

Even before Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger's polemic "The Death of Environmentalism," (2004) which levied an incisive critique of the inefficacies of contemporary U.S. environmentalism, many scholars had cast scrutiny on the longstanding approaches of Western environmental groups. For Jason Moore, these organizations tend to reify the human/Nature dichotomy underpinning projects of capital and empire. Imagining an arguably illusory "return" to an idyllic, uncontaminated form of nature, they often focus primarily on conservation and biodiversity.[33] The issue there, however, is that these are a priori selective decisions that often prioritize aesthetic and affective concerns by say, protecting dogs or dolphins rather than cows or pigs (or fruit flies or any other creatures we tend to find aesthetically unappealing or un-useful). While deep ecology has borne the brunt of many critiques from all sides over the years, it started very much in the spirit of a corrective to this "shallow" form of environmentalism described above.

Arne Næss, the founding father of the deep ecology movement, felt that mainstream environmentalism operates as an "extension of European and North American anthropocentrism—its reasons for conserving wilderness and preserving biodiversity are invariably tied to human welfare, and it prizes nonhuman nature mainly for its use-value" (Keller 206). Another key problem, which the late Richard Grove traced back to the early history of environmentalism (which, in a fascinating and rather counterintuitive historical twist, developed out of colonialism),[34] is that "states will act to prevent environmental degradation only when their economic interests are shown to be directly threatened" (47). As

[33] According to Maurie Cohen, more than 90% of environmental organizations orient themselves around wildlife protection and landscape preservation ("Introduction" to the Symposium on "The Death of Environmentalism," *Organization & Environment* 19.1 (2006): 74-81).
[34] See Grove's landmark work *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism 1600-1860.*

such, deep ecology strives beyond this political, anthropocentric approach to conservation and instead toward an unrelentingly egalitarian biodiversity, "affirm[ing] the inherent value of all forms of life that contribute to this ultimate good, and…actively [opposing] all actions and process by human beings and their societies that compromise these values" (Wolfe 24).[35] Driving this framework is an expansion of ecological consciousness that enables the understanding that, ultimately, harming nature is always harming ourselves (Kimberly Smith 20). Yet there are blind spots in this quasi-utopian view of nature that would dissolve all boundaries, as deep ecologist Warwick Fox envisions.[36] In a well-known critique, eco-feminist scholar Val Plumwood notes that deep ecology's pretense to obliterate all forms of division is an "over-generality [that] fails to provide a genuine basis for an environmental ethics of the kind sought" (13). An even more damning appraisal of deep ecology famously comes from Ramachandra Guha, whose "Third World Critique" essay[37] reproaches deep ecology for its "lack of concern with inequalities *within* human society" (qtd. in Cilano and DeLoughrey 71). Moreover, we might criticize the "ecology" of "deep ecology" for its over-insistence on harmony, an idea that some have labeled "clearly romantic and supported by a somewhat selective view of history" (Allaby).[38] Despite these shortcomings, deep ecology maintains certain ideas that resonate closely with the Caribbean literature examined throughout this dissertation. For example, Næss invokes a rejection of "the monopoly of

[35] Critics have noted, however, that this will always be a challenging ethos to maintain—e.g. are botulism and COVID-19 not technically living organisms and thus part of "biodiversity" as well?
[36] For example, Fox offers this nebulous (and impossible?) ideal of deep ecology: "To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness'' ("Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?" *The Ecologist* 14 (1984), p. 196).
[37] "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique." *Environmental Ethics* (Spring, 1989): 71-83. Published in the late 1980s, Guha's essay came well before the general shift in the humanities and social sciences away from "First/Third World" discourse (and toward "Global North/South," for example, which this dissertation deploys throughout).
[38] "1.3.: Ecology and environmentalism," in *Basics of Environmental Science* (2nd edition).

narrowly human and short-term argumentation patterns in favor of life-centered long-term arguments" and "the human-in-environment metaphor in favor of a more realistic human-in-ecosystems and politics-in-ecosystems one" (Sessions 452).

This gesture towards ecology and even a kind of "green postcolonialism" (Graham Huggan's formulation) is consonant with much Caribbean environmental thought, as well as that of a host of "eco-Marxists," including Marxist geographers and proponents of "world-ecology." At least as early as David Harvey's "The Nature of Environment" (1991-93), Marxist scholars have attempted to develop a unified critique of social and environmental change in a radical dialectic (Moore 2015: 23).[39] Many of these scholars have, under Marx's influence, elaborated an environmental critique of capitalism through the figure of metabolic rift,[40] as well as Marx's theory of value and reification.[41] On the whole, these critics agree that in "the immanent dynamics of the capitalist system…the unbounded drive of capital for valorization erodes its own material conditions and eventually confronts it with the limits of nature" (Saito 20). Within eco-Marxism there has also been a tendency to extrapolate Marx's insight that capitalism "undermine[s]" both "the soil and the worker" to many other areas; as Jason Moore points out, this recognition "applies well beyond the era of large-scale industry…and well beyond the wage worker" (2015: 26). Moore, however, does not unequivocally support the approach of many eco-Marxists. In fact, he argues that the "Oregon School" (namely, Foster, Clark, and York) grounds its analysis "in a Cartesian paradigm" that views "environmental degradation…[a]s a *consequence* of capitalist

[39] Harvey developed his essay between 1991 and 1993 (culminating in its publication in *The Socialist Register* 1993), and it carries the subtitle of "The Dialectics of Social and Environmental Change."
[40] See Foster and Clark 2000, as well as Foster's essay "Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology" (*American Journal of Sociology* 105.2 (1999): 366-405).
[41] See Kohei Saito's *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy*.

development" rather than "*constitutive* of capitalism as a historical system" (2011: 2). This subtlety underlies Moore's own critical framework, which he dubs "world-ecology."

For Moore, many environmentalisms, including deep ecology, focus excessively on an abstracted "Nature"[42] rather than on how material conditions have shaped the human-environment relation. In contrast, he envisions the "the world-ecological perspective [of] environmental history [a]s every bit as much about factories as forests, stock exchanges, shopping centers, slums, and suburban sprawls as soil exhaustion and species extinction" (2011: 34).[43] Moore thus insists on a more holistic assessment of capitalism that does not paint it as somehow exterior to other-than-human nature and vice versa. A touch polemically, as is his wont, he contends that "Capitalism does not *have* an ecological regime; it *is* an ecological regime…[it] is not an economic system; it is not a social system; it is *a way of organizing nature*" (2015: 2). In this way, world-ecology does not endeavor to explore the political side of ecology or the ecological side of politics, but rather politics and capitalism *qua* ecology. This re-appraisal of environmentalism shares commonalities with other recent analyses, such as David Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession," Naomi Klein's "disaster capitalism," Rob Nixon's "slow violence," and the critique of "runaway capitalism."[44]

[42] Moore claims that the ecology of "world-ecology" is not "the ecology of Nature—with uppercase N—but the ecology of the *oikeios*: that creative, generative, and multilayered relation of life-making, of species and environments" (2014: 169).

[43] Moore's attention here to "shopping centers, slums, and suburban sprawls" shows the consonance of his thought with that of urban political ecology, touched on briefly below and at much greater length in Chapter Five.

[44] See: Harvey, "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession" (*Socialist Register* (2004): 63-87); Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Knopf, 2007); Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2013); and Christopher Meyer and Julia Kirby, "Runaway Capitalism" (*Harvard Business Review* January-February 2012).

As world-ecology rightly points out, capitalism and imperialism functioned historically as interrelated forces with a shared proclivity for separating and abstracting "Nature" from "Humanity." This was also a profoundly exclusionary outlook that left out

> most humans from Humanity—indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, nearly all women, and even many white-skinned men (Slavs, Jews, the Irish). From the perspective of imperial administrators, merchants, planters, and conquistadores, these humans were not Human at all. They were regarded as part of Nature, along with trees and soils and rivers—and treated accordingly. (Moore 2014: 170)

Against this alienation, proponents of world-ecology wish to drive us towards an engaged environmentalism that recognizes a "web of life" without succumbing to utopian ideations of a "Nature" somehow separate from the human, the urban, etc. Malcom Ferdinand's "world*ly*-ecology" echoes this perspective by "assum[ing] a relational ontology that recognizes that our existence and our bodies…[comprise] encounters with a plurality of human beings *and* a plurality of non-human beings," an eco-ontology that better lends itself to a sustainable commitment to biodiversity (231). Campbell and Niblett note, however, the extent to which the interests of capitalist accumulation obstruct conservationist measures, reminding us that "the problem of ecological degradation is not merely an abstractly environmental one that can be dissociated from questions of wealth and power" (2).

This is precisely where the environmentalists who proclaim themselves "ecomodernists"[45] or "eco-pragmatists" [46] often have a significant blind spot. They sincerely

[45] Although many terms prefixed by "eco" will be followed by a hyphen throughout this dissertation, I will use "ecomodernist" (sans hyphen) as that is how it is written in the "Ecomodernist Manifesto."
[46] Another group, led by David Kirkpatrick, touts a form of ecomodernism/pragmatism known as "Techonomy," which argues that technology "is itself a neutral force" and whose website features articles with titles such as "Business May Be Our Only Hope for Climate" (https://techonomy.com/).

hope (that word is significant)[47] that capital will enable technological innovation capable of saving us from—or at least dramatically mitigating—the catastrophic possibilities of climate change. Similarly, they share with the world-ecologists a rejection of an old-school, "back-to-nature" environmentalism. While they make some valid points, many of which are perhaps too hastily rejected by certain leftists, such as the legitimate role of denser cities, safer nuclear energy, and responsible implementation of GMOs, ecomodernists generally subscribe to the dominant narrative underpinning capitalism as well as blockbuster disaster films: progress and innovation are inevitable, and a singular force (fueled by market forces), whether technology or a heroic figure, will arise to help us overcome the climate crisis. In an interview, French historian François Jarrige refutes this approach, which he terms "techno-solutionnisme," because "l'idée du découplage [et] la poursuite de la trajectoire de croissance" championed by the ecomodernists

> repose sur l'idée que, grâce au marché, et grâce à la technologie, ils vont [nous] permettre d'optimiser nos consommations [et] d'optimiser nos productions et donc de continuer à maintenir la même qualité de service, continuer de croître, d'augmenter notre niveau de vie, tout en diminuant notre consommation d'énergie, notre pollution, etc… Évidemment on a besoin de technologie, on a besoin de modifier nos infrastructures techniques pour les rendre plus résilients…mais en même temps le problème c'est que les acteurs politiques depuis le dix-neuvième siècle font tellement confiance dans la technique qu'ils hésitent de poser d'autres enjeux, d'autres

[47] Derrick Jensen, cofounder of radical environmental group Deep Green Resistance, argues against hope since it involves placing "faith in something outside yourself, and outside the current moment…to make things all right in the end." Instead, he argues that it's an acceptance of the situation that allows us the freedom to tackle it honestly (Burkeman 230-31). Arundhati Roy, in *The Cost of Living*, makes a similar point through the chiasmatic claim that "as long we have faith, we have no hope. To hope, we have to break the faith" (25).

> questions. Le changement technique doit s'accompagner de changements de pratiques sociales parce que sinon la technologie ne pourra pas résoudre…et surtout cela crée une illusion…que face à chaque problème il aura une solution technique miraculeuse…[48]

In addition to echoing Guattari's call for transversal thinking ("changements de pratiques sociales"), Jarrige makes abundantly clear that capitalism delights in the idea of "green growth" because it leads to new products and new markets. Oftentimes, however, these approaches simply displace pollution rather than embrace a truly *radical* tactic that, per its etymology, seizes the issue at its roots (e.g. the prevalence of discourse and investment around creating a "cleaner" car, rather than questioning the primacy of the automobile in the first place and moving instead toward ridesharing, public transport, and improving mobility for bikes and pedestrians.) As Daniela Huber argues in her critique of the European Green Deal, the policies "*change the instruments* of production, consumption and growth, but *do not question the goals* of endless production, consumption and growth" (4). To put it simply, runaway capitalism's innate focus on short-term profits[49] is fundamentally at odds with what Marx calls "the whole gamut of permanent conditions of life required by the chain of successive generations" (*Capital*, vol. 3; qtd. in Foster 384).

Indeed, a central irony behind ecomodernism is that it depends upon unbridled progress fueled by "free market" capitalism,[50] a phenomenon that has undoubtedly

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[48] "Sobriété énergétique : du slogan à la pratique." *France Culture*, 30 August 2022.

[49] Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia, captures this sentiment in a response to a hypothetical about taking his company public: "What a disaster that would have been. Even public companies with good intentions are under too much pressure to create short-term gain at the expense of long-term vitality and responsibility" (qtd. in Corbett, n.p.).

[50] By placing "free market" in quotes, I am pointing to the unfortunate fact that, as Walter Lippmann puts it, "most men have shown in their behavior that they wished to impose free capitalism on others and to escape it themselves" (qtd. in Appleman 645).

contributed more than any other to the overconsumption fueling our current climate predicament.[51] In fact, climate change "poses a powerful challenge to the idea that the free pursuit of individual interests always leads to the general good" (Ghosh 2016: 136). Unfortunately, our inability to recognize this forms part of what philosopher Gunther Anders terms "apocalypse blindness," which involves our seeming inability and/or outright refusal to acknowledge the full range of technology's (potential) consequences (Horn 229). Moreover, the "Ecomodernist Manifesto," as George Monbiot notes,[52] makes not a single mention of inequality. In it, there is little to no sense of the *longue durée*, or of the damages wrought by "modernity." In Luis Prádano's view, ecomodernist approaches thus equate to a "depoliticized environmentalism" (212).

One of numerous fascinating examples[53] of ecomodernist-style thinking finds expression in Telosa (as in *telos*), the imagined utopic city dreamed up by Marc Lore, a billionaire former Walmart executive. To Lore's credit, the city purportedly draws inspiration from the work of Henry George, whose work *Poverty and Progress* proposes a sort of collectivist ownership (as such, the city of Telosa would collectively retain ownership

[51] There is a considerable ego at the heart of (particularly American) capitalism, which sees itself as the only solution for all of the world's ills. Take, for example, the reaction of Edgar Woolard, the CEO of DuPont, following the Exxon Valdez catastrophe; he argued that environmental groups and governments couldn't fix the environment, so corporations have to, even coining the phrase "corporate environmentalism" in the process (Buell 23-24). For a nuanced reading of Woolard's tenure, see Adam Rome's article "DuPont and the Limits of Corporate Environmentalism" (*Business History Review* 93.1 (2019): 75-99). One notable exception to this is the clothing company Patagonia, whose founder Yvon Chouinard (cited above) recently placed 98% of the company's shares into a nonprofit that will use all of the company's profits in the fight against climate change (see Jessica Corbett's "'Earth Is Now Our Only Shareholder': Founder Gives Away Patagonia to Save the Planet," *Common Dreams*, 14 September 2022).

[52] Monbiot, George. "Meet the ecomodernists." *The Guardian*, 24 Sept 2015.

[53] Consider, for example, as Kendall Dix relates in his piece "Blue Neocolonialism," the fact that the CEO of The Nature Conservancy, one of the world's largest environmental organizations, and a proponent of "blue bonds," is Mark Tercek, former managing director and partner at Goldman Sachs, who wrote a book called *Nature's Fortune: How Business and Society Thrive by Investing in Nature*, which reads like a how-to on profiting off of environmental conservation (see Dix, "Blue Neocolonialism," *Uneven Earth*, 25 January 2021).

of the land). The Telosa website features a variety of mock images straight out of sci-fi and speculative fiction, with skyscrapers covered in greenery and pods zooming above the city on magnetic tracks. Indeed, the site interpellates its visitors via an appeal to the imagination: "Imagine living in a city with an economic system in which citizens have a stake in the land; as the city does better, the residents do better. We call this Equitism." They also describe Equitism as "inclusive growth." Again, to their credit, they recognize that "the current economic system is a growth engine [but]…has led to increasing inequality." In response, they propose four key pillars for the creation of a more equitable and sustainable city:

- Enhanced social services
- Participatory governance
- Sustainable urban design
- Vibrant economy

There is an impressive amount of text outlining these pillars and other aspects of Telosa in relatively fine detail. If all goes according to plan, would-be Telosa residents can be "ready to move in 2030." Only time will tell, however, if this is ultimately a quixotic pipe dream (like many other celebrity ventures into sustainability)[54] or an ambitious and well-executed mission to reinvent the city. My skepticism of Telosa derives in large part from the outsized influence of one extremely wealthy individual, and also because it has a wide range of quite lofty and largely unprecedented goals. It encapsulates, down to its very name, our obsession with teleological thinking.[55]

[54] See Colin Freeman's "From 'wellness' to shotguns: how Leonardo DiCaprio's Belize eco-dream turned sour," *The Telegraph*, 5 November 2021, and Wilfred Chan's "Mold, leaks, rot: how Brad Pitt's post-Katrina housing project went horribly wrong in New Orleans," *The Guardian* 3 February 2022.

[55] To be clear, I am not opposed to well-researched technological developments in "climate tech," one such example being the Living Carbon project, which deploys enzymes to bypass photorespiration in trees, allowing for greater carbon sequestration. In general, however, I support rapidly scaling up existing technologies rather than extensive investment into new technologies that may not prove fruitful, as it is a question of time (venture capital operates in seven- to ten-year time frames, and we need to actively limit rising above the 1.5° Celsius

In any case, Telosa gets many things right (on paper)—among them, notably, that cities are crucial to a sustainable future that manages to promote urbanite happiness while refusing to sacrifice the environment, and that the urban and nature are intimately connected. The final "environmentalism" to which I will now turn, urban political ecology (UPE), hinges upon this latter point, considering cities to be "particular process[es] of environmental production, sustained by particular sets of socio-metabolic processes" (Swyngedouw 2006: 22). For UPE, a movement led most earnestly by Erik Swyngedouw, metabolism and circulation serve as guiding metaphors. This framework shares, with Jason Moore's world-ecology, a denunciation of the long-standing tendency to separate out Humanity and/or the Urban from Nature (capitals intended to imply abstraction). The use of metabolism and circulation helps "convey a sense of flow, process, change, transformation, and dynamism in addition to the 'inter-connectedness' suggested by…other tropes," such as "networks, assemblages, rhizomes, imbroglios, [and] collectives" (Swyngedouw, ibid). An appealing aspect of UPE is its ready extrapolation beyond the urban—which, in fact, it insists upon, given its point that the urban only exists through its appropriation of nature. It thus holds promise as a perspective that contextualizes both historically and materially, and it will serve as a primary theoretical tool for Chapter Five, which focuses on science-fiction cities as a privileged mode for rethinking the urban.

I have taken the time here to elaborate on many environmentalisms because it provides important context for both the Caribbean eco-epistemology and PCE approach that

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mark as affirmed by the 2022 IPCC report). One need only look so far as Shell's new carbon capture plant, which "is emitting significantly more carbon than it's capturing," the equivalent of 1.2 million cars, to be exact ("Shell's Massive Carbon Capture Plant Is Emitting More Than It's Capturing," *Vice World News*, January 20, 2022). I tend to agree with James Temple, senior editor at *MIT Technology Review*, when he argues that carbon capture is becoming a dangerous distraction (see "Carbon removal hype is becoming a dangerous distraction," *MIT Climate Portal*, 8 July 2021).

this dissertation endeavors to both sketch and refine. As there is, of course, no singular Caribbean eco-epistemology, it is important to avoid generalizations. Nonetheless, they can be rhetorically useful, and so I will now point to a few critical ways that Caribbean environmental thinking tends to converge and diverge with the environmentalisms outlined above:

1) a reluctance to overly empathize with a utopic and somehow pure form of nature (Cilano and DeLoughrey);
2) a preference for relationality and diversality over universality (and thus the privileged place of the rhizomatic mangrove in conceptualizing identity);[56]
3) a suspicion of Manichean frameworks and dogmatism (instead embracing ambiguity, opacity, polyphony, etc.); and
4) a tendency to frame the natural world as an active agent rather than passive subject (in both content and form).

These four points, while of course not taken up by all Caribbean writers or environmental activists, nonetheless find frequent expression in the environmental discourse of/on the islands.[57] The resolve of many Caribbean writers to reflect on and represent the sociopolitical context of runaway capitalism and colonialism, as well as consistent attention to the imbrication of the human and other-than-human, aligns them most narrowly with eco-Marxism, world-ecology, and urban political ecology. On the other hand, a fundamental skepticism of the narrative of "progress" espoused by Western, capitalistic cultures leads

[56] Wilson Harris, like Glissant, prefers cultural multiplicities to the "one-sided notion of universality" (Preface, *The Mask of the Beggar*).
[57] For example, as with Martinique's *Association pour la sauvegarde du patrimoine martiniquais* (ASSAUPAMAR). Despite some shortcomings, Malcom Ferdinand describes it as the "backbone of the green movement in Martinique" and one that actively "emphasize[s] the need to consider ecology and politics together" (Ferdinand 2016: 175; 186).

them toward an alternative narrative that privileges creativity and imagination, one which is not afraid to move beyond empiricism and toward the eco-marvelous (a primary theme of Ch. IV). Finally, an appreciation for and aspiration toward the ecological foundation of total interconnectedness (Barry Commoner's "everything is connected to everything else") reveals certain resonances with deep ecology, including an ardent support of biodiversity and conservation measures.

I will invoke these environmentalisms—and their consonances and dissonances with one another and Caribbean eco-epistemology—throughout this dissertation in my reading of Caribbean fiction, in which the flora and fauna and landscapes come to embody quintessential postcolonial concerns of alienation, class, cultural identity, race, subjectivity, and power.

Anthropocene or…?

Despite the reluctance among professional geological associations to accept the "Anthropocene" (from Greek, "epoch of man") as our current official geological period, the term has seen explosive adoption in the humanities and social sciences. Much of the discussion has stemmed over whether this is, in fact, the best term to use. While this may seem somewhat pedantic—does an era by any other name not warm as quickly?—words matter, and the debate around "the Anthropocene" cuts to the core of many essential questions facing the Caribbean context. As such, a brief analysis of this nomenclature will permit me to discuss concerns that are fundamental to the rest of this dissertation.

Before delving into recent theories of the Anthropocene and its alternatives, let's recognize its foundational intention: i.e. to point to the extremely outsized impact that our

species has had on the planetary ecosystem.[58] This is now evident on a geological level since atomic bomb testing in the 1950s,[59] and will undoubtedly remain the case for centuries if not millennia (e.g. due to the petrochemical industry's continued manufacture of products such as Styrofoam and PFAS, aka "forever chemicals").[60] At its root, the "Anthropocene" serves largely to gesture us toward an interrogative and/or subjunctive mode of thought. Following Eric Prieto, it "asks us to do three important things":

1) to (re)think environmentalism "on a planetary scale";
2) to remind us of humanity's "embeddedness within nature"; and
3) to interrogate whether we can effectively "modify [our] behavior sufficiently to mitigate [our] environmental impact" and avoid total (anthropogenically driven) catastrophe. (2016: 47)

These are vital questions, and ones to which the discussion around the Anthropocene has helped bring greater critical attention.

There are, however, two dominant critiques that scholars make of the appellation "Anthropocene." For one, as social historian Paolo Vignolo argues,

> such a conception implies that humankind is thought of not only as a dominant and exceptional subject that controls and decides the fate of all non-human entities, but also as the victim of a kind of species-level autoimmune disorder whose actions produce side effects that prove immensely self-destructive. (274)

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[58] In fact, as Paul N. Edwards notes, it was the conceiving of "weather and climate as global phenomena" that "helped promote an understanding of the world as a single physical system" (xix).

[59] "In August 2016, the Working Group on the Anthropocene officially recommended 1950 as the birth of the Anthropocene. By the 1950s, plutonium fallout from atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons became a detectable global signature of humankind's transformation of the planet" (Moore, Allewaert, Gomez, and Mitman).

[60] Sneed, Annie. "Forever Chemicals Are Widespread in U.S. Drinking Water" (*Scientific American*, January 22 2021). Like microplastics, they are also found in blood samples.

In this view, the nomenclature of "the Anthropocene" becomes, ironically, anthropocentric. It does lead us, however, to actually acknowledge the role of our species in ecological devastation and the ongoing climate crisis. But does its very name not implicitly place the blame for all of this on the "undifferentiated whole" of humanity (Moore 2015: 170)?

This perspective led Jason Moore to develop the alternative term Capitalocene.[61] Many scholars are sympathetic to the intentions underlying Moore's term, which aims to historicize and contextualize the material factors that have led us to our current state of (climate) affairs. As Dipesh Chakrabarty contends,

> why should one include the poor of the world—whose carbon footprint is small anyway—by use of such all-inclusive terms as species or mankind when the blame for the current crisis should be squarely laid at the door of the rich nations in the first place and of the richer classes in the poorer ones? (216)

The fundamental point here, as outlined at length in Moore's *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (2015), is that the deployment of "the Anthropocene" without a historical awareness of capitalism leads to a reification of the false Nature/Human dichotomy upon which capitalism historically rested. This de-historicized understanding, which often points only to the Industrial Revolution as the Anthropocene's origin story, tends to reduce "nature to Nature: a substance that can be variously protected or destroyed by Humans" (Moore 2015: 178).[62] For Moore, however, we must look back to the early modern period and the beginnings of global imperialism.[63] This aligns with Amitav Ghosh's argument that the Anthropocene is

[61] There's a delicious, almost difficult to describe irony in Microsoft Word suggesting CapitalOne (a bank specializing in credit cards and auto finance) as a correction for "Capitalocene."
[62] This recalls Arne Næss' critique of the anthropocentric logic underpinning Western conservation efforts.
[63] As Ghosh argues,

> There is now a great deal of research to suggest that the early modern period, roughly the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, was a time of rapid and often parallel change around much of the world,

commonly thought through via capitalism but to a much lesser extent through the prism of empire (2016: 87). What the Capitalocene does, or at least what Moore would like for it to do, is draw attention to how centuries of commodification and exploitation—both of the raw materials of nature and the labor of the enslaved and indentured—built our current epoch, including its climate crisis. Ghosh and Chakrabarty point to this perspective as necessary for a deeper and more holistic understanding of capitalism, globalization, and the Anthropocene. For Chakrabarty, "a critique that is only a critique of capital is not sufficient for addressing questions relating to human history" (212).

Grounded in a similar perspective, and one which also valorizes the term Capitalocene,[64] Donna Haraway proposes the "Chthulucene" as another alternative. Derived from anecdotal experience, in diametric contrast to the universalizing nature of *anthropos*, and referring to the genus of a spider who bit her, the Chthulucene is for Haraway a recognition of "ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with"; in short, the idea that "we are at stake to each other." Above all, its perspective is that "human beings are not the only important actors…with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the Earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this Earth are the main story."[65] Haraway's attention to narrative here is something this dissertation will take up in its ensuing chapters, and this avowedly anti-anthropocentric

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> and particularly so across the Eurasian landmass. The fact that these developments were set in motion during a period of great climatic disruption (i.e., the seventeenth century) opens the door to the possibility that the changes of the early modern era were influenced by shifts in climate, which had varying effects on different parts of the planet. (94)

[64] She even goes so far as to say that "if we could only have one word for these SF times, surely it must be the Capitalocene" ("Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene." *e-flux Journal* 75 (2016): n.p.). Haraway also lays claim to developing the term around the same time as Moore, who himself heard it first proposed in 2009 by then-graduate student Andreas Malm during a seminar in Lund, Sweden (see footnote 24 of the article cited above).

[65] Ibid, n.p. (web).

perspective finds frequent expression in Caribbean literature and theory. Taken together with yet another Anthropocene alternative, the "Plantationocene," they cohere quite closely with the perspectives and imperatives at the heart of Caribbean eco-epistemology and the PCE approach, respectively.

Developed by Haraway alongside the anthropologist Anna Tsing, the Plantationocene connects both materially and ideologically with the Caribbean. It is most productively read alongside "long-standing traditions of Black, Caribbean, and Indigenous radical thought confronting the enduring legacies of plantations and the transformations of land, labor, bodies, and systems of value that have accompanied their making" (Moore, Allewaert et al).[66] As such, the Plantationocene—with the historicizing[67] and de-anthropocentrizing tendencies it shares with the Capitalocene and Chthulucene—is the most pertinent Anthropocene alternative for Caribbean discourse (and thus my purposes here).

The plantation serves as a kind of Thirdspace (Edward Soja)[68] or heterotopia (Michel Foucault),[69] one inexorably bound up with creole identity and maroon ecology (the latter of which I will define shortly). For Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo, the plantation serves as the Caribbean's "big bang" event, playing an outsized role in establishing instability and change as defining features of creole culture (Lesne 21). As the organizing force par excellence in European colonialism, the plantation became an antagonistic symbol of the

[66] From "Plantation Legacies," a collective work published online without pagination.
[67] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in arguing for "a more ethnographic approach" to Haitian history, calls for attention to the "plantation context" to properly understand the phenomenon of creolization, which he poetically characterizes as a "a miracle begging for analysis" ("Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context," 194-95).
[68] For Soja, "Thirdspace" is both "real and imagined" space where embodied experiences occur (see *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*).
[69] In "Des espaces autres" (1967), Foucault sets up "hétérotopie" in contradistinction to "utopie," and he refers to colonies as a "type extrême" of heterotopia.
https://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heteroTopia.fr/

oppression it wielded. Crucially, the term Plantationocene draws our attention to the ways in which "the European colonization of the Americas produced a violent way of inhabiting the Earth that denies the possibility of a world with the non-European: *a colonial inhabitation*… [that] transformed the land into the jigsaws of factories and plantations" (Ferdinand 20-21).

At the heart of theory around the Plantationocene is a recognition (and condemnation) of ecological imperialism, making it a perspective that aligns narrowly with the PCE approach as well as "decolonial ecology." In his work *Decolonial Ecology*, for instance, Malcom Ferdinand sees the Plantationocene as the setting for "a *socio-economic and political imperialism* that subjugates humans and non-humans to these plantations; and an *ontological imperialism*, meaning the imposition of a singular understanding of what the Earth is and what those who exist upon it are" (38). Ferdinand's delineation of these interrelated imperialisms at the heart of the plantation system echoes Édouard Glissant's vision of the plantation as "un des lieux focaux où se sont élaborés quelques-uns des modes actuels de la Relation" (1990: 79). For Glissant, it was in this "univers de domination et d'oppression…[où] des humanités se sont puissament obstinées" (ibid). Such a conception of the plantation(ocene) depends upon a recognition of material and ecological conditions as well as ideological ones, and it is these vital interconnections that I attempt to grasp through the neologism "eco-epistemology."

Eco-epistemology and the postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach

The etymology of "apprehend" (Lat. *apprehendere*) means "to grasp," a fine reminder of the inherent materiality underpinning ideology. In other words, we must *app*rehend—take hold of the material—in order to *com*prehend, i.e. understand *with*, as

knowledge is always already collectively built and shared (not unlike ecosystems). The Caribbean eco-epistemology I will begin to sketch here is a way of thinking about the human and other-than-human relation that acknowledges the sociohistorical and ecological conditions that not only radically altered the Caribbean, but the entire world. In this way, thinking about the Caribbean is deeply enriched by an ecocritical framework that does not forget the history of colonialism. In the spirit of the ongoing work on the Plantationocene and decolonial ecology outlined above, this dissertation similarly aims to "make visible power relations and economic, environmental, and social inequalities that have…accelerated species extinction, and [made] growing wealth disparity more precarious for some human and nonhuman beings than others" (Moore, Allewaert, et al). The Caribbean eco-epistemology I tease out from a reading of diverse writers and theorists is, on the whole, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist. It recognizes that understanding the human and other-than-human relation also means understanding how capital and empire have conceived it and transformed it, with accumulation and exploitation envisioned as inexhaustible processes. As such, the postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach is well-positioned to approach Caribbean literature and theory and sketch the eco-epistemology underpinning its various texts.

To reckon with violence against both people and environment, the PCE approach draws upon a strain of postcolonial studies that, following Graham Huggan, engages primarily "in the service of human freedom." With an added ecological focus, however, this becomes a theory in the service of human *and* non-human freedom—supporting the right to exist, the right to one's habitat.[70] The traumatic past infuses the landscapes of plantation,

[70] I'm riffing here on Henri Lefebvre's "droit à la ville." I return to his work in Chapter Five in the context of urban political ecology.

field, hill (*morne*), mangrove, forest, and ocean; or, as Wilson Harris argues, we can understand the Caribbean as a "landscape saturated by traumas of conquest" (8). The crop field becomes a cursed place (as in Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Case-Nègres*),[71] but also holds promise as a site of liberatory destiny (as in Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*).[72] This dynamic (one might say double entendre) of historical pain and revolutionary possibility embodied in the spaces and places of the Caribbean is ubiquitous in its history and its fiction. Caribbean writers, for example, often cast an intimate dependence on the land in ambivalent terms.

Such ambivalence characterizes the eco-epistemology typical, I will argue, of much Caribbean literature. It often resonates closely with Malcom Ferdinand's decolonial ecology, through which he takes aim at "modernity's colonial and environmental double fracture," lamenting the fact that postcolonial and antiracist movements have not tended to converse with environmental movements (and vice versa). This creates a blind spot, as Ferdinand notes, because

> by leaving aside the colonial question, ecologists and green activists overlook the fact that both historical colonization and contemporary structural racism are at the center of destructive ways of inhabiting the Earth. Leaving aside the environmental and animal questions, antiracist and postcolonial movements miss the forms of violence that exacerbate the domination of the enslaved, the colonized, and racialized women. (11)

[71] "[U]n champ représentait toujours à mes yeux un endroit maudit où des bourreaux qu'on ne voyait même pas condamnent des nègres, dès l'âge de huit ans, à sarcler, bécher, sous des orages qui les flétrissent et des soleils qui dévorent comme feraient des chiens enragés…" (163).
[72] I explore this idea further in Chapter Three.

On the contrary, the strength of decolonial ecology is that it "maintains continuities with the indigenous African and Amerindian communities but is not reducible to either of them" (13). In this way, both decolonial ecology and the PCE approach that I am advocating for operate as relatively omnivorous perspectives, ones that endeavor to avoid dogmatism and the shortcomings of a de-politicized ecocriticism or a post/decolonial studies inattentive to environmental concerns.

The eco-epistemology grounding the PCE approach thus privileges an appraisal of polyphonic perspectives and cultural artifacts as a remedy to (post/neo)coloniality, which "denies otherness and…mak[es] everything…a reduction to the Same" (Ferdinand 30). It recognizes that colonial inhabitation involved the establishing of monocultures that would degrade both the soil and the worker (Marx),[73] as well as enrich the plantation owner and investors in the *Hexagone* (Ferdinand 32-33). The subsequent disruptions to landscape (via deforestation) and biodiversity (via monocrop plantations) thus led to disruption of the metabolic exchange itself (Ferdinand 42). In light of this, eco-epistemology lays the foundation for a de-/postcolonial ecopoetics as a form of reparative writing, reading, and inhabiting that seeks to decenter the human within the sphere of the living.[74]

To adhere to this self-imposed ethos, this dissertation will draw transversally upon a variety of heterodox discourses, especially perspectives that privilege a sort of methodological creolization. One critical area, which Ferdinand terms "maroon ecology," reveals how less anthropocentric and decolonial thinking lies at the heart of Caribbean eco-

[73] Quoted in Moore 2015: 26. Marx's view perhaps inspired Frantz Fanon's pronouncement that "The colonial regime has hammered its channels into place and the risk of not maintaining them would be catastrophic. Perhaps everything needs to be started over again: the type of exports needs to be changed, not just their destination; the soil needs researching as well as the subsoil…" (qtd. in Ferdinand 15).
[74] What Patrick Chamoiseau frequently refers to as *le vivant* in his works.

epistemology. Against the brute oppression of colonialism, maroon ecology valorizes the resistance efforts (*marronage*) carried out by the maroons in the hills (*mornes*) around the plantation.[75] Lest we forget, the brutalization of slaves and maroons "was legally justified by metropolitan and colonial law" as Article 38 of the French *Code noir* (1685) stipulated dismemberment as a legal punishment for *petit marronage* (disappearing for one month), including cutting off ears, slashing tendons in the leg, or even amputation for repeat offenses (Allewaert 3; 90). The third offense? Nothing less than death. Despite these utterly dire conditions, Afro-American slaves developed syncretic cosmologies that relied fundamentally on the use of plants. To explore this aspect more fully, Chapter Four will turn to the role of Vodou in particular. As a botanical and community focused practice, Vodou grounds its understanding of the universe in a distinctly ecological perspective. Maroon resistance similarly depended on a far greater awareness of the land than the colonizers. The late eighteenth century showed a "[growing] awareness that those who could manipulate ecology possessed a transformative power associated then and now with revolution," and is William Blake's *March thro' a swamp or Marsh in Terra-firma* represents this vividly, as does Edmund Burke's association of French revolutionaries with "savages" and "maroon slaves" (Allewaert 47).[76]

[75] Allewaert points to the significance of the *mornes* as "spaces at the borders of plantations and plantation metropoles where Afro-Americans and their allies drew on the particularities of the terrain to resist and even incapacitate the order of the colonial plantation zone" (144). This dynamic finds expression in Glissant's *La Lézarde*, which I analyze in Chapter Two.

[76] And thus clearly affirming the nature/culture split that I have been critiquing here.

Blake, "March thro' a swamp or Marsh in Terra-firma (1793); credit: National Gallery of Art

It is in many ways thanks to the creole storyteller, who Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant in fact valorize as the most important figure of Antillean folk culture,[77] that the stories and traditions of Vodou and maroon culture continue to be told. As Cuban scholar Gustavo Pérez Firmat argues, creolist writing aims "to achieve an ever closer link with *la*

[77] Bongie 156-57. Similarly, George Lamming argues that the "third most important event in [British Caribbean] history," after its "discovery" and the abolition of slavery, is "the discovery of the novel by West Indians as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of the West Indian community" (qtd. in Campbell and Niblett 5). Chamoiseau continues to prominently valorize the folk storyteller—e.g. in the lyrical theoretical work *Le conteur, la nuit et le panier* (2021) and in his novel *Le Vent du nord dans les fougères glacées* (2022), which follows a group in search of Boulianno, a *conteur* who presided over funeral wakes with quasi-supernatural storytelling ability.

tierra, regarded as the matrix of individual and national identity" (88), a view shared by Glissant when he claims that the Caribbean writer "doit…dévoiler la vivacité féconde d'une dialectique réamorcée entre nature et culture antillaises" (1981: 133). This dissertation thus engages at length with literature as a means of deepening our understanding of the human and other-than-human relation and as a tool for creating new possibilities in post/colonial environments—and not only in the Caribbean, but in the world at large. As Ghosh succinctly puts it, "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (2016: 9). Literature can help fill the gap as a privileged space for imagining new realities and thus new—and, ideally, improved—iterations of the human and other-than-human relation (Posthumus 86).

As such, the following chapter continues to define and deploy a PCE approach suitable for analyzing the rhizomatic postcolonial ecologies of three now-canonical novels of (francophone) Caribbean literature: Édouard Glissant's *La Lézarde* (1958), Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989), and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992). My readings of these novels engage in an exploration of fiction and the representational difficulties of climate change, as well as key concepts such as "slow violence" (Rob Nixon) and Glissantian terms such as *Relation* and *opacité*. In Glissant's debut novel, I examine how the political frames the environmental and vice versa. Moreover, I highlight how Glissant's novel eschews what would be the artificial and arbitrary character of a linear and ordered literary representation, given the disrupted and unsettled nature of Caribbean identity and collective memory in the wake of colonization (and departmentalization). Then, in Condé's second novel upon returning to her native Guadeloupe, I argue that there is a meaningful recognition

of the opacity of Caribbean identity, a fact ironically captured in the title.[78] Its (post)modernist arrangement of many intertwined voices speaks both to the fundamentally ecological nature of community (the *oikos*) as well as the idea that knowledge is always bound up in a multiplicity of perspectives. Finally, in Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, I identify an urban ecology that valorizes informal urbanism as a logical response to the Plantationocene. Much like Condé, Chamoiseau emphasizes a poetics of disorder that eschews orthodox rationality in favor of a creole aesthetic of community. Ultimately, one discovers in *Texaco* a form of adaptability and resilience that arises through a historically informed engagement with other-than-human nature.

Chapter Three builds upon this examination of Caribbean fiction as a corpus that often privileges ambiguity and the subversion of conventional forms, while nonetheless frequently taking up the savior metanarrative. In addition to the "white savior" mentality often found in colonial ideology, ecologically focused fiction frequently features messianic characters, not to mention the savior structure inherent in environmental approaches dependent upon "le techno-solutionnisme" (François Jarrige's term). The savior trope, however, depends upon a limited model that is historically (and continually) tied to "free-market" neoliberal ideologies and religiosity. Falling back on the miraculous is an undeniably questionable wager, and the same logic of unfettered and inexhaustible progress is largely what led us to our present predicament. As such, I ask if there is not a kind of Sisyphean messianism at work in our current climate discourse. Through a reading of Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944) and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Les neuf consciences du Malfini* (2009), I argue for a shift toward collectivities—as in Ursula K. Le

[78] Ironic because a character explicitly says that "On ne traverse pas le mangrove."

Guin's "carrier bag" model of fiction—in order to represent more accurately the chaotic order of ecology and respond more effectively to climate crisis. As such, this chapter calls for a movement from messiahs to mangroves and, therefore, an embrace of rhizomatic theory and praxis over the resigned and recurring appeals to a savior figure.

Chapter Four argues that the eco-marvelous, or tropical sublime, is one mode of fiction that may be better suited to answer this call to move away from heroic individualism. This is due in large part to the genre's tendency for ecologies that de center the human. My analysis of the fiction of three authors—Wilson Harris, Jacques Stephen Alexis, and Yanick Lahens—builds upon a synthesis of three interrelated ideological systems that scholars have not, to my knowledge, previously placed in conversation: deep ecology, indigenous and creole beliefs, and object-oriented ontology. Taken together, these epistemologies present a compelling case for an eco-marvelous form, which the aforementioned authors' work gestures toward in varying degrees. This genre ultimately valorizes the agency and rights of the other-than-human and acknowledges the historical and political failures of an anthropocentric worldview (of the kind that has radically altered—ecologically and ideologically—the authors' countries of Haiti and Guyana).

In Chapter Five, the eco-marvelous gives way to science fiction as another mode of speculative exploration, i.e. one that generally operates in the subjunctive mood (Ghosh 2016: 128). In one sense, this chapter intends itself as a corrective to the rather limited critical attention that the "world republic of letters"[79] has paid Caribbean sci-fi, for this body of literature offers vital alternatives to conventional sci-fi and cli-fi ("climate fiction"). To

[79] By this I mean not only humanities scholars but publishers, booksellers, book reviewers, casual readers, etc. The term derives from Pascale Casanova, who wrote *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999).

both highlight an urgent issue of the climate crisis and pragmatically narrow down the corpus, Chapter Five takes as its *point de départ* the urban space. With the understanding that we must reimagine our cities to effectively curb emissions and boost resiliency, I argue that novels by Tobias Buckell and Stephanie Saulter present alternative urbanisms that make room for less anthropocentric ways of thinking and being-in-the-city. Supporting my close readings is a synthesis of literary urban studies and urban studies writ large, including the work of Marxist geographers and the burgeoning field of urban political ecology.

Finally, the conclusion meditates on the crises of COVID-19 and chlordecone to "test" the applicability of the PCE approach that this dissertation applies to the history and culture of the Caribbean. Both issues stem from the rapid globalization and acceleration of neoliberal policies of the late twentieth century, and both represent effects of slow violence. I tend to agree with Ferdinand when he argues that it is "a cognitive and political embarrassment" to observe that France's overseas territories house some eighty percent of France's biodiversity without acknowledging that the inhabitants of these biodiverse-rich territories "are kept in poverty and on the margins of France's political and imaginary representations" (9). And while the chlordecone crisis has largely been understood as an obvious example of environmental injustice, shockingly little attention (in my view) has been paid to the foundations of the COVID-19 virus and what it tells us about our past, present, and future as a species inextricably bound up with every other, which is the ultimate lesson and ethos of ecology.

Alexis Ohanian writes that we often "don't even realize something is broken until someone else shows us a better way" (qtd. in Burkeman 53). The considerable environmental challenge before us, as Mike Davis persuasively argues, "requires a vast stage for the

imagination…presuppose[ing] a radical willingness to think beyond the horizon of neo-liberal capitalism" (44-45). Wilson Harris, following a similar appeal to the neglected role of imagination, proclaims our "need to build afresh through the brokenness of the world" (qtd. in Noxolo 382). In however small a way, this dissertation aims to contribute to this "building afresh"—to the movement from messiah to mangrove—by interrogating various strands of environmental thinking and proposing a Caribbean eco-epistemology, as teased out through the PCE approach, as a compelling addition and complement, and one that leads us toward a more just and fulfilling human and other-than-human relation.

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Chapter II

(Re)defining the Postcolonial-Ecocritical Approach:
A Case Study of Glissant, Condé, and Chamoiseau's Rhizomatic Ecologies

Since the turn of the century, scholars have increasingly noted the productive synergies of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism (see, for example: Nixon 2005, 2013; Huggan and Tiffin 2010; DeLoughrey and Handley 2011). While many scholars of both fields see their work as "correctives" to unacceptable sociopolitical or ecological realities, critics have observed certain blind spots unique to each of them (Banerjee 195). For instance, whereas some scholars have critiqued postcolonial studies for a lack of attention to environmental concerns (and thus an overly anthropocentric perspective), others have taken ecocritics—in particular, deep ecologists[80]—to task for privileging environmental costs over human ones. In any event, the climate crisis demands a holistic approach that goes beyond any one humanistic or (social) scientific discipline. Dipesh Chakrabarty echoes this sentiment in his influential essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses," acknowledging that

> readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today. (199)

In this chapter, I will argue that a wedding of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism—what I term the postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach[81]—creates a framework that is well

[80] For a more in-depth overview (and critique) of modern environmentalisms, including deep ecology, see Chapter One.

[81] This stems more for pragmatic reasons—I cite the PCE approach throughout the chapter and beyond—than a desire to neologize or stake a claim to a totally new theoretical framework. As shown throughout the introduction and in the very first sentence above, many scholars have called for a bringing together of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism (and successfully done so).

positioned to address the intersection of sociopolitical and ecological concerns at play in the climate crisis. Increasingly, as DeLoughrey and Handley note, “the land and even the ocean become...crucial as recuperative sites of postcolonial historiography” (8). This concept of witnessing runs through postcolonial studies as a crucial mode of dismantling postcolonial logic. Just as postcolonial critics and authors seek to restore agency to the marginalized, ecocritics aim to question the discourses and ideologies that have underpinned so much environmental devastation. In the Caribbean (and throughout the Global South), much of the violence against people and the earth stems from colonialism and its postcolonial legacies. Moreover, this history did not occur “naturally,” as it were; foundational narratives and logics built and supported it, ones that abstracted and Otherized both (post)colonial subjects and the landscapes they inhabit.

We see, then, the utility of the PCE approach when confronting postcolonial history and identity in the Caribbean, and especially when addressing the role of narrative. For the past seventy-five years or so, Caribbean writers have furnished a rich body of literature that challenges the insidious legacies of colonialism. In their works, several patterns emerge. Among them, for my purposes here, are the following: an insistence on the natural world as an *active* agent for both content and form; an intense suspicion of the reductive, binary logic characteristic of colonialism and, conversely, an embrace of ambiguity; a dismissal of singular perspectives and clear-cut identities in favor of a multiplicity of perspectives (polyphony) and creolized, rhizomatic identities and modes of understanding. This preference for creolization, horizontality (Chamoiseau), opacity (Glissant), and natural images such as the mangrove characterizes modern Caribbean literature as a logical reaction to the insistence on fixed identities and hierarchies perpetuated throughout the history of

colonialism and post/neocolonialism. This chapter will endeavor to show how Caribbean literature, when read through a PCE framework, reveals a rhizomatic eco-epistemology deviating from orthodox Western discourses of nature and appealing instead to a poetics of uncertainty and opacity.

This PCE approach, as I will attempt to define it below, offers a privileged perspective for the reading of these texts, as it takes stock not only of the historical conditions of the Caribbean but also attends to the role of the creative and narrative imagination in understanding the self vis-à-vis other-than-human nature. As such, this chapter will explore not only how the drama and trauma of (post/neo)colonialism has shaped the Caribbean landscape, but how a common eco-epistemology—as outlined in the introduction—has influenced these writers' assessments of post/neocolonialism and its construction of a rhizomatic identity. After elaborating a PCE synthesis from within the Caribbean context, I will deploy it to show how three exemplary novels—Glissant's *La Lézarde* (1958), Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989), and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992)—demonstrate Caribbean fiction's tendency to mobilize natural elements not only as meta/symbolic tropes, but as heuristic tools that mine ecological principles to interrogate the rhizomatic nature of postcolonial Caribbean identity. As DeLoughrey and Handley observe, the landscape/seascape in Caribbean literature often plays the role of "participant" in sociohistorical processes rather than a mere "bystander to human experience" (4). Ultimately, the three novelists under study display a kind of rhizomatic ecology in which the landscape plays a role in valorizing (and engendering hope for) emergent collectivities, the proliferation of which is desperately needed to combat our ongoing climate crisis and rethink the human and other-than-human relation.

(Before proceeding, I offer one significant caveat. An important consideration of analysis from both postcolonial and ecocritical vantage points is—or should be—a best effort to avoid reifying stereotypes and constraining the interpretation of Caribbean literature to certain confines (whether in terms of postcolonial identity or the centrality of ecology).[82] Although I do indeed aim to demonstrate the merits of a PCE approach, I do not wish to be prescriptive. This would above all be highly ironic given the defining features of both the Caribbean eco-epistemology I began sketching in the introduction, as well as the rhizomatic ecologies I will soon begin outlining.)

The Landscape in/of Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Few authors have mobilized the (post/neo)colonial landscape in its literal and symbolic forms as artfully as Martinican poet, playwright, and politician Aimé Césaire. With poetic indignation, Césaire connects colonialism narrowly with degradation. Extrapolating from his critique of the inhumane *rapports de force* established between colonizer and colonized, it follows that nature too suffers from the colonial mindset, in which it stands as a

[82] The most cursory sampling of interviews with Caribbean writers (including my own) quickly reveals the tendency to pose questions centered around identity—i.e. what does it *mean* to be a Caribbean author? Although a logical and significant question given the Caribbean historical and cultural context, such questions nonetheless point to a central issue of postcolonial literary studies (and one it perhaps perpetuates): to what extent do authors of the Global South possess, in Chamoiseau's words, "literary freedom"? In an interview, he elaborates that

> [on] est relativement contraintes, dans la mesure où nous sommes forcés de prendre en compte un certain nombre de difficultés concernant l'identité, l'exploration de l'histoire, la mémoire, les mutations identitaires, la question de la diversité, etc.… Ce sont des problèmes qui, en quelque sorte, ne nous permettent pas de "liberté littéraire." (De Bleeker 92)

Academic and literary markets are clearly complicit to some degree in pigeon-holing these authors—if they want to draw publishers and critical attention—into focusing on only the topical problems of their given region. It is thus important to remain sensitive to a certain reductivism and expectation that writers of the Global South will have—a priori—a political and/or identitarian parti pris. As the Haitian writer Yanick Lahens (whose work I read in Ch. IV) asks, "Why is it that a Third World writer cannot, before saying 'I am black or I am a Marxist,' say simply 'I am,' and write? In saying so, they would not necessarily be neglecting social concerns, politics, or history" (qtd. in Taleb-Khyar 442).

passive subject not only ripe for *but deserving of* subjugation for the benefit of a select few. As Césaire points out, the effects are deleterious not only for the colonized subject, but the colonizing one as well:

> [L]a colonisation…déshumanise l'homme même le plus civilisé ; …l'entreprise coloniale...fondée sur le mépris de l'homme indigène et justifiée par ce mépris, tend inévitablement à modifier celui que l'entreprend… [L]e colonisateur…pour se donner bonne conscience, s'habitue à voir dans l'autre *la bête*, s'entraine à le traiter en bête, tend objectivement à se transformer lui-même en *bête*. (18)

In *Une Tempête* (1969), his suggestive rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Césaire continues to reflect on the theme of colonial domination/subjugation observed here, with more attention to ecological resonances. In Césaire's version, Prospero becomes a white colonizer; Ariel, a mulatto; and Caliban, Prospero's black slave. Significantly, Prospero shares the instrumentalist view of nature typical to colonialism: Caliban tells us that, for Prospero, "la terre est une chose morte… Morte, alors on la piétine, on la souille, on la foule d'un pied vainqueur" (25-26). In Prospero's view, he's simply defending "civilization" (92).

Caliban, on the other hand, maintains an intimate rapport with nature—for example, he calls the sea (*la mer*) "ma copine" and continually personifies "her." Alone in his struggle for freedom against the powerful Prospero, Caliban remarks, "L'Histoire ne me reprochera pas de n'avoir pas su me libérer tout seul" (79). The allegorical overtones are obvious: who can blame a colonized people for not achieving liberation without any help, and while facing continuous degradation of the sort outlined above by Césaire? With Fanonian overtones, Caliban attacks Prospero for destroying his self-image:

> ...tu m'as tellement menti,

menti sur le monde, menti sur moi-même,

que tu as fini par m'imposer

une image de moi-même :

Un sous-développé, comme tu dis,

un sous-capable,

voilà comment tu m'as obligé à me voir,

et cette image, je la hais ! Et elle est fausse !

Mais maintenant, je te connais, vieux cancer,

et je me connais aussi ! (88)

Significantly, as he finds his voice and rises to challenge Prospero, Caliban speaks in verse, whereas previously his lines had been in prose. (Shakespeare often marked class differences through the intentional allotment of lines in verse for some characters and prose for others.) In deriding Prospero for assigning him this "fausse image" of inferiority, Caliban valorizes himself and, as the most ecologically centered character, other-than-human nature as well. Where postcolonial fiction seeks to raise awareness about injustice, ecologically focused literature aims to do the same for environmental injustice. *Une Tempête*, and the other texts that I will be close reading, do both—and not only do they criticize these injustices individually, but they show, critically, the ways in which they are inextricably interconnected. The PCE approach thus enables a more comprehensive reading of authors such as Césaire because it insists upon attending to the interplay between cultural, sociopolitical, and ecological forces.

Given the region's history of slavery and oppression—Caribbean societies are "inherently colonial," following Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1992)—discourses of inequality

find frequent expression in Caribbean literature. In his novel *La rue Cases-Nègres*, for example, Joseph Zobel bears witness to the institutionalized exploitation that took place in the plantation fields of Martinique, which are henceforth saturated with negative imagery in his mind:

> [U]n champ représentait toujours à mes yeux un endroit maudit où des bourreaux qu'on ne voyait même pas condamnent des nègres, dès l'âge de huit ans, à sarcler, bécher, sous des orages qui les flétrissent et des soleils qui dévorent comme feraient des chiens enragés… (163)

Here, Zobel reveals the fundamental role of experience in one's perception of the landscape. Whereas a tourist might see an idyllic, unproblematic field, Zobel sees the infernal site of child labor and myriad abuses. In Maryse Condé's novel *Traversée de la mangrove*, a character explains that "On ne traverse pas la mangrove. On s'empale sur les racines des palétuviers. On s'enterre et on étouffe dans la boue saumâtre," thus revealing the paradoxical nature of the title and affirming the inscrutable ambiguity of the text-cum-mangrove (202). Ultimately, such excerpts reveal how the Caribbean landscape embodies—for Caribbean subjects—quintessential (post)colonial concerns of alienation, class, cultural identity, race, subjectivity, and power.

In a critique that highlights the importance of the PCE approach, Toni Morrison argues that African Americans and indigenous peoples are, in the white imagination, "conceptually stained with dirt; the addition of still more dirt, for example in the form of toxic waste or polluted water, is therefore a non-issue" (qtd. in Mount and O'Brien 10). Unavoidably sullied by the back-breaking labor of the field, Caribbean plantation workers then bear the burden of a negative identification with the lower classes. This ironic and tragic

bind reinforces the biases of a colonial logic that proudly champions mastery over the earth but denigrates those who toil in the fields and produce the goods that enrich the colonizer. Such logic is consonant with a pervasive and sinister aspect of Western imperialism: after causing (overseeing, funding) radical degradation of the land, colonizers then associate the devastated land with the colonized laborers rather than with themselves. Guyanese writer Wilson Harris has rightfully pointed out that Caribbean countries feature "a landscape saturated by traumas of conquest" (1962: 8). To learn from the horrors of the colonial past and post/neocolonial present, Harris argues that humanity must engage in a "profound dialogue with the landscape" (qtd. in Subramanian 139). Doing so will better enable an undoing of our "epistemological tendencies to decouple nature and history, human and nonhuman" (Subramaniam 139).

Sensitive to both sociopolitical concerns and ecological ones, the PCE approach aims to recouple "nature and history, human and nonhuman." A vital component of this process involves a recognition of hybridity and an acceptance that, to paraphrase Glissant, one can change through an exchange with the Other without losing oneself.[83] Unfortunately, much mainstream environmentalism continues to adhere to a discourse that reinforces the human/nature binary. As Rob Nixon has noted, "the poetics of hybridity that dominates postcolonial studies…does not sit well with the ethics of mainstream environmentalism" (2005: 984). As a corrective to this shortcoming of much contemporary environmentalism, the PCE approach embraces hybridity as an essential feature of both ecology and the globalizing world. And to interrogate both ecological and symbolic/representational concerns, there is no better figure of hybridity in the Caribbean than the mangrove.

[83] The exact citation is given a few paragraphs below.

For the reader who may be unfamiliar, here is a succinct definition offered by Fabienne Viala:

> La mangrove est un écosystème biovégétal qui se définit par sa capacité d'adaptation à un milieu hostile, une extrême salinité de l'eau, un amoncellement de vase et une absence d'oxygène qui force les branches à puiser en profondeur dans un sol instable. Les racines se tubérisent et filtrent le sel, telles des éponges, jusqu'à ressembler à un ossuaire blanchi par les cristaux salins. (127-28)

It is no surprise that Caribbean authors have seen in the mangrove—so resilient under hostile circumstances, and with its rhizomatic roots—an inspired figure for understanding Caribbean identity.

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Patrick Chamoiseau, for instance, sees in the mangrove an *arbre relationnel*, one that better reflects the multiple origins and hybridity of Caribbean people than the *arbre genealogique* (Lesne 32-33). The authors under study in this chapter also recognize the ways in which literary narratives can adopt the mangrove's rhizomatic structure for a more suitable

representation of postcolonial history. Rather than a "topdown" retelling or "history from below," the rhizomatic narrative "fait entendre des voix subalternes, multiples, cousines et étrangères à la fois les unes des autres" (Viala 138). Here we can see the mutually beneficial possibilities of literature and ecology. For Glissant, as read by DeLoughrey and Handley, literature has the potential to "teach the political force of ecology…[to] recapture ecology's radical articulation" of the interdependence of all ecosystems (28).

A key aspect to Glissant's understanding of both ecology and narrative is his concept of *opacité*, which I will briefly define here and return to in my reading of his novel *La Lézarde*. Against the dehumanizing and dogmatic logic and language of colonization, Caribbean authors have rightly sought to valorize a new idiom, which Glissant terms "contre-poétique." In the section "Poétiques" of *Le Discours antillais*, Glissant connects this *contre-poétique*, which he sees as "vouée à la synthèse d'éléments culturels diversifiés, parfois opposites," to *opacité*, elaborating the concept as a means of attaining "l'humain": "consentir à l'opacité, c'est-à-dire à la densité irréductible de l'autre, c'est accomplir véritablement, à travers le divers, l'humain" (245). In his *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), Glissant registers a dramatic change from the colonial era to the globalizing, postcolonial present, and he does so by leaning on the ecological image of *limon*, or "silt":

> La transparence n'apparaît plus comme le fond du miroir où l'humanité occidentale reflétait le monde à son image ; au fond du miroir il y a maintenant de l'opacité, tout un limon déposé par des peuples, limon fertile mais à vrai dire incertain, inexploré, encore aujourd'hui et le plus souvent nié ou offusqué, dont nous ne pouvons pas ne pas vivre la présence insistante. (125)

Whereas the colonizing forces of Europe attempted to recast "the world in its image," Glissant sees opacity as the reigning force in today's world. His constant emphasis on opacity as a means of coming to grips with alterity resonates with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, particularly their delineation of the rhizome in *Mille plateaux*, which they define against an "arborescent" model of knowledge dependent on hierarchy. Whereas one might compare Aimé Césaire's *négritude* to this latter, verticalized conception—with his *négritude* that "plonge dans la chair rouge du sol…[et] dans la chair ardente du ciel"—Caribbean writers such as Glissant have endeavored to explode this hierarchical view of Caribbean identity (126; 100).

For instance, in *Poétique de la Relation*, Glissant opposes "identité-racine" with "identité-relation," privileging the latter as "liée...au vécu conscient et contradictoire des contacts de culture" (158). As with Deleuze and Guattari's "arborescent" model, Glissant's conception of "identité-racine" employs a botanical metaphor to criticize a view of identity that "conduit imparablement...aux refuges généralisants de l'universel comme valeur" (156). Later, in *Traité du Tout-Monde* (1997), Glissant makes explicit reference to the rhizome, linking it to an idealized form of collective Caribbean identity intent on inclusivity: "Nos identités-rhizome en ont fini avec les essences, les exclusives, les rites du retirement. Entrons dans notre monde à nous, ce qui est aussi entrer au monde" (229). Glissant thus establishes a connection between Martinique and the rest of the world and, fundamentally, envisions his native country as an exemplar for ecological awareness: "Et inscrivons haut cette devise : *Martinique, pays biologique du monde*. Elle ne répondra pas à une mode d'écologie, mais à des besoins précis liés au souci de l'écologie" (231). In this way, Glissant characterizes Caribbean identity as rhizomatic while imploring his fellow Martinicans to embrace an

ecological stance, which, in spite of its potential shortcomings in practice, demonstrates Glissant's commitment to fighting postcoloniality *through* the ecological.

Many postcolonial and ecocritical scholars argue that it is problematic to romanticize nature, which they view as inherently neutral, and Glissant sees ecology as an extension of "l'ancienne pensée sacrée du Territoire" (1990: 160). In his view, ecology

> est ainsi à double orientation : ou bien on la concevra comme une dérivée de ce sacré, auquel cas on la vivra comme une mystique ; ou bien cette extension portera en germe la critique de cette pensée du territoire (de son sacré, de son exclusive), et l'écologie alors s'agira en politique. (ibid)

Glissant thus sees the sacred character of ecology as a potential driver of political action, so long as it engenders a critique of territorial thought. Deterritorialization forms a fundamental part of Deleuze and Guattari's theory in their two-part work entitled *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (comprising *L'anti-Œdipe* [1972] and *Mille plateaux* [1980]). In this chapter, I will focus on their usage of the term in *Mille plateaux* rather than in *L'anti-Œdipe*, where it is involved in a more psychoanalytical framework.[84] And although Deleuze and Guattari allow the concept of deterritorialization to unfold and interact with a dizzying number of other terms and topics in *Mille plateaux*, I will focus primarily on what I see as deterritorialization's most pertinent contribution to Caribbean context, i.e. deterritorialization as a movement by which one leaves a territory (also referred to as *une ligne de fuite*), but recognizing that in this movement the territory also reconstitutes and extends itself. In Caribbean thought and literature, deterritorialization thus aligns with the tension between the

[84] For a study that traces the evolution in Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term, see Eugene W. Holland's analysis in "Deterritorializing 'Deterritorialization': From the 'Anti-Oedipus' to 'A Thousand Plateaus'." *SubStance* 20.3 (1991): 55-65.

local and the planetary, and the periphery and the center. In his largely overlooked first collection of essays, *Soleil de la conscience* (1955), part travelogue, part philosophizing poetry, Glissant reflects that

> "[t]he confrontation of landscapes confirms that of cultures, of sensibilities: not as an exaltation of the Unknown, but as a way of sloughing off a resistant skin in order to understand one's projection in a different light, the shadow of that which we will be" (69; qtd. in Dash 2003: 102).

In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, Glissant affirms that every deterritorialization results in a reterritorialization, i.e. a recognition of the recasting of the local in the "different light" of the foreign.

The Martinican writer René Ménil, in his 1959 essay "De l'exotisme colonial," acknowledges the necessarily reciprocal nature—akin to the move from deterritorialization to reterritorialization—of exoticism:

> There is an exoticism founded in nature resulting from a particular form of human relation. Finding myself in a foreign land, I am disoriented and perceive the manners, practices, and customs of the native as picturesque and marked with signs of alienness. And as the relation is reciprocal, the native of the land will have a similar, if inverse, vision of me. For him I am as alien as he is for me: he has an exotic vision of me and I have an exotic vision of him. Things cannot be otherwise. (qtd. in Dash 104)

Accepting the ineluctable fact that the *habitus* and *socius* of local culture remain bound to a given *territory*, as Ménil eloquently does here, opens the door to a consideration of the *mobility* of a given culture and the complex relations undergone in its confrontation with the

foreign. As J. Michael Dash observes in the early Glissant of *Soleil de la conscience*, "Glissant's poetics of open insularity provides a vision of radical global reordering in which he foresees that 'there will no longer be culture without all cultures, no longer civilization that can be the *métropole* of others' (11)" (2003: 103). Glissant and his fellow Caribbean authors do not at all shy away from examining the complex relationship between the Caribbean and *l'Hexagone*, between the local and the global; indeed, their forceful engagement with this evergreen topos is a central part of what makes their literature and theory so rich for the postcolonial critic.

Glissant's vision of a decentered, de-hierarchized world from the mid-1950s cited above demonstrates that his thinking is remarkably consonant, avant la lettre, with the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari. By re-examining how we define identity, and in the process cognizant of the fraught tendencies of deterritorialization-reterritorialization, Glissant's work adopts the figure of the rhizome in that it opposes root-verticality and rhizome-horizontality to challenge rootedness in favor of a more dynamic, mobile conception of identity and relation. Significantly, Glissant maintained this outlook throughout his life, remarking in a 2009 interview that

> it's of fundamental importance in today's world to say that everything is happening in a rhizome world, that is, roots that intertwine, mix, and mutually assist each other. And I think that somewhere in all this is the drama of New World Blacks, whether in Brazil to the south, in the Caribbean at the centre, or in the Americas of the north, which has begun to make this multiplicity of the world comprehensible. I myself like the idea that I can change through exchanging with the Other without losing or

> distorting myself. It's only recently that it's been possible to believe this, and I think it's one of the truths of the present world. (Diawara 6)[85]

Glissant's theory of Relation hinges crucially upon a rhizomatic conception, one which does not fear a loss of identity in the encounter with the Other but, on the contrary, embraces these "roots that intertwine, mix, and mutually assist each other." It is in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari view deterritorialization as not only an *uprooting* from a given territory but an *extension* at the same time.

In elaborating his theory of Relation, Glissant's emphatically non-dogmatic approach leads him to claim that

> There isn't one absolute truth, but truths. Everything is alive; everything is a Relation of differences, not contraries, but differences. Accordingly, the dialectic is not a linear approach towards that which is contrary. The dialectic is a total rhizome of what's different (Diawara 8).

This stance explains why he strongly prefers the concept of Relation to the universal, for, as he puts it,

> The universal is a sublimation, an abstraction that enables us to forget small differences; we drift upon the universal and forget these small differences, and Relation is wonderful because it doesn't allow us to do that. There is no such thing as a Relation made up of big differences. Relation is total; otherwise it's not Relation. So that's why I prefer the notion of Relation to the notion of the universal. (Diawara 6)

[85] This interview took place adjacent to a documentary filmed by Manthia Diawara entitled *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation* (2009).

In Glissant's approach, universalizing is unforgivable because *difference* remains fundamental to a rhizomatic conception of Relation, in which individual aspects and infinitesimally small variations might well influence the totality of a given structure or relation between structures. As Deleuze and Guattari insist, "n'importe quel point d'un rhizome peut être connecté avec n'importe quel autre, et doit l'être" (3).

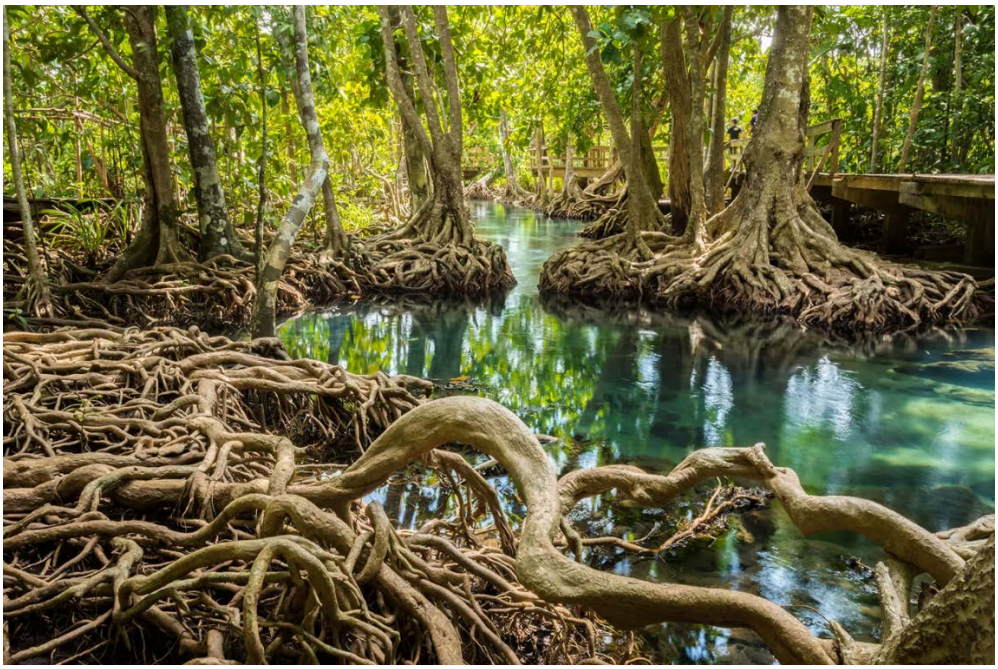
Glissant's anti-universal, rhizomatic framework thus naturally opposes traditional deep ecology, which attempts to universalize nature as a means of elevating it beyond the sphere of the human.[86] Indeed, the rhizome serves as a potent foundation for an eco-epistemology that privileges neither human concerns nor those of "nature," but rather views humans as deeply imbricated *within* nature in a non- (or less) hierarchical schema. Following this rhizomatic framework, the PCE approach would thus avoid the dangers of sentimentality regarding both human and nonhuman life. As Cilano and DeLoughrey contend, "a vital aspect of postcolonial ecocriticism refuses the nostalgia of pure landscape even while it grapples with the best ways of addressing the representation of the nonhuman environment" (79). Following Graham Huggan, postcolonial studies "dedicates itself to the service of human freedom in the context of a world historically conditioned by colonial relations of power" (2013: 1). One sees how readymade postcolonial strategies are, then, for confronting how nature, and our myriad relationships with it, are equally conditioned by "colonial relations of power." The PCE approach simply shifts the focus, not necessarily away from the human, but toward the deleterious ecological costs of colonialism and the insidious legacies it has left behind. As Mount and O'Brien argue, such a framework understands that

[86] See, among others: Huggan's "'Greening' Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives"; Ramachandra Guha's "Third World Critique"; and Cilano and DeLoughrey's "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism."

"the projects of social and environmental justice must be symbiotically intertwined" (1). Again, the rhizomatic approach resonates here—a careful, responsible methodology cannot divorce social and environmental issues but rather sees them as coequal concerns. Moreover, postcolonial and environmental critiques converge in certain key areas: e.g. place (and its attendant deterritorialization) and food security/agricultural concerns (Mount and O'Brien 11). Somewhat vulgarized, deterritorialization (and reterritorialization) can, for the PCE approach, function as a useful tool for appraising the "detachment of culture from place associated with globalization, an intensification of the unsettling of space and place" precipitated so violently by colonialism (Mount and O'Brien 12).

My own approach to Caribbean literature will thus bring together postcolonial studies and ecocriticism to zero in on (post)colonialism's impact on how Caribbeans conceive of—and interact with—the environment. My examination of three now-canonical Caribbean novels—Glissant's *La Lézarde*, Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*, and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*—goes beyond the merely ecological to demonstrate how environmental concerns correspond to and reflect on fundamental political questions of identity and agency in a postcolonial landscape. In each of these three novels, a particular aspect of the natural world plays an outsized role in shaping both the form and content of the narrative: the river for which *La Lézarde* is named, and the mangrove forests of *Traversée de la mangrove* and *Texaco*.[87]

[87] These authors adhere to the taxonomy of major Caribbean essayists by Florencia Bonfiglio in that they share a "geographical (aquatic) imaginary" and a "metaphorical system...deriv[ing] from a common politics of decolonization" (149).



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Glissant: Landscape and the awakening of a political consciousness

> Des racines sous-marines: c'est-à-dire dérivées, non implantées d'un seul mât dans un seul limon, mais prolongées dans tous les sens de notre univers par leur réseau de branches.
>
> — Édouard Glissant[88]

In Édouard Glissant's description of the "network" of mangrove root branches in *Le Discours antillais*, J. Michael Dash identifies an "early meditation on the image of the rhizome" (qtd. in Bonfiglio 160). Although too often read as an ex post facto *partisan* of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of the rhizome, Glissant shows, through his early fictional and theoretical writings, a longstanding sensitivity to rhizomatic ecology and its aptness for conceptualizing Caribbean culture, history, and politics.

[88] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 134.

This rhizomatic ecology finds expression, for instance, in Glissant's debut novel *La Lézarde* (1958), which follows a group of young political activists leading up to the elections of 1945 (in which Aimé Césaire was elected mayor of Fort-de-France). In these war-time years, Martinicans enjoyed a certain kind of liberty as the allies blockaded them due to Vichy France. As Antoinette Tidjani Alou writes,

> This balkanization was to be the island's only experience of self-government. It led to multiple degrees of novelty: a new awakening, a new maturity, a new interest in politics, a new sense of identity, a new consciousness, a renewed taste for knowledge, for justice and for life, a recovery of the right to dream and to act. (7)

Such an atmosphere no doubt fueled the popular uprisings that the novel's main antagonist Garin seeks to repress (as well as played a role in the transformation of the English title to *The Ripening*). Glissant, however, penned his novel more than a decade after the events of the novel itself, which allows for a certain retrospective cynicism to creep in at times—not to mention tragedy, as the protagonist Thaël loses his lover Valérie at the end of the novel. The bulk of the narrative follows Thaël and his new comrades discussing their plan of action—in reality, the murder of Garin, referred to euphemistically as the *acte*—as well as contemplating their individual and collective futures. Like the Lézarde river itself, a constant flow of natural imagery, analogies, and metaphors accompany these political reveries. As such, Glissant's early novel contains the essence of what will occupy him intellectually throughout his life. It thus serves as a quintessential text for the postcolonial ecopoetics that he continued to develop for the following five decades.

Early on in *La Lézarde*, the narrator marks a distinction between Martinique and *le Centre*, i.e. *l'Hexagone*: "On méconnaît ces terres lointaines, qui ne paraissent dans

l'imagination des hommes du Centre qu'à la manière de paradis en fin de compte assez peu sérieux. Telle est la politique des dirigeants" (18).[89] This establishes the rift between the protagonists and the political structure that they hope to heavily reform. The *dirigeants*' dismissive view of Martinique as a "paradis en fin de compte assez peu sérieux" shows exactly why the young political activists of the narrative yearn so deeply for change. The narrator offers a prompt counterpoint, however, relaying that "c'est d'un pays qu'il s'agit là, et non pas d'hommes sans raisons. Histoire de la terre qui s'éveille et s'élargit. Voici la fécondation mystérieuse, la douleur nue. Mais peut-on nommer la terre, avant que l'homme qui l'habite se soit levé ?" (20). We thus see how the land itself, in the narrator's language, becomes complicit with the political aspirations of the young group. More important, the narrator establishes a clear link between the land and political consciousness—the land is not ripe to be named, i.e. truly possessed, until its inhabitants have established their readiness. The political party to which the main characters belong envisions a reorganization of political power narrowly connected to redistribution of land and legal rights:

> Ils réclament une nouvelle organisation des ressources, ils veulent qu'on fasse des cultures vivrières, qu'on abandonne le système des 'habitations' qui permet d'emprisonner à vie un ouvrier agricole, sans qu'il puisse partir ailleurs ; ils exigent les mêmes droits pour eux que pour les hommes du Centre. (132)

This yoking together of the land with political power undoubtedly stems not only from the current political situation—in which men such as Garin abuse their positions and corrupt the environment—but from the legacy of the Plantationocene, where deeply inegalitarian

[89] The fact that France is not directly named but referred to as "le Centre" serves to strengthen both the allegorical feel of the novel as well as the center-periphery binary.

plantations profited on the backs of slaves, then indentured servants, then laborers working poverty wages.

The dominant feature of the landscape is the Lézarde, a river which runs from the mountains down across the plains and into the sea. In an early chapter consecrated entirely to what one is tempted to call the titular character, the narrator personifies the Lézarde and intimates its symbolic (historical, political) overtones: “elle veut emprisonner la cité, mais soudain elle se reprend, elle refuse ce gardiennage, et vers l’est, passé les cannes sinistres, elle se perd dans son delta. Sa goulée est parcourue de courants sales ; la Lézarde n’a pas une belle mort” (33). The river’s apparent rejection of the city, which contains and embodies the established government, aligns it with the revolutionary ideals of Thaël and company. For Glissant specialist J. Michael Dash, a trademark of Glissant’s fiction is his “sensuous approach to the Caribbean as an unregimented and agitated landscape,” which applies equally as well to the political sphere of 1945 evoked in the novel (2009: 12-13). Indeed, the narrator describes the river as “un peuple qui se lève,” which closely echoes the previous citation (“Mais peut-on nommer la terre, avant que l’homme qui l’habite se soit levé?...” (33; 20)). The narrator thus establishes a clear parallel between the landscape and the country’s politics, which—the young activists hope—is on the cusp of dramatic change. In this chapter, the narrator recalls his youth spent in and alongside the river, remarking several times how he is “l’enfant de cette histoire” who “grandir[a] en cette histoire” (34). He notes the many aspects of life of which he was ignorant at this time, including that “l’homme importe quand il connaît dans sa propre histoire (dans ses passions et dans ses joies) la saveur d’un pays” (34). Such examples abound in which the narrator establishes a distinct correlation between

personal and collective growth—specifically (political) consciousness-raising—and the landscape.

It is not only the narrator but the characters themselves who are acutely aware of this connection. “La mer, c’est toute une politique, disait Pablo. Avec elle nous vaincrons. Juste au moment de sombrer, vous verrez, nous agripperons le monde. C’est la mer : on coule, et soudain on est à flot” (44). As a means of making sense of their mission, and to reassure themselves, Pablo finds an apt analogy in the natural world, binding their political destiny to the land and sea. The river, the narrator frequently reminds us, however, is far from a simple, unequivocal symbol: “la Lézarde, qu’on ne peut oublier, car elle déborde souvent” (55). Similarly, we are led to believe, the political energy of Thaël, Mathieu, and the others, runs the risk of overflowing, i.e. falling outside of their control and ultimately doing more harm than good. Significantly, as Peter Hallward notes, the river “takes on the attributes of active subject, while Thaël becomes less sure of his mission right to the very moment of its virtually accidental accomplishment, an event engendered very precisely by the river’s own energy” (85). This active-passive dialectic recurs throughout the text in the fraught relationship between the land and the main characters:

> La terre ne leur appartenait pas, la terre était une rouge aspiration de l’être, un désir, une colère !… Voilà. Il avait compris que cette terre qu’ils portaient en eux, il fallait la conquérir. Non pas seulement dans la force des mots, mais concrètement, chaque jour, qu’ils en aient l’usufruit, le bénéfice, qu’ils en fassent l’inventaire et en disposent librement. Car la terre toujours se donne. (58)

In language deeply reminiscent of Jacques Roumain’s novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, to which I will turn in the following chapter, the narrator provides—via free and indirect

discourse—the inner thoughts of Mathieu, a historian of Martinique linked physically and symbolically with the town (counterposed to Thaël, child of the mountain), revealing yet again an intimate connection between the group and their land, and how the latter remains powerfully linked to their potential political force.

The group faces a significant obstacle, however, in the harnessing and unleashing of their power: individual and collective moral ambiguity, another issue reflected in the Lézarde (though not *literally* "reflected," as both natural and anthropogenic forces render the river turbulent and opaque). The decision to assassinate Garin serves as the novel's principal source of conflict and moral consternation.[90] Ostensibly, Mathieu seeks out Thaël to carry out this murder because the rest of the group, as city-dwellers, are too well-known and thus too obvious. The narrator frames it thus:

> l'homme choisi [Garin] se trouvait être un ancien habitant du pays, renégat et doublement criminel. Il fallait avant tout le mettre hors d'état de nuire. Chacun savait qu'il était résolu comme tout renégat aux pires violences ; nos amis décidèrent qu'il leur revenait de museler la bête. (21)

Their logic is not so unlike that underpinning the Cold War that Glissant, by the time of writing, had come to know—preparation to preemptively undermine the adversary. Thaël recognizes that they face a difficult situation, one that seemingly blankets the entire atmosphere of the country and whose moral ambiguity parallels the hazy, opaque waters of the Lézarde:

[90] For a possible glimpse into Glissant's own view on the matter, he writes in *Traité du Tout-Monde* that utopia "est juste et vivace" when shared but without "folie collective" (226).

> Tout est vague, tout est diffus par ici ! Mais c'est tant que nous n'avons pas pénétré le courant souterrain, le nœud de vie !… Alors ? Interpréter les signes interdits ?… A quoi bon ? Tout est vague, tout est diffus, tant que l'homme n'a pas défini, et pesé. Je ne veux pas décrire, je ne veux pas souffrir, je veux connaître et enseigner. (31)

This semiotic haze only deepens the moral ambiguity—and subsequent disquiet—experienced by Thaël. As for Mathieu, however, he believes that the righteousness of their *acte* to get rid of Garin will engender a miraculous clearing up of the Lézarde:

> Oui, tout est vague, tout est vague maintenant. Mais voici que nous allons connaître l'acte !… Et ensuite, notre delta ne sera pas sale ! En cela seulement la Lézarde nous a trahis. Mais nous lui ferons des digues, des canaux (nous apprendrons les techniques) ! Et un jour la Lézarde sera claire devant la mer. Comme un peuple assuré vient au-devant des autres peuples… (85)

Jason Herbeck notes that Thaël's observation of Garin's sullying of the Lézarde leads him to naturally associate his killing with "restoring...the source in its pure and unadulterated form" (89). As the utmost symbol of their political liberation, the Lézarde becoming clear signifies their own progression from the murky waters of a vigilante killing to a newfound political clear- sightedness, unobstructed by the corruption embodied by the likes of Garin.

Moreover, the opaque status of the Lézarde is not simply an inherent quality but exacerbated by Garin himself, who also serves as an agent of environmental pollution.[91] Glissant's novel suggests that both *terre* and *territoire* must heal together as they are inextricably linked. In this way, *La Lézarde* depicts the landscape not only as an allegory of

[91] Shortly before the struggle that results in Garin's death, Thaël tells him "Maintenant tu as perdu la rivière… Tu ne pourras plus voler, terroriser, tuer" (146).

Martinican history and politics, as many scholars have argued, but it confronts its ecological dimensions as well. Thaël, for instance, embodies the positive effects of growing up with the land and maintaining an intimate bond with it. He even prizes his lover, Valérie, precisely because she is "vraiment fille de ces terres...la parfaite réalité des forces contradictoires qui le hantaient, et qui en elle s'étaient unies indissolublement" (183-84). Thaël understands the value of his connection with other-than-human nature and levies a biting critique of the materialist bourgeoisie of the city who think of nothing but "leur petit bien-être, leur fierté de se trouver presque pareilles aux gens du Centre, ni comme ces jeunes gens dont la vie était si pauvrement fondée sur l'acquisition d'une voiture, les plaisirs débiles, l'ignorance irréparable et la fausse richesse" (184). Critically, Thaël links this "irreparable ignorance and false richness" due to external influence (i.e. globalization) with a failure to create a new political order, one which he imagines as "la force de ce peuple, le scénario patient dont le déroulement conduisait avec sûreté vers la seule et vraie richesse. Oui, Valérie avait en elle toutes les grandeurs de la montagne et toutes les forces de la plaine" (184). Although it is tempting to read the second sentence on Valérie as a non sequitur, Glissant deploys this stream-of-consciousness style to show how Thaël's unfiltered mind seizes on the inextricable links between the personal and the collective, the ecological and the political. As Glissant remarks in *Le Discours antillais*, "Le Nous devient le lieu du système génératif, et le vrai sujet" (258). Understanding must derive from the collective, which also serves as a fundamental aspect of both ecocritical and postcolonial methodologies.

Although only his debut novel, *La Lézarde* captures Glissant's lifelong interest in the Caribbean landscape and its inexorable ties to personal and political identity. As Jason Herbeck notes, a brief perusal of Glissant's oeuvre unveils the centrality of ecology: "*La*

Terre inquiète, Le Sel noir, Les Indes, Un Champ d'iles, Boises: histoire naturelle d'une aridité, Pays rêve-pays réel, Mahogany, Le Monde incréé, 'Une nouvelle région du monde,' 'La Terre magnétique,'" etc. (62). In *Le Discours antillais,* published more than two decades after *La Lézarde*, Glissant affirms his conviction about the role of the landscape in fiction: "Décrire le paysage ne suffira pas. L'individu, la communauté, le pays sont indissociables dans l'épisode constitutif de leur histoire. Le paysage est un personnage de cette histoire. Il faut le comprendre dans ses profondeurs" (199). In his appraisal of Caribbean literature, Glissant acknowledges the violent and complex historical factors that disrupt the formation of Martinican collective memory, which would thus render any pretenses to ordered and linear representation as arbitrary and artificial:

> Notre quête de la dimension temporelle ne sera donc ni harmonieuse ni linéaire. Elle cheminera dans une polyphonie de chocs dramatiques, au niveau du conscient comme de l'inconscient, entre des donnés, des 'temps' disparates, discontinus, dont le lié n'est pas évident. L'harmonie majestueuse ne prévaut pas ici, mais (tant que pour nous l'histoire à faire n'aura pas rencontré le passé jusqu'ici méconnu) la recherche inquiète et souvent chaotique. (199)

It is in this vein that the turbulent and opaque Lézarde functions as a readymade symbol for Glissant's depiction of a deeply unsettled and morally ambiguous political situation. Eight years after Glissant's valorization of a nonlinear, polyphonic approach to literature, Maryse Condé will weave together *Traversée de la mangrove*, a rhizomatic narrative centered around the decentering, opaque, and confounding image of the mangrove.[92]

[92] As far back as 1957, a year before the publication of *La Lézarde*, Glissant argues that not only should black novelists decry social inequality but they should also pay heed to "le souci de créer un style" ("Le Romancier noir et son peuple," *Présence Africaine* [1957], p. 29).

Condé: Mangrove ecology, mangrove narrative

The novels *La vie scélérate* (1987) and *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989; henceforth *Traversée*) mark Maryse Condé's return to her native Guadeloupe in the mid-1980s. As with Aimé Césaire's canonical poem, a significant amount of reflection about Caribbean identity accompanies Condé's *retour au pays natal*. And much like Césaire's poem, *Traversée* considers the role of the environment in the processes of identity formation; *unlike* Césaire, however, for whom identity—specifically black identity, or *négritude*—often moves in nature upon a vertical axis ("elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol / elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel" [126]), Condé's novel employs and embodies the horizontality of the rhizome structure that one finds in the mangrove forests from which the novel derives its name. In contrast with her male predecessors and contemporaries—namely, Césaire, Glissant, and the Créolistes (Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Jean Bernabé)—Condé has refrained from publishing her own systematic philosophy of Caribbean identity in favor of open-ended novels that capture the inscrutability of both identity and other-than-human nature in the region. As such, she offers her readers a largely ambivalent and ambiguous Guadeloupe that embodies the complexities—and the anguishes—of post/neocolonial identity, using ecology as both setting and metaphor to depict this destabilized ontology.

In an interview following her return home, Condé acknowledges the sheer force of Caribbean nature:

> When I went back to Guadeloupe, I realized again that nature has power, a presence. You cannot forget it. It is even more important than the people. At night, there is no silence. No silence. You are sitting on your veranda, and you hear so many sounds.

> You wonder whether you are going to sleep… So nature is so powerful, even furious, and you have to pay attention to it. (549)

It is thus easy to see why nature's fury makes its presence felt in her second Guadeloupean novel, *Traversée,* and not only is nature present but highly *active,* shaping the narrative by way of the rhizomatic mangrove. This occurs both thematically, through an insistence on community and opacity, and structurally, via a polyphonic tangle of narrative viewpoints.

In terms of plot, though it diverges from that of a traditional novel, *Traversée* revolves around the mysterious death of Francis Sancher—or is it Francisco Sanchez? This is but one of many details left unresolved. What the reader experiences, in lieu of an orthodox narrative, is a series of some twenty narratives from twenty different residents of Rivière au Sel, the village where the novel takes place. In A. James Arnold's view, Condé "has replaced the ideological weight of *discours* with a maximum of *récits* or tellings and retellings that urge the reader to attend, not to the Truth, but to the process by which a community comes to understand itself" (716). Bookending these varied perspectives are two brief chapters whose names—"Le serein" and "Le devant-jour" —emphasize the environmental influence on the text and frame the story within the cycle of one night, from dusk to dawn, as the residents gather for Sancher's wake (*véillée*). He had arrived not long before in Rivière au Sel, a man haunted by his past and the pasts of his ancestors.

Feared and reviled by some, and loved and admired by others, Sancher leaves an indelible mark on the community, as amply shown in the progression of narratives that compose the bulk of the novel. Ruthmarie Mitsch notes the mangrove root-like aspects of Sancher, how his "activities spread out in many directions, intersecting, crossing, [and] setting roots in the lives of many others" (54). Sancher's magnetism makes him akin to the

environmental mechanism that Condé has described in her essay “Habiter ce pays, la Guadeloupe,” this “mécanisme par lequel nous intégrons tellement de choses qui paraissent opposées à ce que nous sommes, le mécanisme par lequel...nous les phagocytose” (11). In spite of their better judgment, two young women find themselves ensnared by Sancher (as by the tendril-like roots of the mangrove swamp), becoming pregnant with his children. Sancher embodies this all-encompassing aspect of an aggressive, almost predatory and parasitical natural force. A consistently paradoxical figure—an exile in his own land, a deterritorialized pariah—the reader of *Traversée* can understand Sancher’s identity as representative in some ways of the Caribbean writ large, which Félix Guattari sees as “des archipels complexes qui nécessitent un autre type de discours et un autre langage” (Fonkoua 41; qtd. in Mitsch 56). Mitsch aptly points out that archipelagos are themselves “the image of the rhizome—fractured, reaching outward” (56). Sancher, solitary and yet arrived in Rivière au Sel searching for answers to his family history/mystery, symbolizes both rootedness and wandering, rejecting the community while also impregnating two of its women and, by consequence, quite literally inserting himself into it.

In this way, the novel grapples with local politics of gender and sexuality. As Eric Prieto has noted regarding the famous Aimé Césaire passage cited above, the speaker’s négritude “takes root in the Earth with a phallic plunging” (2001: 146). Condé’s novel, on the other hand, seemingly rejects both linearity and Glissant’s *identité-racine* in favor of the mangrove’s rhizomatic structure, which inherently privileges horizontality and thus the flattening out of hierarchies, patriarchal and otherwise. Following Deleuze and Guattari, the arborescent models of thought—the traditional root or tree—“inspirent une triste image de la pensée qui ne cesse d’imiter le multiple à partir d’une unité supérieure, de centre ou de

segment"; moreover, they link the arborescent structure with the psychoanalytical view of the unconscious, which contains "l'inconscient à des structures arborescentes, à des graphes hiérarchiques, à des mémoires récapitulatrices, à des organes centraux, phallus, arbre-phallus" (27).[93] Condé's novel eschews the phallic arborescent model and thus prioritizes a more feminized view of nature and identity—significantly, the female characters all speak in the first person, whereas the male characters' chapters are predominately written in the third person.

The rhizomatic framework thus facilitates this ceaseless exploration of multiplicity and interconnectedness. In Deleuze and Guattari's model, "n'importe quel point d'un rhizome peut être connecté avec n'importe quel autre, et doit l'être," and the novel demonstrates in a compelling manner how each member of the community remains inextricably bound to every other resident (13). In their overall definition of the "rhizome," Deleuze and Guattari call attention to a certain openness that they term "un des caractères les plus important," i.e. "d'être toujours à entrées multiples" (20). While the novel does insist on multiple—indeed, twenty—entryways into the death of Sancher, it remains in many ways hermetically sealed, as we never learn the true nature of his demise. In this way, Condé's text captures the complex and paradoxical nature of the rhizomatic mangrove in her novel, captured in Vilma's pronouncement that "On ne traverse pas la mangrove. On s'empale sur les racines des palétuviers. On s'enterre et on étouffe dans la boue saumâtre" (202). The title thus takes on ironic resonances as Condé points to the many impossibilities raised by the text: e.g. solving Sancher's death, defining Caribbean identity, and establishing a perfectly

[93] Deleuze and Guattari note, and I am inclined to agree, how such a framework necessarily limits psychoanalysis and traps it in its "propre pouvoir dictatorial" (9).

harmonious relationship within a given community and with its environment. Through a close analysis of certain key characters' respective relationships with other-than-human nature, I will show how ecology affects—shaping, disrupting, and ossifying—identity in postcolonial Guadeloupe.

The first character I will examine, Francis Sancher, maintains an ambivalent rapport with the natural environment (as one might expect based on my prior descriptions). At once the center of the narrative yet lacking any narrative agency of his own,[94] Sancher incarnates the text's aporetic view of identity; he tasks himself with writing a novel—one that shares its title with Condé's, i.e. *Traversée de la mangrove*—that he never completes, embodying the very impossibility of crossing the mangrove that Vilma attests to ("On ne traverse pas la mangrove"). As Suzanne Crosta has noted, the various residents of Rivière au Sel describe him as like a tree—apart from his epithet "Pié-bwa," a kind of tree, there is a great deal of descriptive, arborescent characterization: "la forêt de ses poils"; "sa ramure argentée"; and "son bras lourd comme une branche morte," among others (qtd. in Crosta 152). Ironically, he remains perpetually unrooted, even in his return to his native region.[95] In the introductory chapter "Le serein," the novel's implicit author[96] remarks, after recounting how certain men of the village carried Sancher's corpse home, "[Il] revint chez lui, non plus campé sur ses deux pieds et dominant tous les hommes, même les plus hauts, de sa stature, mais allongé

[94] As Suzanne Crosta persuasively argues, "the deliberate silence and death of the main character forces reader[s] to adapt [their] reading from a referential mode (a given representation of the universe) to a cognitive mode (the subjective or objective perception of the represented universe)" (147; citation amended for inclusivity).

[95] There is a rapprochement here with Condé's own life and beliefs. She has said that spending time away from Guadeloupe strengthened her writing: "C'est l'errance qui amène la créativité. L'enracinement est très mauvais au fond. Il faut absolument être errant, multiple, au-dehors et au-dedans. Nomade (qtd. in Soestwohner 690). The parallels with Glissant as well as Deleuze and Guattari are evident.

[96] For more on the novel's implicit author, see Crosta 1992.

dans la prison de bois" (22). Treelike in life and contained by dead trees in death, Sancher—despite his best efforts—fails to break free from the melancholic prison of his own making.[97] If we bear in mind Sancher's constant comparison to trees, the lamentation of Vilma's mother, Rosa, to Sancher, carries extra resonance:

> Comme c'est vrai ! Les problèmes de la vie, c'est comme les arbres. On voit le tronc, on voit les branches et les feuilles. Mais on ne voit pas les racines, cachées dans le fin fond de la terre. Or ce qu'il faudrait connaître, c'est leur forme, leur nature, jusqu'où elles s'enfoncent pour chercher l'eau, le terreau gras. Alors peut-être, on comprendrait. (180-81)

Sancher, too, exists only on a surface level for all the other characters and, by extension, Condé's readers. We, like them, never uncover the mystery of his origins, the full extent of his crimes and those of his forebears, nor the way in which he dies. Rosa recognizes that getting to the *root* would likely be more illuminating than remaining on the surface.

In response, Sancher tells her that "Personne ne comprend jamais," and "Rien n'est plus dangereux qu'un homme qui essaie de comprendre," to which she replies "Je dirai que vous êtes un homme qui a beaucoup de sagesse !" (181). He answers by smiling and saying "Sagesse ? Je ne dirai pas cela. Je dirai que j'ai essayé de démêler l'écheveau de la vie" (181). Sancher had envisioned life as a great, knotted mystery that one must untangle to begin to understand, and even his bloodless corpse deepens the enigma of his living and dying.[98] The text itself presents a mass of mangrove roots to the reader through which—

[97] Dinah also speaks of her "maison de bois à la lisière de la forêt dense" as a prison and regrets losing youthful years there in an unhappy relationship with Loulou (109-110). This recalls statements made by Condé herself in interviews about an unfulfilling youth spent in Guadeloupe and her ardent desire to leave.

[98] Further adding mystique to the scene is the fact that the moon stops shining so brightly when the men turn over Sancher's body and reveal his face—once they begin transporting the corpse, however, the moon shines down again (17). Interestingly, on the other hand, the moon for Xantippe "signifiait que la voie était libre,"

despite ourselves, and despite Sancher's statements above, affirming Roland Barthes' proclamation that we are *homo significans*[99]—we attempt to piece together meaning. The novel offers us little in the way of solving the mysteries of Rivière au Sel and Sancher, but at the same time reinforces that this approach renders more justice to the inscrutability of life (and death).

Xantippe, the character most aware of Sancher's true being (because he's apparently the only one privy to the crimes that Sancher committed), shows the most intimate and respectful relationship with other-than-human nature. Derided by the other inhabitants as a lunatic, Xantippe proves himself to be arguably the novel's most admirable character. His undying grief for his late wife and his deep reverence for the earth permit Condé to demonstrate that he possesses a softness unseen by the other characters. Xantippe embodies the complete antithesis of the instrumentalist view of nature most often expressed in capitalism and colonialism. Even the killing of pigs for their meat on Christmas, something that his wife recognizes as a longstanding tradition, utterly revolts him: "Un matin, je m'éveillai dans la clameur des porcs qu'on égorge. C'était le jour de Noël et les bouchers assassins essuyaient leurs mains rouges aux feuilles de bois d'Inde… J'en avais le cœur retourné et, pour ne pas voir ce spectacle…" (257). It would seem that Xantippe would rather not harm anything in nature—in this way he (re)presents a new way forward, one respectful of the earth and wary of the "bouchers assassins" that would have their way with it exclusively for their own gain.

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when he would no longer go out in daylight due to his mistreatment at the hands (and mouths) of the other villagers (258).

[99] "L'activité structuraliste" (1963).

Like many of the characters, Xantippe recounts the changes to Guadeloupe that he has witnessed in his life. As in Patrick Chamoiseau's memoirs, he notes the distinct alienation perpetuated in the post-departmentalization era: "J'ai vu s'ouvrir les écoles et, n'en croyait pas mes oreilles, j'ai entendu les enfants chantonner : 'Nos ancêtres les Gaulois…'" (258). Against this backdrop, and against his own ostracization—apparently due to no other reason than envy at his personal happiness and modest success—Xantippe turns resolutely away from the village and deepens his relationship with other-than-human nature: "Un jour j'ai débouché d'un chemin et des arbres m'ont hélé pour me donner de l'ombrage. J'ai obéi et je me suis rencogné dans la touffeur retrouvée de leurs aisselles" (259). Xantippe inverts the "normal" hierarchical relationship in which humanity bends nature to its will. Part of a long familial tradition—"La journée, je plantais comme avant moi mon père et mon grand-père et la terre me donnait tous les trésors de son ventre"—Xantippe represents an ancient savoir-vivre, one in much greater équilibrium with the earth, engaged in an "ethic of care" long associated with the feminine (256).

Indeed, Xantippe's name would seem to derive from Socrates' wife, Xanthippe. In antique and Renaissance literature, she was written off as an insufferable shrew.[100] Robert Graves' essay "The Case for Xanthippe," however, argues that this characterization results from a long-standing perceived division between masculinity and femininity, in which the former is aligned with rationality and the latter with irrationality.[101] Throughout the novel, characters mostly refer to Xantippe in a negative fashion, construing him as irrationally attached to the landscape. Capturing the general sentiment of the Rivière au Sel community,

[100] See, for example, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which Petruchio compares Katherina to "Socrates' Xanthippe" (I.ii).
[101] See Graves 1960.

the implied author of the introductory chapter shares that "La présence de Xantippe créait toujours un réel malaise" (25). Interestingly, Condé gives him essentially the last word—also in the first person, an exceptional case for a male character—as he is the final character to "speak" before "Le devant-jour," the concluding chapter. In this way, the text redeems him in the reader's eyes, showing that Xantippe, with his ethic of care for the earth, maintains a much more profound relationship with other-than-human nature than the other characters.

One such character is that of Loulou Lameaulnes, nursery owner, for whom financial and aesthetic concerns dominate his relationship with the earth. Revealed to be obsessed with pride and profit, Lameaulnes experiences the same dream every night, year after year, imagining that Queen Elizabeth II of England appreciates his flowers so much that she commissions him to be the new royal *fournisseur* (127-28). His flowers appear resolutely artificial in comparison with the teeming verdure inhabited and respected so ardently by Xantippe. As Pascale De Souza has observed, Lameaulnes' flowers adhere to Glissant's description in *Le Discours antillais*: "the flowers that grow today are cultivated for export. They look like neat and delicate sculptures. They are also heavy, full, lasting...but have no smell. They are all shape and visibility" (80-81; qtd. in De Souza 2003: 364). Loulou represents the vestiges of the plantation economy, and as such his worldview rests heavily on the hierarchical, arborescent model elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari.[102] Xantippe, on the other hand, with his creole garden,[103] embodies a rhizomatic conception, one that establishes humans as merely one part of nature among countless others. As Patrick ffrench contends,

[102] Crosta draws a parallel between Sancher and Loulou in that both aim to "[objectify] their existence, an attempt that can be explained by their adherence to, or interiorization of, the dominant discourse" (151).
[103] A. James Arnold goes so far as seeing Xantippe's garden as "the ultimate inscription of Creole culture in the text," similar to the role of the creole garden in Chamoiseau's C*hronique des sept misères* (716).

Xantippe's "knowledge [is] more connected to the earth than to rationality or religion" (101). In spite of his patriarchal tendencies—"J'ai nommé tous les arbres de ce pays"; "En un mot, j'ai nommé ce pays. Il est sorti de mes reins dans une giclée de foutre"—Xantippe insists on nature as a foundational aspect of human existence (255-56). For example, even in his most melancholic moments—"le bonheur n'est jamais qu'une parenthèse dans l'océan sans mesure du malheur"—he draws on the dark beauty of the earth to poetically evoke life's pain and despair (257).

Ultimately, the novel questions deep down what it means *to know*—to know oneself, to know another individual, to know one's community, to know other-than-human nature—and, critically, due to how interconnected these are, just how difficult it really is. We do not experience Sancher in the orthodox mode of fiction but as a multiplicity of perspectives that more accurately reflect the enigmas of identity, nature, and knowing in the postcolonial Caribbean. As De Souza argues, Condé "s'inscrit ainsi dans une littérature antillaise non pas en privilégiant son île natale…mais en soulignant l'opacité qui caractérise le passé de l'archipel antillais" (2000: 831).[104] In her article "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," Condé cites Maurice Blanchot's *Le Livre à venir*: "The essence of literature is to escape any fundamental determination, any assertion which could stabilize it or even fix it. It is never already there, it is always to be found or invented again" (293; qtd. on 164). By refusing to settle on one narrative voice, by eschewing the natural appeal of a conclusive ending, and by deploying the rhizomatic mangrove as a structural and thematic *point de*

[104] As De Souza observes, the villagers of Rivière au Sel come from a variety of Caribbean islands and elsewhere (2000: 824).

départ, Condé privileges plurality and opacity as a more authentic means of capturing the complex relationship between identity and environment in the postcolonial Caribbean.

Chamoiseau: The urban mangrove

Following a Guadeloupean tradition, Maryse Condé in fact offered Patrick Chamoiseau the occasion to be her "first reader" before the official publication of *Traversée*. In a short piece, entitled "Reflections on Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*," Chamoiseau argues that "The mangrove is...a sensitive figure in our collective consciousness; it is, in our nature, a cradle, a source of life, of birth and rebirth" (1991: 390). In his Prix Goncourt-winning novel *Texaco* (1992), Chamoiseau further stresses the ecological importance of the mangrove, despite its apparent hostility:

> La mangrove semble de prime abord hostile aux existences. Il est difficile d'admettre que, dans ses angoisses de racines, d'ombres moussues, d'eaux voilées, la mangrove puisse être un tel berceau de vie pour les crabes, les poissons, les langoustes, l'écosystème marine. (289)

In this way, Chamoiseau does not simply deploy the mangrove as a facile symbol for postcolonial identity in the Caribbean; he also honors the mangrove's distinct ecological role. Moreover, Chamoiseau adopts the same general "mangrove" approach in his fiction as Condé does in *Traversée*—that is, he privileges a polyphonic narrative structure, declaring in an interview: "je ne cherche pas à reconstituer *une* Histoire, je cherche à reconstituer une *tresse* d'histoires, qui donnerait un petit peu le signe de la diversité dans le pays" (McCusker 725). Chamoiseau's novel serves as an excellent example of this "tresse d'histoires" as it frequently interpolates a number of diegetic and metadiegetic voices: those of Marie-Sophie

("l'informatrice"), the urban planner who arrives ("le Christ"), the Haitian intellectual Ti-Cirique, and a figure of the author himself ("le marqueur de paroles").

In spite of their many similarities, however, Chamoiseau and Condé have publicly engaged in airing out their differences of opinion over the years, most notably in the period following the 1989 publication of Chamoiseau's *Éloge de la créolité* (with Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant). In one interview, Condé opines that "it is totally passé to divide the world constantly into black and white" (Pfaff 20; qtd. in Mitsch 55). This attitude reveals her clear opposition to the sort of essentializing discourse present in the *Éloge*, which comes across as ironically short-sighted. For in their valorization of creole identity, Chamoiseau et al. fall back on a negative, exclusionary definition of identity: "ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons créoles" (3). Glissant himself shared these same reservations, arguing how, as Richard Watts summarizes, "the very suffix *-ité* implies a dangerously fixed identity," something more akin to his idea of *identité-racine*, whereas "the suffix *-isation*…implies a continuous process and, by extension, an openness to change" (125). In both a (largely critical) co-edited volume entitled *Penser la créolité* (1995), as well as her 1993 article "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," Condé clearly echoes this sentiment in her stated disagreement with many of her Caribbean contemporaries (and particularly the Créolistes). In a pointed remark, Condé claims that "various commands decreed about West Indian literature…[have contributed] to the edification of an order very few writers have dared to transgress to introduce disorder" (2000: 152). While Condé may be right to point out the dangers of the *Éloge* as a potential roadblock to the creative freedom of the Caribbean writer, it is important to recognize that the Créolistes, particularly

Chamoiseau, have continued to develop their thinking since the publication of the *Éloge*.[105] In *Texaco*, for instance, Chamoiseau notes the ambivalent possibilities latent in *créolité*: on the one hand, it can highlight the symbiotic and "adaptive logic" of semi-urban habitations (Prieto 2016: 57); on the other hand, in the form of the city (here, Fort-de-France), it can breed monstrousness—as the urbanist of *Texaco* warns, "la ville est un danger…elle s'érige monstrueusement plurinationale, transnationale, supranationale, cosmopolite—créole démente en quelque sorte" (390). Indeed, in Chamoiseau's fictional work, and especially since *Texaco*, he increasingly embraces a more Glissantian view that privileges both relationality and opacity.

In fact, much like Condé, Chamoiseau adopts the opaque and aporetic mangrove to gesture toward the fraught nature of postcolonial identity. But why exactly is this iconic ecological figure of tropical climates so apposite? In her analysis of *Traversée*, Ruthmarie Mitsch defines the mangrove as

> a mesh of both land and water, and in that sense it is fluid, borderless, open to influence and change…might it not be called a *métissage*? Yet because of its rhizomatic lateral growth patterns, which prominently feature prop roots and pneumatophores, it can also contain, entangle, strangle, blind, thus acting much like a border. (55)

Mitsch's percipient observation that mangrove forests are in one sense "borderless" yet can also serve as potent, even dangerous barriers captures the mangrove's ambiguity and malleability, traits upon which Chamoiseau and Condé both seize. Whereas Condé employs

[105] Just as Césaire, in 1966 at the Festival mondial des Arts nègres in Dakar, warned that *négritude* risked becoming a "notion de divisions" unless properly considered in its original historical context.

the mangrove both structurally and thematically, as I have shown above, Chamoiseau extrapolates the ecological figure onto the quasi-urban settlement of Texaco in Martinique, for which the novel is named. As the urbanist remarks to the *Marqueur*,

> Je compris soudain que Texaco n'était pas ce que les Occidentaux appellent un bidonville, mais une mangrove, *une mangrove urbaine*… Elle [une mangrove] ne semble appartenir ni à la terre, ni à la mer un peu comme Texaco n'est ni de la ville ni de la campagne. (289)

Chamoiseau's model for the urbanist figure, the real-life urbanist and politician Serge Letchimy, who succeeded Aimé Césaire as mayor of Fort-de-France in 2001 and is now President of the Executive Council of Martinique, confirms this in his work *De l'habitat précaire à la ville : l'exemple martiniquais*, published the same year as *Texaco*: "Les quartiers populaires, dans l'écosystème urbain, ont en effet une double spécificité. Elle leur confère un rôle repoussant et vital, similaire à celui de la mangrove dans l'écosystème naturel" (47). This recourse to an urban ecology establishes the centrality of the mangrove as a figure of semi-urban settlement and also permits Chamoiseau, like Condé, to explore the rhizomatic characteristics of postcolonial identity in the Caribbean. As much has been written about *Texaco*, a novel epic in its scope and implications, I will focus on one particular aspect here, i.e. how Chamoiseau's consideration of the "urban mangrove" raises questions about the complex relationship between humans and the natural world and how we might attain a more nuanced and symbiotic way of life with our surroundings.

A multi-generational historical fresco, Chamoiseau's novel addresses the ecological and economic devastation wrought by centuries of globalizing capital funding the Plantationocene. The novel's title, *Texaco*, as Keithley Woolward notes,

> conjures up contemporary iterations of multinational capitalism and environmental abuse in this once exploited and now abandoned mangrove area. That this already-polluted oil refinery is the only place left for the descendants of slaves to claim as their own brings into stark relief the lasting legacies of human activity and interaction with the environment. Texaco, now doubly "polluted" by the insalubrious shantytown, unites past and present, bearing witness to the foundational relationship of the Antillean population and the land. A relationship marked by exclusion and exploitation. (67)

Against this historical and contemporary backdrop, the city sends the urbanist to Texaco to essentially affirm that it should be destroyed. He ends up playing a key role, however, in Chamoiseau's emphasis on a more nuanced understanding of Texaco. As he listens to Marie-Sophie recount the personal and collective history of the settlement—the power of literature, oral and written, serves as a principal theme[106]—he begins to recognize how razing it would engender significant human costs. In this way, he comes to see Marie-Sophie as a kind of teacher rather than a mere inconvenience.[107] In the "Notes de l'urbaniste" sprinkled throughout the novel, he writes that "Elle m'apprit à relire les deux espaces de notre ville créole" (188). Seeming asides such as this one reinforce the significant role of interpretation when faced with the unorthodox. For instance, in Marie-Sophie's vision of Texaco, the

[106] Chamoiseau expresses this theme most blatantly through the figure of Ti-Cirique, a Haitian who frequently cites Rabelais and Shakespeare. The Marqueur de paroles recounts how "il [Ti-Cirique] me parla du vaste tissu qu'est la Littérature, une clameur multiple et une, qui rassemblait les langues du monde, les peuples, les vies" (357). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this definition of what might be termed "World Literature" closely mirrors Chamoiseau's own, as expressed in his essay "Mondialisation, mondialité, pierre-monde" (*Littérature* 174 (2014): 92-103; special edition on Glissant: "Édouard Glissant, la pensée du détour").

[107] On the proliferation of language of learning and "déchiffrage" in *Texaco*, see Serge Dominique Ménager's "Topographie, texte et palimpseste: *Texaco* de Patrick Chamoiseau" in *The French Review* 68.1 (1994): p. 66.

seeming chaos is not an insalubrious mess but rather an organic, poetic assemblage, one which aligns with Condé's valorization of disorder. In another one of his more poetic, inspired notes, the urbanist comes to believe that

> [s]i la ville créole ne disposait que de l'ordre de son centre, elle serait morte. Il lui faut le chaos de ses franges. C'est la beauté riche de l'horreur, l'ordre nanti du désordre. C'est la beauté palpitant dans l'horreur et l'ordre secret du désordre. Texaco est le désordre de Fort-de-France ; pense : la poésie de son Ordre. L'urbaniste ne choisit plus entre l'ordre et le désordre, entre la beauté et la laideur ; désormais il s'érige en artiste : mais lequel ? La Dame me l'apprendrait. (203-204)

Envisioning a new mantle as artist-cum-urbanist, the urbanist condemns the heterodox opinion of the West that chooses to frame informal urbanism as a problem and nothing else: "il nous faut congédier l'Occident et réapprendre à lire : réapprendre à inventer la ville. L'urbaniste ici-là, doit se penser créole avant même de penser" (296). The urbanist's embrace of a creole intuition and way of life permits Chamoiseau to extol the benefits of Texaco not only from the viewpoint of Marie-Sophie but from an official, technical standpoint as well.

With his newfound perspective, the urbanist argues that the traditional city is no longer tenable for the creole urbaniste; rather, he must "réamorcer d'autres tracées, en sorte de susciter en ville *une contre-ville*. Et autour de la ville, *réinventer la campagne*. L'architecte, c'est pourquoi, doit se faire musicien, sculpteur, peintre…—et l'urbaniste, poète" (396). It is useful here to draw on Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of deterritorialization in the context of linguistics. In Chapter Four of *Mille plateaux*, "Postulats de la linguistique," they write that it is not a question of "se reterritorialiser sur un dialecte ou

un patois, mais de déterritorialiser la langue majeure," using the example of "Black English" (132).[108] Building on this concept, we can see that Chamoiseau's urbanist realizes the need not only to *re*territorialize the shantytown of Texaco, but also to *de*territorialize the creole city. Moreover, the urbanist's recognition of the value of the arts adheres to the following credo in Chamoiseau's essay "Mondialisation, mondialité, pierre-monde": "Ce que nous avons à vivre et à construire ensemble est surtout *un imaginaire de la diversité*" (102). In his privileging of the imagination, particularly a literary one, Chamoiseau echoes Glissant's belief that, despite "les oppressions concrètes qui stupéfient le monde…[nous sommes toujours] capables de changer l'imaginaire des humanités" (*Traité du Tout-monde* 18). Both Glissant and Chamoiseau maintain the view that the best representation of Caribbean identity accepts—and, moreover, appreciates—diversity. In an interview, Chamoiseau meditates on the rhizomatic identity of "les sociétés créoles":

> Nous provenons du choc de plusieurs races, de plusieurs langues, de plusieurs civilisations qui se sont fracassées dans la colonisation et dans l'esclavage. Ce choc a produit les émergences qui sont les nôtres et que nous devons essayer de comprendre. Et chaque fois que nous essayons de nous comprendre, nous tombons sur la complexité, donc sur le monde. *Ainsi, lorsque nous avons essayé de rentrer dans le plus profond de ce que nous sommes, au lieu de trouver une grosse racine unique qui nous relierait à une lignée d'ancêtres, nous avons trouvé un rhizome*. (De Bleeker 98; emphasis mine)

[108] This concept, which Deleuze and Guattari also explore at length in *Pour une littérature mineur* (1975), calls to mind Marie-Sophie's characterization of her father Esternome's creole, remarking of Rabelais that "son langage bizarre me rappelle les phrases étranges de mon cher Esternome pris entre son envie de bien parler français et son créole des mornes—un état singulier que je ne parvins jamais à restituer dans mes cahiers" (248).

Faced with the complexity of these rhizome-origins, which Condé and Chamoiseau both emphasize through the figure of the mangrove, Chamoiseau argues that "this is an exercise of the imagination, and we need to diffuse this so people hear about it" (Morgan 451). Literature thus serves as one method of raising awareness about the epistemological model of the rhizome and working toward a more nuanced understanding of Caribbean and postcolonial identity.

Following Glissant's later work, Chamoiseau privileges a radical openness to the world that aims to overcome surface-level judgments based on Western models of identity and savoir-faire. It is with this framework that we can appreciate the more ecologically symbiotic development of Texaco. As Eric Prieto suggests,

> [t]his is a mode of urbanization that is adaptive rather than domineering. And if we think of the favelas and barrios of Latin America, which, like Texaco itself, spill down hillsides and create organic shapes that can be quite lovely, we have a kind of visual instantiation of the adaptive logic of these settlements, which adhere to the topographical contours of the landscape and create an engaging vernacular architectural vocabulary. Unlike the grid and hub-and-spoke patterns of centrally planned cities, or the prefab uniformity of suburban subdivisions, the informal settlement obeys the dictates of the landscape and available materials. (57)

This aligns neatly with the "urban mangrove" metaphor because the mangrove is a site par excellence of adaptability. The urbanist comes to the same conclusion, acknowledging how Marie-Sophie "m'a enseigné à percevoir la ville comme un éco-système, tout en équilibres et en interactions" (282). The urbanist thus comes to believe in an urban ecology embodied by the "creole city" that is "multilingue, multiraciale, multi-historique, ouverte, sensible à la

diversité du monde" (243). The novel's interrelated themes of identity, literature, and urbanization all depend on a poetics of diversity that echoes the biodiversity and rhizomatic structure of the mangrove forest. Regarding the inhabitants of Texaco, herself included, Marie-Sophie notes how they live in narrow alignment with other-than-human nature: "[N]ous avions pris le rythme de l'eau, la texture des écorces, le mouvement des oiseaux qui se posaient par terre" (317). Dedicated as any activist, Marie-Sophie remarks that the urbanist will forever take her and her community seriously: "Maintenant qu'il en savait le faisceau des histoires, je lui dis qu'il pouvait lâcher ses bulldozers, et tout raser, et tout détruire, mais qu'il sache que nous serions debout, en face, moi la première, comme de toute éternité" (415). Critically, it is his knowledge of "le faisceau des histoires" that underpins his understanding that Marie-Sophie and her neighbors will always fight for their right to inhabit Texaco.

On this foundational role of storytelling, Chamoiseau aligns himself with Glissant and Condé on the value of opacity. Beginning with a critique of colonialist ideology, he argues that

> il faut lutter contre la transparence, car elle a fait tellement de mal. Le principe de la colonisation, c'était la transparence : "Je vais rendre le monde transparent, c'est-à-dire conforme à ce que je peux voir et à ce que je comprends. Donc je te donne ma langue, mon Dieu... pour que tu me ressembles." Le respect de l'opacité, par contre, va même au-delà du respect de la différence : l'opacité me permet d'entrer dans une

> relation à l'autre qui respecte ce qu'est l'autre et qui, absolument fondamental, à la limite peut me permettre de m'ouvrir à l'autre sans crainte. (De Bleeker 106)[109]

Building on this deconstruction of the "transparency" of colonialism, he then pivots to literature as a means of opening up new frameworks through ambiguity and opacity:

> [U]n texte littéraire libère l'esprit plus qu'il ne l'emprisonne. Un texte littéraire ne donne pas un sens, un texte littéraire n'est pas une certitude, n'est pas un dogme. Un texte littéraire est fondamentalement ambigu : l'autorité du texte littéraire, c'est justement son incertitude, le fait qu'il déplace les lignes du réel, qu'il rend disponible. Et l'opacité, on ne trouve pas mieux que ça pour un peu défaire les cadres habituels. (De Bleeker 106)

We thus see how Chamoiseau's novel, like *Traversée*, embraces opacity to open new pathways to understanding postcolonial identity, ones which hinge epistemologically on relational, diversal connections, much like the knotted, omnidirectional tangle of mangrove roots.

Conclusion

As this chapter amply shows, identity has long been a source of consternation and creative exploration in the Caribbean, an inevitable consequence of the region's unique (post/neo)colonial history. As Maryse Condé points out,

[109] A point of contention between Chamoiseau and Condé lies in this question of glossaries. Whereas *Texaco* takes a defamiliarizing approach, Condé opted to gloss some creole expressions in *Traversée*. See also Chamoiseau's "Reflections on *Traversée de la Mangrove*."

> Les Antilles sont des créations totalement artificielles du système capitaliste. Le paradoxe, c'est qu'en fin de compte, né d'une création vraiment artificielle, le peuple antillais existe. Mais si l'on regarde sa genèse, on comprend que ses problèmes soient complexes. (Jacquey et Hugon 24, qtd. in Malena 5)

Living this paradox, Caribbean writers confront the complexities of postcolonial identity through an appropriation of the landscape. As we saw in Glissant's *La Lézarde*, the river represents the past, present, and future of Martinican politics, with its twists and turns embodying the revolutionary *détours* of Glissant's political vision; in Condé's *Traversée*, the mangrove serves both structurally and thematically to reflect the quandaries and impossibilities of Caribbean identity; and in Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, the mangrove functions primarily as a tool for understanding the Texaco community not as an insalubrious eyesore but as an adaptable and symbiotic "urban mangrove," one which gestures the way towards a new "ville créole."

Despite the various subtleties in their approaches, each novel analyzed in this chapter does not content itself to merely point to nature as a facile, readymade symbol of postcolonial identity. Instead, they lean into the natural world as a prolific lesson-giver, drawing out an eco-epistemology that aligns more appropriately with what it means to exist within Caribbean history and culture. In light of colonial history, and subsequent departmentalization and globalization, Caribbean literature confronts the landscape not as a passive aesthetic but an active poetics, one that continually defines and redefines Caribbean identity. As Noxolo and Preziuso argue,

> this process of allowing the self to be creatively produced and reproduced through the collective resources of language and landscape is one answer to what Spivak (2003,

> 26) called ‘the question of the formation of collectivities without necessarily prefabricated contents’—an opening out to creative ways of living together on and with the planet. (Noxolo and Preziuso 172)

Literature thus plays a significant role in viewing Caribbean identity not, following Dany Bébel-Gisler, as “destin et fatalité…mais comme projet, compréhension, critique de soi et de la société dans laquelle nous vivons” (qtd. in Malena 6). Caribbean identity, as in Henri Bergson’s meditation on reality, is always “un perpétuel devenir…jamais quelque chose de fait” (183). This state of perpetual becoming, in each of these novels, would seem to emerge from other-than-human nature’s inscrutability—after all, how can Caribbean identity possibly be stable in light of the violent uprooting of its peoples’ ancestors, and when the environment itself is understood to have its own powerful agency that shapes material and ideological concerns? Indeed, the novels studied in this chapter open up questions about the Caribbean as a place, in Condé’s words, “sans contours définis, poreux à tous les bruits lointains, traversé par toutes les influences, même les plus contradictoires” (1995: 309). Yet, in varying degrees, they all point a way forward, developing a dynamic, relational eco-epistemology that decenters the human and more fittingly reflects the postcolonial condition.

In our movement toward an increasingly uncertain climate future, however, writers will increasingly grapple with crises and, equally importantly, our response to them. (In this chapter, *Texaco* marked an exceptional example of resilience and adaptability in the face of environmental adversity.) The PCE approach ensures that environmental discourse takes stock of the environmental injustice in-built into runaway capitalism and the climate crises it fuels. While the PCE perspective calls for a reform of environmental policies to better address instances of climate injustice, much popular-cultural and environmental discourse

continues to seek solutions through an unbridled faith in technology and a resistance to reform on a systemic level. The following chapter will thus consider a problematic aspect ubiquitous to modern and contemporary approaches to ecological challenges, that is, a tendency to fall back on the eschatological (and narratological) tropes of apocalypse and savior.[110]

[110] Indeed, though this chapter did not explicitly draw attention to it, the three primary novels examined all feature a messianic or quasi-messianic figure: Thaël in *La Lézarde*, Sancher (at least for some) in *Traversée*, and the urbanist in *Texaco* (the very first sentence of which refers to the urbanist as "le Christ" [19]).

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Chapter III

Sisyphean Messianism:
Eschatology in Literature and Environmentalism

At the time of drafting this chapter, in August of 2021, an eerie orange-gray light streamed through my window, a result of massive fires far to the north.[111] Two years prior, final exams at UC Santa Barbara were canceled due to the health hazards posed by smoke from the nearby Cave Fire. This relatively minor disruption came on the heels of the 2018 wildfire season, the deadliest and most destructive in California history.[112] As the climate crisis intensifies, images of eco-apocalypse do not require much effort for us to conjure forth. In the past half-century alone, thousands of fiction and nonfiction books—not to mention scores of films and countless hours of news coverage—have assessed the origins and/or aftermath of ecological disaster, attesting vividly to the evergreen appeal of the eco-apocalyptic imagination. In 2021 alone, more than forty percent of U.S. citizens experienced (or were in the vicinity of) some kind of climate disaster, whether tropical storms or hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, drought, record heat waves, forest fires, and so forth.[113]

Given our seemingly ineluctable embeddedness in an eco-apocalyptic environment, important questions emerge: e.g. what to make of our *embodied* experience of climate catastrophes? and what to make of our *vicarious* experience of them? and, importantly, how do these two inform one another? In the search for possible answers to these difficult

[111] Cal Fire referred to "unprecedented fire behavior and growth" in an update on the Caldor Fire, which was one of three major fires at the time (along with the Dixie Fire and McFarland Fire) (Elamroussi and Chan, "'Unprecedented' conditions feed Northern California wildfire, forcing thousands to evacuate," *CNN*, 18 August 2021).
[112] The Camp Fire alone resulted in 85 deaths, nearly 19,000 destroyed buildings, and $16.5 billion in property damage. (Reyes-Velarde, "California's Camp fire was the costliest global disaster last year, insurance report shows," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 January 2019).
[113] Kaplan and Tran, "More than 40 percent of Americans live in counties hit by climate disasters in 2021." *The Washington Post*, 5 January 2022.

questions, it quickly becomes clear that we tend to take recourse to eschatology, that is, a certain codified and long-established way of approaching apocalypse. As such, both modern environmentalist discourse and ecologically focused fictions (of both "genre" fiction and the "literary" variety) frequently fall back on the miraculous as a primary (or exclusive) means of managing climate catastrophe. In what ways, however, does this potentially mitigate our ability to meaningfully combat the climate crisis? And how might different perspectives and alternative narrative modalities more accurately and effectively represent our (probable) eco-apocalyptic future and provoke inspiration and action rather than despair and passivity?

It would, of course, be absurd to suggest that there are simple answers to these questions. As such, this chapter will work in an interrogative mode, persistently questioning dominant environmental discourse and conventional narrative tropes and forms. As a site par excellence of ambiguity,[114] the Caribbean provides a privileged perspective on how modern environmental discourse simultaneously adheres to and subverts orthodox approaches to eco-apocalypse. My reading of novels by Jacques Roumain and Patrick Chamoiseau—*Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944) and *Les neuf consciences du Malfini* (2009)—will argue that, despite their many differences, they both imply that humanity and the Earth require exceptional figures to save us from environmental problems. As we will see from a brief examination of contemporary environmental discourse, however, this is far from unusual. Recent groups such as the self-described "ecomodernists," for example, have staked out technological ingenuity as the "Deus ex machina" for a narrative that inches increasingly toward inevitable ecological disaster.

[114] See Chapters One (the Introduction) and Two for an elaboration of eco-epistemology and the postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach, both of which embrace the ambivalence and ambiguity of the human and other-than-human relation.

Whether our salvation might stem from an extraordinary individual or a revolutionary technological breakthrough, these suggestions point to an apocalyptic end—barring an individual or event that borders on the miraculous. My central question, then, centers on this persistent anxiety: is modern eco-epistemology[115] beset by a savior complex, perhaps even trapped in a Sisyphean messianism? Before close reading these two texts, I will first provide an overview of eschatological eco-anxiety in both recent environmental discourse as well as popular culture. In the wake of the unique Caribbean perspectives revealed through my close readings, I will explore theoretical and "real-world" possibilities for moving beyond the savior narrative in our confrontation with eco-apocalypse. Ultimately, I will argue that Roumain and Chamoiseau show how stories operating within the messianic metanarrative can still subvert conventions of passivity and hierarchy while pointing the way to a more just eco-epistemology, one that supports a more optimal framework for combatting the climate crisis.

Eschatological eco-anxiety

It is abundantly clear that humanity remains transfixed by the end of the world, or what Frederick Buell terms "ecodystopianism" when the culprit is environmental catastrophe. The Caribbean is by no means exempt from this morbid fascination, as Rivke Jaffe's fieldwork in Jamaica and Curaçao confirms: "There is a strong belief in the threat of an ecological crisis, a somewhat millenarian expectation of environmental catastrophe"

[115] At its most simple, eco-epistemology is shorthand for "ecological epistemology." On a deeper level, however, as this dissertation aims to demonstrate, it stands for a distinctly Caribbean strand of environmental thought that diverges in meaningful ways from conventional Western perspectives on other-than-human nature—as seen, for example, in the ideologies underpinning settler colonialism and runaway capitalism. For a more extensive definition of the term, see the Introduction (Ch. I).

(230). Crucially, there is a linkage expressed here, and one that is echoed throughout much Caribbean (and world) literature, between ecological crisis and miraculous (in this case, divine) intervention. Jaffe attributes this to the "more general, religiously inspired, Caribbean belief that disaster will not be long coming, a certain apocalyptical preoccupation combined with the region's history of natural disasters" (ibid). Regardless of religious leanings, people in the Caribbean frequently recognize the intimate connection between human activity and environmental disturbance. For example, Jaffe notes that many of her interviewees spoke of how flooding followed Curaçaoan land reclamation, and how drought followed deforestation in Jamaica, observations mirrored closely in the Chamoiseau and Roumain novels I will soon be close reading (231).[116]

Faced with such environmental crises, we often turn to an aestheticization of apocalypse, experiencing, as Walter Benjamin wrote, our "own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order" (242). Such ecodystopianism finds expression in many forms of media, from news and social media to music, literature, and film (among others). Writing on the role of affect, Adrian Parr suggests that,

> however repressed they might be, the anxieties climate change and ecological collapse present to society return as a symptom that is both enjoyed and hated at the same time… The spectacle of calamity strikes a chord that runs deep throughout the social field, terrifying as much as it is pleasurable. (205)

Some critics argue that environmentalists are themselves no more immune to this preoccupation with doom (and perhaps the perverse pleasure it produces). Berkeley professor

[116] This is also demonstrated amply by much of the literature read throughout this dissertation, including, for example, Glissant's *La Lézarde* (see Ch. II), Yanick Lahens' *Bain de lune* (Ch. IV), and Tobias Buckell's *Sly Mongoose* (Ch. V).

of political science Aaron Wildavsky, for instance, claims that environmentalists suffer from an "Armageddon complex" (qtd. in Buell 21). (To be fair, it is difficult not to see "Armageddon" when you delve into the science underlying the breakneck warming of our planet and the rapid diminishing of its biodiversity.) The question, then, is what exactly do apocalyptic narratives about climate change—whether environmentalist discourse or blockbuster films—*do*? On the one hand, we might see them as cathartic, convenient avenues for coping with the threat of climate catastrophe through the pleasurable (because vicarious and thus safe)[117] horror of seeing what may lie ahead. On the other hand, we might see them as ultimately unproductive, a kind of opium of the masses, which is precisely philosopher Alain Badiou's position (i.e. eco-dystopia "replacing religion as the axis around which our fear of social disintegration becomes articulated").[118] Jason Moore agrees, arguing that "the politics of fear and catastrophism that have permeated Green politics will not produce the clarity necessary to face the challenges ahead" (2015: 294).

Well then, how *do* we find clarity? And what exactly is the role of the imagination when it comes to eco-apocalypse? Fredric Jameson wrote that "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism."[119] Although deeper consideration lies outside the scope of this chapter, it is indeed a compelling question to consider how

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[117] Here I am reminded of the critique of morbid vicarious pleasure by Maynard James Keenan (of the band Tool) in the aptly titled "Vicarious":

> I need to watch things die
> From a good safe distance
> Vicariously I live while the whole world dies
> You all feel the same so
> Why can't we just admit it? (genius.com/Tool-vicarious-lyrics)

[118] Qtd. in Swyngedouw & Cook 1973.

[119] Jameson offers this formulation in both the Introduction to *The Seeds of Time* (1994) as well as his essay "Future City," where he phrases it thus: "Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world" (76).

capitalism might fuel apocalyptic narratives, particularly in mass media. Parr believes that our imagination is itself in the "mythic grip" of apocalypse, and that "imagining harbors emancipatory inclinations" (170). (Parr distinguishes between "imagination" (passive) and "imagining" (active).) A valid concern thus arises: could the normalization of an apocalyptic-minded imagination, perpetuated by passive consumption of popular media, lead to lethargy and thus belated (or nonexistent) action to combat the climate crisis? Perhaps contributing to this problem is the fact that contemporary disaster fiction often communicates a message of "Relax, technoscientific fix 'X' or messianic protagonist 'Y' will save the day." Moreover, much popular environmental discourse continues to perpetuate this idea, i.e. that revolutionary technological innovation(s) may lead us out of our present climate quandary and should thus be our primary focus rather than individual actions. Recently, for example, Bill Gates argued against critics of his private jet use by claiming that his use is offset (and more) by his large-scale investments in climate tech.[120] Environmentalists such as Gates, i.e. of the ecomodernist/eco-pragmatist camp, often tout the idea of "green growth" but fail to see—or perhaps do not care—that their discourse essentially echoes press releases by greenwashing oil executives.[121]

Such proponents of "green growth" often fail to acknowledge capitalism's metabolic problem. On this point, Brett Clark and John Bellamy Foster (of the "Oregon School")[122] draw from Marx's metabolic analysis, an aspect of his work that had previously been

[120] See Li Cohen, "Bill Gates says flying on a private jet doesn't make him 'part of the problem'…" *CBS News*, 10 February 2023.
[121] For example, in the wake of the Exxon Valdez catastrophe in 1989, Edgar S. Woolard, Jr., the CEO of DuPont, argued in favor of corporate environmentalism. In his view, environmental groups and governments could not fix the environment, so corporations must (Buell 23-24).
[122] Chapter One provides a brief overview of Clark and Foster's contribution to the concept of "metabolic rift" while also referring to Jason Moore's critique of the "Oregon School" to which they belong.

relatively underexamined. In *Capital*, Marx defines labor as "a process between [humans] and nature, a process by which [humans], through [their] own actions, mediate, regulate, and control the metabolism between [themselves] and nature" (qtd. in Clark and Bellamy Foster 145; citation amended for inclusivity). In essence, then, there exists a metabolic relationship between humankind and other-than-human nature, and it is one that has continued to fall into increasing disequilibria over the past hundreds of years. While capitalism contributes to these "metabolic rifts," Clark and Foster point out that

> rather than abiding to sustainability needs of natural systems, [it] attempts to bridge whatever rifts it creates through technological fixes…without properly addressing the social causes of the metabolic rift. Such artificial solutions simply shift the problem elsewhere, creating additional environmental concerns and compounding the overall problem. (147)

Rather than maintain a holistic view of the natural world that would seek to minimize this "law of unintended consequences," governments and multinational corporations gravitate toward short-sighted decisions in view of profits. While leveraging their power may benefit them in the short-term through the enactment of self-interested policies, they tend to worsen the metabolic rifts that gravely threaten all life on the planet, and particularly in the Global South, where there is a perfect storm of poverty and unfriendly geography when it comes to both slow violence (e.g. rising seas) and extreme weather events (e.g. hurricanes). Apocalyptic fictions, however, may help liberal democracies confront the reality of our historical excesses in concrete terms, as Parr argues (xvii-xviii). That ultimately depends, however, on the *type* of fiction.

Following Parr, a central problem of popular eco-dystopian narratives is that they are quite often ahistorical and apolitical: "All [of them] present a world terrorized by natural disasters, but…[it is] one where the structural violence of capitalism remains innocent" (172). This is consistent with Moore's argument that the traditional Western understanding of capitalism, nature, and catastrophe views capitalism and nature as distinct entities, and this perspective is held not only by instrumentalist, colonialist views of nature but also by many on the environmental left:

> The Cartesian narrative unfolds like this. Capitalism—or if one prefers, modernity or industrial civilization—emerged *out of* Nature. It drew wealth *from* Nature. It disrupted, degraded, or defiled *Nature*. And now, or sometime very soon, Nature will exact its revenge. Catastrophe is coming. Collapse is on the horizon. (Moore 2015: 5)

Moore can complete his deconstruction of this ontological distinction between capitalism and nature with a simplistic aping of contemporary eco-anxiety only because it has become such a ubiquitous cliché in environmental discourse and popular media. That does not make it any less true, however, and we clearly must work to resist the desensitization that inhabits us by way of incessant, arguably inescapable, exposure to apocalypse.

It is hard to dispute that, when it comes to eco-apocalypse, we remain perpetually caught in a catch-22: it is, of course, essential to work on and report on climate change as if our lives (and the lives of future generations) depend on it, because they do; at the same time, this nonstop presentation of imminent doom wears away at our psyche and thus our capacity to care. It could be argued, as Parr does, that this locks our imagination in an unhelpful mode of apocalyptic thinking, and that our faith in our ability to save ourselves *by ourselves* will consequently wither away. Unfortunately, these attitudes work together to create the

following scenario: wholly desensitized to eco-apocalypse, we are not primed to accept alternative, efficacious narrative forms and practical modes of combatting climate change, and due to the onslaught of the savior mentality, we foist off individual and collective agency and responsibility in lieu of the ultimate technoscientific fix and/or savior to emerge.

Fortunately, on the other hand, not all savior narratives follow the ahistorical and apolitical tendencies of today's typical big-budget disaster film. In fact, this chapter will engage with novels by two of the Caribbean's most influential writers, Jacques Roumain and Patrick Chamoiseau, to examine the role of reformed sociopolitical organization in confronting climate crises. As Parr pointedly asks, "What political form is up to the gargantuan task of realizing the change emancipatory imagining presents?" (195). While in many ways these novels do deploy the standard savior metanarrative, they nonetheless propose an alternative model to eco-apocalypse, one where *collective salvation* ultimately depends on a radical commitment to *collective action*; only then can we achieve greater equilibrium with other-than-human nature, as well as among ourselves. Before moving to Roumain and Chamoiseau's novels, however, a brief reflection on the history of messianism in both literature and environmentalism will provide useful context for my close readings.

The messianic (meta)narrative

The messianic metanarrative is, of course, nothing new (otherwise it would not be a *meta*narrative in the first place). A story of disaster and redemption, it is, in ecologically inclined narratives, often a case of *natural* disaster and *ecological* redemption through the remedying of the environmental crisis at hand. One could argue that the hero's journey *and* climate fiction both go back to at least *The Epic of Gilgamesh*—lest we forget, climate

catastrophes and saviors were long-established narrative tropes by the time the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an were written. Indeed, there's an extensive history of savior narratives in the Western canon[123] as well as in Caribbean literature.[124] Today, the environmental iteration appears to be a global phenomenon.

But just how innate is our desire for a savior? In his lecture series published as *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), Thomas Carlyle argues that this is exactly our predicament. In addition to his often-maligned "great man" theory of history,[125] Carlyle offers a fascinating perspective into the perennial appeal of heroes. He argues that, even if all "traditions, arrangements, creeds, [and] societies" disappeared, hero worship would continue to prosper (166). In his view, it is an instinct rather than a learned habit. The most noble of human feelings, Carlyle told his audiences, is "admiration for one higher than [one]self" (28). Given the global nature of heroic literature and other cultural expressions, as well as the evergreen popularity of religious beliefs around the world, it would seem that we largely share Carlyle's view. After all, who better to confront catastrophe than a hero? From a narrative and heuristic point of view, as Eva Horn argues, "the imagination of disaster seems to shed a light through the fog of an overly complex world, to make things manageable and to promise to reveal an essential truth" (9). This extends, moreover, to our

[123] A brief and, of course, partial list might include the following examples: Herman Melville's Billy Budd (*Billy Budd*), C.S. Lewis' Aslan (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*), John Steinbeck's Jim Casy (*The Grapes of Wrath*; his initials are even the same as Jesus Christ), Fyodor Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin (*The Idiot*), William Golding's Simon (*Lord of the Flies*), John Knowles' Phineas (*A Separate Peace*), William Faulkner's Joe Christmas (*Light in August*), Albert Camus' Tarrou (*La Peste*), and Frank Herbert's Paul Atreides (*Dune*).

[124] Notable Caribbean authors who invoke the savior narrative include Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Roger Mais, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and, of course, Roumain and Chamoiseau.

[125] Carlyle's reputation suffered in part due to the adoption of his ideas by Nietzsche (the *Übermensch*), whose work was in turn appropriated by the authoritarian and fascist regimes of the early-mid twentieth century. According to Goebbels' diary, for example, Carlyle's *History of Frederick the Great* was Hitler's "chief source of solace during his final months in the Berlin bunker" (Sorensen 2).

confrontation with other-than-human nature; we are, as Parr believes, generally "excited, aroused, horrified, intrigued, and entertained by masculine displays of strength pitted against the transcendent forces of nature" (177).

The novel tradition, at least since Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* (1829-1850), has mirrored the West's increasing belief in its ability to maintain epistemological mastery over the earth. Ursula K. Le Guin, however, proposes an alternative to this (arguably excessively) self-assured mode. In her essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," Le Guin theorizes that "the (male) activity of hunting has produced a tradition of 'death' stories having a linear plot, a larger-than-life hero, and inevitable conflict" (Glotfelty xxix). Whether or not we are convinced by her assertion that hunting serves as the primary motivation for this type of narrative, it has dominated Western literature for thousands of years. While the two novels by Roumain and Chamoiseau analyzed in this chapter fall into this category, they also bear significant elements of what Le Guin saw as an alternative to this male-dominated tradition, i.e. a feminine tradition of "life" stories drawn from seed gathering, "conveying a cyclical sense of time, describing a community of diverse individuals, and embracing an ethic of continuity" (Glotfelty xxix). Overall, however, these novels lean more to the male, "death"-oriented side of Le Guin's dichotomy. They both feature extraordinary protagonists who eventually meet their end, but not before pointing the way toward salvation from their respective ecological crises.

Crucially, salvation in this case depends upon a radical reconfiguration of our relationship with the earth. In both Roumain and Chamoiseau's novels, the environment takes on an active role as a driving force behind each novel's conflict. This aligns with the preceding chapter's argument that in Caribbean literature, as summarized by Eric Prieto,

"depictions of the landscape tend not to function merely as scenic settings for narrative activity, or as aesthetic responses to the sheer physical beauty of the landscape, but to present the environment as an *active agent* in the drama of Caribbean history" (142; emphasis mine). Taking place in and foregrounding the teeming biodiversity of Haitian and Martinican villages, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* and *Les neuf consciences du Malfini* depict an intimate relationship with other-than-human nature, one that depends on a less anthropocentric eco-epistemology. Contemporary Caribbean theory—influenced immensely by Édouard Glissant—tends to valorize this viewpoint by opting for a poetics of horizontal relationality in lieu of hierarchized, verticalized structures (see Ch's. I and II). This discourse endeavors to subvert (post)coloniality and other anthropocentric forms of inequitable domination, which followed as unfortunate but unsurprising consequences of settler colonialism.

Through its unique struggle with colonization and decolonization, as well as its propensity for environmentally focused literature, the Caribbean thus provides a privileged perspective on how modern environmental discourse often frames climate crises in eschatological terms of apocalypse and salvation.[126] Haiti is somewhat of an outlier, given its relative independence since the end of the eighteenth century, but its literature nonetheless tends to place focus on the sociopolitical aspects of environmental issues. In Roumain, for instance, it is a question of agriculture and labor power. In Chamoiseau, efforts must be made to combat the "slow violence"[127] of climate change. In both cases, as we will see, the answer—or, at least, a response—arrives via an encounter with a secular savior.

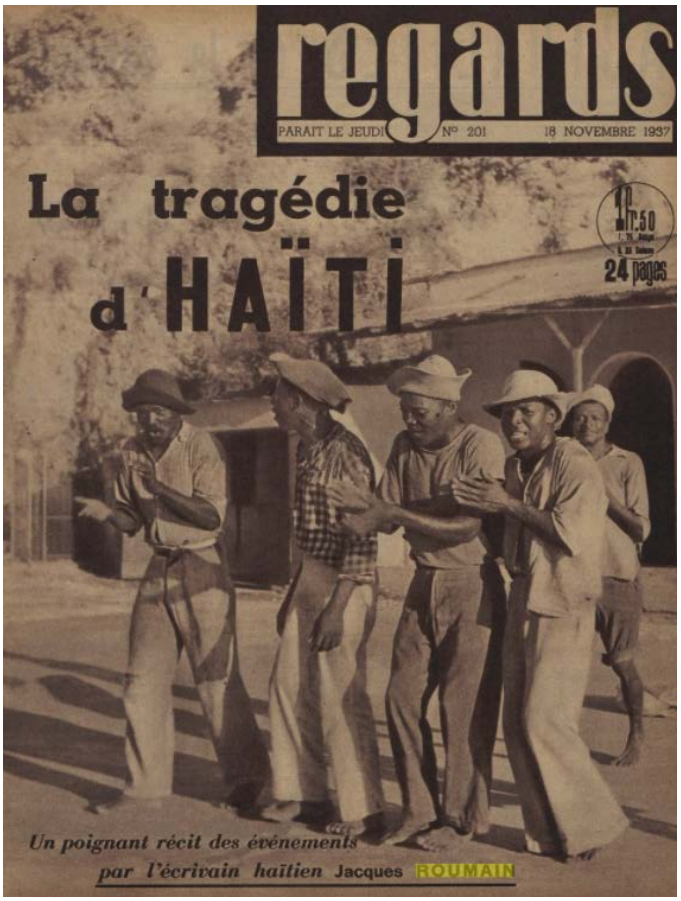
[126] For work on the messianic trend in francophone Caribbean fiction as it pertains specifically to Black leadership, see Awendela Oni Grantham's "Messianism in French Caribbean Literature: Césaire, Roumain, Glissant, and Schwarz-Bart" (Dissertation, 2012, Yale University).

[127] Nixon, alluding to his predecessor Rachel Carson, writes of phenomena such as biomagnification and toxic drift as "forms of oblique, slow-acting violence that, like climate change and desertification, pose formidable imaginative difficulties for writers and activists alike" (515).

Roumain: The coumbite and a socialist savior

Gouverneurs de la rosée, Roumain's now-canonical novel, was first published in short story form six years earlier in the journal *Regards*.[128] This text contains the crux of what the novel would become, i.e. a story about the fundamental relationship between people and the land, as was the case with the "telluric" novels popular at this time in Latin America.[129] The story takes pains to characterize the Haitian peasantry by way of their intimate relationship with the earth, as embodied by their hands, which is how "on reconnaît le paysan": "la couleur en est plus noire que la face parce que la terre s'est mêlée à la chair, et on dirait même, au sang" (9). Recalling Césaire's description of négritude as plunging into the "chair rouge du sol," the bloody hue of the earth here mirrors the rough way of life common to these men, described as "Nègres[130] des bois, gouverneurs de la rosée, dépossédés de leur destin, tous pareillement dans la griffe du malheur et chacun a son histoire, différente et semblable, de sang, de violence et de mort" (10). The life-or-death struggle that they share leads them to follow Jean-Gille, who serves as the messianic figure in this early version of the novel: "Il conduit comme un berger, par les défilés de la montagne, la petite troupe de paysans vaincus" (10). Conquered by the land's infertility, these peasants become the sheep to Jean-Gille's shepherd.

[128] 25 August 1938.
[129] Two prominent examples being Rómulo Gallego's *Doña Bárbara* (1929) and José Eustasio Rivera's *La Vorágine* (1924).
[130] In Haiti, "nègre" equates to "human being" and is not pejorative.



Roumain's 1937 essay on Haiti, published in *Regards*

Haiti itself possesses a history of messiah figures, from the appointed to the dictatorial, and *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (henceforth *Gouverneurs*) is one of the country's most evocative fictionalizations of this trope. Reflecting on Haitian history, Régis Antoine asks rhetorically, "depuis la mort de Mackandal, n'abonde-t-elle pas en vies et morts exemplaires ?" (140). Roumain's novel thus deploys a distinctly universal form—the savior narrative—that falls well within the boundaries of Haitian sociocultural expectations. The uncompromising social(ist) realism of *Gouverneurs* is no doubt partly responsible for

Stephen Alexis' assertion that the novel marks the beginning of mature Haitian literature (264).[131]

The protagonist of *Gouverneurs* is Manuel, whose very name links him to God and also suggests that he will provide instruction to his compatriots.[132] Perhaps more significantly, *manuel* derives from the Latin *manualis*, itself originating in *manus* ("hand"), and it is Manuel who will lead his peers out of the drought and back to a collective way of working the land (the *coumbite*). Moreover, Manuel's name associates him with Latin America/the Latin Caribbean, like the country of Cuba where he had gone to make a living as a field hand (prior to the start of the novel). On a global scale, Cuba lies extremely close to Haiti, but for the *paysans* of Fonds-Rouge[133] it seems intensely exotic, a fascinating product largely of their collective imagination. In Cuba, Manuel participates in *huelgas* (strikes) and gains a strong sense of class consciousness. His long *séjour* in Cuba and his resulting hands-on education in workers' rights makes Manuel an impressive figure once he has returned at long last to his native soil, which lies pitilessly fallow due to severe drought: "Il était là…nimbé de cette aura étranger qui enveloppe ceux qui s'en reviennent de loin" (Chamoiseau 113). Although used to characterize the savior figure of Chamoiseau's novel, this description perfectly encapsulates the local sentiment around Manuel upon his return.

Part of Manuel's powerful messianic aura lies in his fondness for down-to-earth philosophizing, the ideological underpinnings of which always remain firmly rooted in other-

[131] Stephen Alexis was a Haitian writer, and not to be confused with his son Jacques Stephen Alexis, whose work I examine in the following chapter (Ch. IV).
[132] "Manuel" originates from the Hebrew name Immanu'el ("God with us"), and *manuel* in French means a textbook or other book of instruction.
[133] The name of Manuel's village not only reinforces the role of blood and earth in the novel but also calls to mind yet again the passage of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) in which his *négritude* "plonge dans *la chair rouge du sol*" (emphasis mine).

than-human nature. Manuel perhaps inherited this eco-epistemology from his father, Bien-Aimé, who testifies to the indelible mark left by one's environment:

> Si l'on est d'un pays, si l'on y est né, comme qui dirait : natif-natal, eh bien, on l'a dans les yeux, la peau, les mains, avec la chevelure de ses arbres, la chair de sa terre, les os des pierres, le sang de ses rivières, son ciel, sa saveur, ses hommes et ses femmes : c'est une présence, dans le cœur, ineffaçable, comme une fille qu'on aime : on connaît la source de son regard, le fruit de sa bouche, les collines de ses seins, ses mains qui se défendent et se rendent, ses genoux sans mystère, sa force et sa faiblesse, sa voix et son silence. (24)

Bien-Aimé's poetic speech personifies nature in a way that fuses the human inexorably with the environment. While it feminizes nature in an arguably problematic way ("comme une fille qu'on aime"), Bien-Aimé nonetheless underscores the fundamental role of other-than-human nature for the self-conception of Haitian identity. Although Bien-Aimé emphasizes the aesthetic and enigmatic aspects of other-than-human nature, Frantz Fanon reminds us that, for the marginalized, such an eco-epistemology remains tied to pragmatic concerns: "la valeur la plus essentielle, parce que la plus concrète, c'est d'abord la terre : la terre qui doit assurer le pain et, bien sûr, la dignité" (47). In *Compère Général Soleil*, Jacques Stephen Alexis writes that "Ce pays [Haiti] ne vaut que par ses travailleurs," further reiterating the dignity of human labor.

Indeed, the maintenance of nature's equilibrium—or metabolism—through agriculture is fundamental to Manuel's worldview, one which looks to move beyond the popular traditions of Vodou. Roumain himself felt seriously conflicted about the continued role of Vodou in Haiti and its perception by the outside world. Commenting on a 1938 *Radio*

Paris emission in which Roumain participated,[134] Christine Laurière argues that there is profound ambiguity in Roumain's "pensée ethnologique":

> Soucieux de valoriser le petit peuple haïtien et son mode de vie populaire, par humanisme et conviction marxiste, il n'en est pas moins embarrassé de devoir évoquer cet 'obscurantisme religieux' qui entache le drapeau national pour les élites haïtiennes…il souhaite jeter une fois pour toutes les 'contes à dormir debout sur les zombies-revenants, les loups-garous, les envoûtements et autres sornettes…au panier des *et cetera*,' afin de normaliser le vaudou et de le débarrasser de ces représentations fantasmées. (192)

While he hoped to counteract the exoticizing and caricatural stereotypes of Vodou found outside of Haiti, Roumain also understood that Vodou—no more or less than any other religion—is not a practical means of combatting an ecological crisis. Manuel thus critiques the inefficacy of the community's Vodou rituals while singling out his fellow people for their agricultural problems, pinning the blame specifically on the heavy deforestation carried out while he was abroad in Cuba: "Je dis vrai : c'est pas Dieu qui abandonne le nègre, c'est le nègre qui abandonne la terre et il reçoit sa punition : la sécheresse, la misère et la désolation" (34-5). In this way, the novel presents Manuel as a secular savior, purveyor of a Marxist ecology that foregrounds the idea of metabolic rift: humans have upset the natural equilibrium, and now they must face the consequences. Against oligarchy and petty internecine conflict, Manuel calls for the restoration of the *coumbite* and the dissolution of the toxic vendetta plaguing Fonds-Rouge. More passionate than didactic, Manuel delivers forceful injunctions that carry—despite his relative youth—the gravity of a spiritual elder.

[134] "Croyances religieuses populaires d'Haïti," Radio Paris, 1938.

An inviolable respect for other-than-human nature underpins these pronouncements on collective action, including the essential recognition that the fruits of nature (Marx's "free gifts")[135] belong to the commons, as Manuel tells his father Bienaimé that water is "le bien commun, la bénédiction de la terre" (122). While other families speak of leaving the village in search of (literal) greener pastures, Bienaimé dismisses this idea as short-sighted ingratitude:

> Ah nègres ingrats que vous êtes, s'écria-t-il. Cette terre vous a donné à manger, jour après jour, pendant des années et voilà que vous la quittez avec quelques lamentations pour la forme et un peu d'eau dans les yeux en guise de lessive pour la mauvaise conscience et le remords. Bande d'hypocrites. (111)

Manuel shares some of his father's stubbornness, leading him to scour the land until he finds a source of water to save their crops. Once he shares this stratagem with his girlfriend Annaïse, she prophetically affirms his success: "Tu es le nègre qui trouvera l'eau, tu seras le maître des sources, tu marcheras dans ta rosée au milieu des plantes. Je sens ta force et ta vérité" (84). In this vision, Manuel himself embodies the force of other-than-human nature, a man so interconnected with the natural world that he can conquer it and appropriate for the common good.

Any disruption to the harmony of the metabolic relationship between the villagers and the environment strikes Manuel as illogical. "Sans la concorde," he insists, "la vie n'a pas de goût, la vie n'a pas de sens" (124). This anaphora emphasizes "life," corresponding to the feminine tradition of Le Guin's dichotomy. And indeed, the novel circulates around

[135] In his reading of Marx, Jason Moore defines "the irreducibly socio-ecological constitution of 'value'" by means of "its internalization of human nature through commodified labor power, and its externalization of extra-human nature through the treatment of nature as a free gift" (2011: 16).

fecundity—the fallow crops thirsting for water, the amorous coupling of Manuel and Annaïse, and the cyclical rhythm of life and death in nature. In characteristic fashion, Manuel neatly summarizes the dire situation that Fonds-Rouge faces: "Cette question de l'eau, c'est la vie ou la mort pour nous, la salvation ou la perdition" (50). Their salvation rests in this precious resource, but the drought necessitates human intervention. As Manuel recognizes the need to act practically (rather than sacrifice a chicken as in the Vodou ritual shown early in the narrative) and succeeds in finding water where others had failed, he embodies the savior-hero. Yet he rejects a hierarchy that would position him—or anyone—above others, instead calling for the egalitarian model of the *coumbite*, wherein the villagers work alongside one another and share the benefits of their combined labor.

The problem, however, is that the villagers lack the direct experience of the benefits produced by collective labor power that Manuel saw firsthand in Cuba. Manuel must thus endeavor to pass on his newfound class consciousness. Much like Étienne Lantier in Émile Zola's socialist classic *Germinal* (1885), Manuel extols the power of people united around an awareness and an assertion of the innate value of their labor:

> nous ne savons pas encore que nous sommes une force, une seule force : tous les habitants, tous les nègres des plaines et des mornes réunis. Un jour, quand nous aurons compris cette vérité, nous nous lèverons d'un point à l'autre du pays et *nous ferons l'assemblée générale des gouverneurs de la rosée, le grand coumbite des travailleurs de la terre pour défricher la misère et planter la vie nouvelle*. (70; emphasis mine)

Manuel's agricultural language stresses the essence of his mission. As in *Germinal*, the overarching metaphor is that of the growth of new life, of the latent power in a new social

consciousness as expressed in an ecological metaphor, cultivating a sense for the dignity and fairness of labor. It is with the very last lines of his epic treatment of a coal miners' strike that Zola hits on the metaphor that, along with inspiration from the revolutionary calendar, gives the novel its title: "Des hommes poussaient, une armée noire, vengeresse, qui *germait* lentement dans les sillons, grandissant pour *les récoltes* du siècle futur, et dont la *germination* allait faire bientôt éclater la terre" (704; emphasis mine). Zola's vision of a future where workers—the producers of value by dint of their labor power—take in their fair share of the profits finds an echo in Manuel as a kind of socialist Christ.[136]

Unfortunately, the bad blood between his family and the Dorsica clan (in some ways this story is another *Romeo and Juliet*) ultimately prevents Manuel from fully carrying out his beatific vision. The villain is the venomous Gervilen, who cowardly ambushes Manuel as he returns from a successful meeting about restoring the peace. It is in his death that Manuel perhaps most resembles Christ, for on his deathbed he implores his mother, Délira, to abide by his final wish: to effectively turn the other cheek[137] and not disclose Gervilen's murderous act. She obeys, telling the others that he died of a sudden illness. Before passing, Manuel recognizes the bittersweet truth that life will go on, hopeful that his mission will continue through his family and friends—in other words, his disciples: "Le jour se lève, chaque jour, le jour se lève. La vie recommence" (157). This chiasmatic repetition again emphasizes the persistence of life, and his last words insist on solidarity: "chantez mon deuil, chantez mon deuil avec un chant de coumbite" (157). In this way, his death becomes a sacrifice, his

[136] It feels almost redundant to say "socialist Christ," as the Biblical Jesus espoused a radical ideology that eschewed an excessive concentration of wealth. On the one hand, calling Jesus "socialist" involves retrofitting a modern term; on the other hand, it feels important to note his "socialist" tendencies given the anti-socialist discourse of contemporary Evangelicals.
[137] Matthew 5:38-40.

parting message one of "la réconciliation, la réconciliation pour que la vie recommence, pour que le jour se lève sur la rosée" (157). This poetic, repetitious, and alliterative turn of phrase accentuates reconciliation and starting anew, symbolized by the return of the sun rising on the dew and validating Manuel as a successful savior. Like Christ, his influence will continue after death, a fact lamented by Hilarion, the other main antagonist: "Il est mort, Manuel, mais c'est toujours lui qui guide" (186).[138] There is a powerful contrast here between Manuel's redemptive blood and the blood spilled uselessly during the Vodou ceremony. Moreover, blood is one of three liquids (along with water and semen) that play an outsized role in both the plot and characterization of Manuel as a generative savior figure (Antoine 140).

It is at the very end of the novel, however, that Manuel's messianic characteristics come most explicitly to the fore. Délira recognizes that Manuel sees his death as a sacrifice for "le recommencement de la vie" (182). As she says to Annaïse, while they "chante le deuil…avec les cantiques des morts…Manuel a choisi un cantique pour les vivants : le chant du coumbite, le chant de la terre, de l'eau, des plantes, de l'amitié entre habitants" (182). In the prophetic guidance of the savior that endures beyond death, Manuel's message encourages a respect for the land, a sense of class consciousness, and a desire for harmony between humans and other-than-human nature. Although Manuel's demise gives the novel a poignant dénouement, it ends on a hopeful note in the last chapter, entitled "La fin et le commencement." Not only will Manuel's discovery of water and his teachings continue to influence the community, but his extraordinary spirit will live on through his child, for the

[138] Roumain's negative characterization of Hilarion, as a cop who represents the corrupted nature of bureaucratic governance, recalls the vehement imperative that opens the 1956 version of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*: "Va-t'en, lui disais-je, gueule de flic, gueule de vache, va-t'en je déteste les larbins de l'ordre et les hannetons de l'espérance" (1).

story ends with Annaïse telling Délira, “non, il n’est pas mort” as she presses her mother-in-law’s hand to her stomach, “où remuait la vie nouvelle” (189). From death emerges life, and Manuel’s eco-epistemology—cognizant of the ebb and flow of existence—becomes concretized in the infant child, a literal engendering of new life symbolized by the dew and the socio-ecological harmony of the *coumbite*. As one of the novel’s primary symbols, dew encapsulates the spirit of rebirth not only brought on by Manuel but also left in his wake. This symbology resonates with many cultures, ancient and modern,[139] which have seen dew as “a portent of transpersonal intervention and illumination” (*The Book of Symbols*).

Roumain’s novel thus serves as an example of the syncretic nature of Caribbean eco-epistemology, which at times falls back on longstanding forms of eschatology to make sense of ecological crises, even if predominately secularized. This approach makes sense for the well-traveled Roumain, who studied in France and spent time in Cuba as well as Mexico as a diplomat. His life and work reflect a globalizing world in which the globe itself will take on increasing importance in the collective imaginary. That he narrowly links this ecological sensibility to social relations, that is, to the key Marxist concept of labor power, makes of Roumain’s novel a prescient forebear of—and literary link to—future environmental discourse (especially that of the eco-Marxist camp). Furthermore, it is a testament to Roumain that his work remains ultimately more poetic than preachy, in some ways more a *bildungsroman* than a *roman à these.* As Christopher L. Miller notes, the novel “shows how seamlessly socialist discourse was able to appropriate and inhabit tropes of messianism and redemption. There is no contradiction, only complementarity” (450).

[139] For example, in the Book of Exodus, dew serves to herald the mana-like bread that God will send to the Israelites who have been expelled from Egypt (16: 13-14).

If one sought to reproach Roumain, they could very well point to the fact that the restoration of the *coumbite*, an ostensibly horizontalized structure, nonetheless relies on Manuel, as savior, residing at its head, shrouded in a sort of mystical aura. Furthermore, the novel reflects the attitudes of its era toward women, including a relationship of domination-subservience between Manuel and Annaïse, which, though consensual, may nonetheless trouble our contemporary eyes.[140] In this light, the discourse of Chamoiseau's novel, published sixty-five years later, reflects a more radical sense of egalitarianism and points more explicitly to "horizontality" as an ideal, even if it, too, depends on a savior figure to show the way.

Chamoiseau: An eco-poetics of resistance to slow violence

For Patrick Chamoiseau, writing only gestures at the truth, recalling André Breton's self-conscious reminder in *Nadja* (1929) that "La vie est autre que ce qu'on écrit."[141] Throughout his novel *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*, which takes the perspective of a Malfini, i.e. a fearsome bird of prey ("une sorte de grande rapace"), Chamoiseau implies that narrative testifies to an anthropocentric worldview that purports to claim mastery over nature and its mystery: "les histoires ne servent qu'à habiller l'indéchiffrable du monde" (67-68). And on the "Nocifs," the depressing (because apt) yet amusing term the Malfini ascribes to humans, he offers this parenthetical, characterizing them as those "(qui pensent encore que le monde peut gésir dans leurs mots)" (20). The position of the narrator and the role of literature

[140] See, for example, Maryse Condé's critique in her essay "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer." *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 155-56.
[141] This also echoes Plato's famous condemnation of poetry as three-times removed from the truth, with each poet only "an imitator…speak[ing] at best in felicitous parables of approximate images of the truth" (Irwin Edman, "Poetry and Truth in Plato," *The Journal of Philosophy* 33.22 [1936]: 609).

more broadly is of utmost importance in Chamoiseau's work, and, notably, the use of animals does not reduce the text to an *Animal Farm*-style allegory. As Richard Watts argues, the novel "resists allegorical readings and obliges us to read it as if it were centrally, if not exclusively, concerned with animals. It forces us to partially suspend the hermeneutic reflexes that privilege allegory (i.e., reading for the human) in representations of animals" (181). Indeed, compared to *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the atmosphere of Chamoiseau's text, set in the lush Rabuchon Forest of Martinique, feels much more enigmatic as the reader must grapple with the alien subjectivity of the (non-human) animal.[142] As in Roumain's novel, however, the characters—in this case almost exclusively animals—largely lack a higher ecological consciousness. To penetrate past the surface level of the chaotic world takes a special awareness, and Malfini learns from a surprising member of his genus: the hummingbird, or *colibri*.

This choice of savior in Chamoiseau's novel contrasts starkly with the imposing Malfini, for the latter lives and abides by his "Alaya," a Buddhist concept (*ālayavijñāna*)[143] adapted by Chamoiseau, which, in this context, loosely corresponds to an animal's guiding instinctual drives. This foundational consciousness provides the basis for the seven other consciousnesses, and the Malfini's journey toward a ninth (and highest) consciousness provides the novel's fundamental plot (and hence its title). Following Bernadette Cailler, "Croire en cette sorte d'*Alaya*, c'est, en somme, croire à un complexe nature/culture immuable, à une identité fixe, sorte de mémoire individuelle et collective inconsciente, et quasi prédéterminée" (287). As an apex predator, the Malfini flourishes in precisely this

[142] See the following chapter (Ch. IV) for more on the role of animals in Caribbean literature as a way of relating to other-than-human nature and representing it in a less anthropocentric fashion.
[143] In Mahayana Buddhism, specifically the Yogācāra school, the *ālayavijñāna* is the eighth consciousness.

hierarchical mindset, freely avowing that he enjoys [*aimer*] the act of killing, describing it as "*le* désir organique" of his being (22).[144] For him, the behavior of what he perceives as lesser creatures seems absurd. The novel, however, will follow his trajectory from bloodthirsty predator to peaceful disciple of Foufou, who, in essence, will become his messiah. As a hummingbird, Foufou epitomizes hybridity, conceived of as a creature between bird and insect.[145] Furthermore, the word *colibri* is of Caribbean origin, emphasizing the species as symbolic of the enchanting biodiversity of the region that gave rise to *lo real maravilloso* ("the marvelous real"), which emerged from Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's belief in the utter uniqueness of the Caribbean archipelago. (I will be exploring the genre of marvelous realism at length in the following chapter.) Chamoiseau takes full advantage of this magical approach to nature and situates the unexpected savior figure in this *tableau vivant*.

There is further emphasis of Foufou's uniqueness by way of juxtaposition with his brother, who, as a seemingly model archetype of his species, the Malfini simply calls "Colibri" (not so unlike how the narrator calls Malfini *the* Malfini, which is the *franco-antillais* name for his species).[146] In his initial characterization, he draws a distinction between their respective Alayas: while Colibri obeys his "d'une manière exacte," Foufou's is

[144] The extended passage provides a greater sense of the initial and elementary mindset conferred upon Malfini by his Alaya: "Je dis *j'aime*, mais cet élan [de tuer] n'est même pas à l'acmé d'un désir. Il est *le* désir organique de mon être. Je ne suis ni méchant ni sanguinaire. Juste une force inscrite aux violences impassibles qui régentent le vivant. Mais *aimer* est peut-être le mot juste : je vivais de cette terreur que soulevaient mes envols" (22).

[145] *Oiseau-mouche* is another term for hummingbird in French, and Malfini derisively employs *oiseau-moustique*.

[146] In a rather exhaustive reading of Glissant's fiction, Chris Bongie notes that Glissant, in a lexicon following *La case du commandeur* (1981), "provides the following definition of the 'malfini' (chicken-hawk), a bird that makes frequent appearance in his work: 'Large shore bird. Disappearing' (p. 247)" (161). Chamoiseau, an avowed Glissantian, perhaps drew inspiration from Glissant's own use of the malfini. In any case, Glissant's definition—"Large shore bird. Disappearing"—concisely summarizes the specter of slow violence that runs throughout Chamoiseau's novel. (Ornithologists, however, would disapprove of Bongie's translation of "chickenhawk," which is an informal designation for Cooper's hawks and red-tailed hawks, and one that has often been used to characterize them as pests—and thus justify their slaughter.)

"incertaine, bifide, trouble, même discordante" (41).[147] This sets up Chamoiseau's ecological picture of the world, in which a stunning sense of chaos ultimately results in self-regulating harmony: "Le monde est organisé. Le vivant a son ordre. Il ne confusionne pas. Il ne bouleverse que pour organiser" (41).[148] Although typically the Alaya is "une démone de singularité," this is not the case for Foufou, described as "une jonction discordante…son Alaya…était une intempérie" (42). At odds with the normative guiding forces of instinct, Foufou, though seemingly bizarre, manages almost singlehandedly to overcome the region's agricultural sterility. In the process, and much in the spirit of Manuel of Roumain's *Gouverneurs*, he awakens a higher social and ecological consciousness.

Malfini notes that Foufou obsessively scrutinizes the world around him and thus gains a greater sense of the world on a molecular level, in large part due to his small size and incredible aerial acrobatics. As Foufou does not speak nor offer overt teachings (à la Christ), he leads rather by example, with Malfini eventually imitating him: "je décidai d'être aussi libre que lui [Foufou] dans ma manière de l'observer… *Comme c'est difficile de seulement contempler*" (47).[149] As a fierce predator, accustomed to judging the world from the top of the food chain, he finds it difficult to think beyond his next prey. With the help of Foufou's example, however, the Malfini changes drastically, becoming almost ascetic and arriving at what Camus considered the great task of artists—that is, to oblige themselves to understand rather than judge.[150] So far outside the heterodox behavior of his fellow *colibris*, Foufou

[147] Although how exactly Malfini can discern the Alaya of others is left unclear—it is perhaps simply an innate capability of animals in the world constructed by Chamoiseau.
[148] This resonates closely with Chamoiseau's—or, rather, the urban planner's—description of the "mangrove urbain" of Texaco (see Ch. II).
[149] Chamoiseau is fond of italics—they are all his own unless otherwise stated.
[150] "[L]es vrais artistes ne méprisent rien; ils s'obligent à comprendre au lieu de juger" (*Discours de Suède*, 1957).

becomes a pariah upon expulsion by his brother, Colibri, who, as the totalitarian dictator of a sort of police state, serves as the primary adversary in the novel (apart from the slow violence of climate change).[151] In exile, Foufou retains his joie de vivre, paradoxically remaining freer than his fellow *colibris*: "tandis que lui vivait sans limite apparente, les oiseaux-moustiques (qui le gardaient à vue) restaient emprisonnés dans leur propre gardiennage" (71). The novel plays constantly with this binary of liberty and enslavement, showing how the Malfini breaks free from his Alaya to experience an intoxicating new sense of freedom.

Through observation, the Malfini absorbs Foufou's liberating mentality, eventually entering "en osmose" with him (92). "J'ouvrais," he continues, "un autre monde en moi, et qui, plutôt que de m'en éloigner, m'installa autrement dans les réalités imperceptibles de mon entour" (93). Like Manuel in *Gouverneurs*, Foufou serves first as a teacher, sharing his heightened ecological awareness, even if in a much less deliberate manner than Manuel. In an echo of Glissant's concept of "chaos-monde," Malfini becomes increasingly conscious of the molecular level and the abundant chaos expressed in nature: "Ces existences constituaient un chaos d'archipels en mouvement qu'il me fallut tenter de structurer selon des ressemblances, le choix de quelques invariances dans un chaos de variations sans fin" (94).[152] His newfound perception of the world permits him to even imagine a life "sans Alaya" (97). Foufou flourishes à la flâneur, coming and going with seemingly tireless verve. The description of the eponymous savior figure of Roger Mais' *Brother Man* suits Foufou well in this regard: "He was not a miracle-healer, nothing like that… He was a channel

[151] Chamoiseau makes of Colibri a quasi-fascist who deploys underlings to enforce strict border control (83; 85).
[152] Glissant, including his concepts of "tout-monde" and "chaos-monde," has greatly influenced Chamoiseau's fiction and non-fiction. (See Ch. II for the fullest engagement with Glissant's theoretical corpus.)

through which life flowed, nothing more" (131). Malfini himself starts to experience the world as Foufou does, engendering a liberating revolution of his being-in-the-world, of his eco-epistemology: "J'étais plus libre que je ne l'avais jamais été" (121).

Halfway through the story, however, an ominous force threatens to circumscribe this freedom and security, as well as that of all living matter in the area: "Une accélération causée par on ne sait quoi nous révélait l'invisible désastre. Malgré mon infinie puissance, cette mort massive et mystérieuse me fit trembler" (151). Malfini labels this threat "la mort lente," a concept that closely parallels Rob Nixon's theorization of "slow violence." The authoritarian efforts of Colibri are no match for "la lente catastrophe"; it is Foufou, rather, who first senses the problem and takes it on as a personal quest (155). It is at this same point in the narrative that Malfini remarks a change in Foufou: "Je percevais les éclats de ses sens en éveil, et de bien d'autres vigilances sensibles qu'il s'était développées de lui-même et dont il était impossible de deviner l'usage" (157). Foufou's eco-epistemology is so potently developed that he alone understands the true nature of the issue and recognizes the solution lies in the circulation of pollen. As before, his awareness manages to transfer to the Malfini via a kind of osmosis brought about through the careful scrutiny of Foufou's every move.

In an impressive reversal, Malfini comes to see himself as *subordinate* to Foufou, whom he dubs "le petit maître" and eventually "le Maître," although he struggles existentially with this idea before coming around to it (183; 204). Indeed, to do so he must completely reconceptualize a universe that he had previously seen only through the prism of hierarchy: "Les différences entre moi, les insectes, les rats, et les Nocifs, n'installaient plus

de distances mais d'amples proximités" (251).[153] This is a dramatic 180-degree turn from the beginning of the novel, where the Malfini describes the world as not having any "célébration autre que l'aplomb de ses forces et de ses contreforces sur lequel l'Alaya jouait sa partition souveraine" (26). This makes the transformation of Malfini, a dominant force at the top of the food chain, even more remarkable as he transcends an instinctual ideological position where power runs the day and base drives govern supreme. The contrast between Foufou and Colibri also accentuates this divide, as the former freely models a de-hierarchized praxis while the latter becomes a dictator with a deeply territorial, hierarchical mindset. Following Glissant's *Poétique de la Relation*, Foufou would embody "identité-relation" while Colibri would represent "identité-racine," a conception of identity that "conduit imparablement…aux refuges généralisants de l'universel comme valeur**"** (156).

In this way, the novel encourages a reading wherein horizontality emerges as the highest virtue, even if, ultimately, there still exists considerable distance between Foufou and Malfini. The latter even accepts the Nocifs—who had previously received his constant disdain[154]—on the same horizontal plane, in which a higher ecological law rules supreme. The "Récitation sur le vivant" that closes the book—comprising a series of aphoristic refrains—proposes that "Rien n'est universel, tout est diversel dans l'infinie variété du vivant et dans l'idéale perspective de son horizontale plénitude" (260). As in *Gouverneurs*, this knowledge does not derive wholly from within but emerges from an encounter with the

[153] There are numerous instances of this, e.g.: "Je crus que…la vie tenait à une infinie réorganisation de ce qui lui était donné" (197).
[154] "Je nourrissais pour les Nocifs un mépris impossible à dissoudre"; "En vérité, ils étaient la pire des monstruosités inutiles du vivant !" (99; 100).

savior figure, whose teachings and/or actions activate the latent horizontality within.[155] As the Malfini recognizes, "*Il nous fallait trouver en nous et hors de nous comment vivre au vivant*" (255). With the help of Foufou, he shirks off his Alaya, and with it, his insatiable carnism and hierarchical mindset. Now, he tells us, "Je sais…contempler les mystères, et me laisser porter par le sens du sacré" (256).

Following the classic savior narrative, Foufou dies after establishing his message of the sacred, and does so in even greater symbolic fashion than Manuel. Foufou's death is a true apotheosis, described in glittering language that mirrors the spectacular nature of the event, a dramatic use of chiaroscuro highlighting the clashing of opposite forces:

> Je crus voir sa silhouette atteindre un noir intense qui s'étendit en flash sur Rabuchon, qui envahit mon propre esprit, et poursuivit son extension je ne sais où. Ce flux de pénombre naturelle reflua en une contraction obscure, lumineuse, jusqu'à ne rien constituer qui me fût concevable ; puis elle se dilata d'un coup, dans la violence d'une explosion, le silence d'un abîme. Un océan de lumière ! Mon Alaya tressaillit du fond de son exil. Un vocable envahit mon esprit, mi-cri, mi-soupir, mi-musique, mi-sensation, mi-inconscience… Dès lors, je me le répétais sans jamais le comprendre : *Amala ! Amala ! Amala*… (246)

That Foufou's death occurs within and produces intense luminosity further connects him to the popular (though *not* scriptural) image of an ascension into the heavens associated with Christ. This event also marks the complete metamorphosis of Malfini as he ascends to a new, but ultimately unknowable, ninth consciousness, or "Amala," which overpowers his Alaya.

[155] While this lies beyond the scope of this chapter, it would be productive to consider the extent to which Chamoiseau *himself* fulfills the savior role as a mediator of knowledge. This idea similarly finds expression in his novel *Texaco*, in which the narrative represents the *urbaniste* as a twentieth-century Christ.

Further emphasizing the savior narrative, and as Fonds-Rouge does in the wake of Manuel's death, the community immediately strives to continue Foufou's legacy, taking up his fervor for pollinating while looking to Malfini as "le nouveau Guide" (249). Malfini rejects this role, however, instead deferring to Foufou even after death. The savior thus sows the seeds for an eco-epistemology that sweeps the community and engenders collective action. Malfini comes to see life as a continuous force, "*l'événement continuel, infini, impensable, du vivant,*" just as for Manuel the essential outcome was for the next day's sun to shine upon the dew and signal the "recommencement" of life (251).[156]

The novel, in another parallel with *Gouverneurs*, fuses the savior trope with a meditation on the (dis)equilibria of nature. Malfini states explicitly that nature must occasionally submit to extraordinary forces for its continued renewal:

> "Si la ténébreuse évolution exige des cheminements tortueux, des morts et destructions, elle avait sans doute aussi besoin de surgissements miraculeux. De ces créatures qui bouleversent à jamais. Qui ouvrent de nouveaux horizons sans pour autant les désigner. En était-ce?" (255).

Unlike Manuel, who quite overtly spells out the proper way through the drought in Fonds-Rouge, Foufou leads entirely by example. He thus fulfills the role of the savior, a "miraculous emergence" whose force restores order within nature while simultaneously pointing to a more sophisticated eco-epistemology, one freed from the constraining vertical mindset of hierarchy. Foufou engages in an epic clash of good versus evil, "comme si son seul adversaire était cette mort lente qui ruinait Rabuchon" and, by defeating it, embodies the

[156] This idea of a purificatory dawn and its dew also occurs in Aimé Césaire's *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), when the titular character asks to be "rid…of all these clothes, rid me of them as, when dawn comes, one is rid of the night and its dreams" (qtd. in Bongie 48).

savior figure, even if he does not himself claim this role (187).[157] Rather, he simply *is*, his actions guided by a profound accordance with higher ecological principles, and the community (*oikos*) reshapes itself around him.

Eco-apocalypse beyond the savior narrative

The savior narrative is clearly a bona fide metanarrative frequently deployed across environmental discourse, whether fictional or otherwise. Speculative fiction author Neal Stephenson's latest novel, *Termination Shock* (2021), is yet another prominent example of the "climate crisis requires a savior figure" narrative. When an interviewer asked Stephenson, "Who'll lead the efforts to address climate change?" he replied, "In my book, it's a billionaire, because it makes for a good story," while admitting that he doesn't "know how realistic that is."[158] In a few words, therein lies the crux of the problem. We find ourselves tirelessly compelled by savior figures (as the success of the latest *Dune* adaptation attests),[159] yet many of us would admit that the chances we are saved by a solitary messiah figure are miniscule.

Nonetheless, it behooves us to differentiate these stories, even if they all generally fall under the savior metanarrative, for some mindlessly perpetuate a colonial-capitalist model, while others challenge us to rethink our existing social and economic structures.

[157] There are numerous instances where the text paints Foufou as a solitary savior who pays no heed to others and seeks no help or validation: "Il n'avait pas besoin de disciple. Il n'avait pas besoin d'élève. Il n'avait pas besoin d'honneur. Il faisait juste ce qu'il avait à faire de sa vie, et du mieux qu'il le pouvait"; "Il menait une guerre dans laquelle nous ne pouvons rien, et à laquelle nous ne comprenions rien…"; "[I]l…ne se considérait point comme guide providentiel" (205; 206; 243).
[158] See Alan Boyle's article "Neal Stephenson talks about his climate thriller..." *GeekWire*, 7 November 2021.
[159] A point made by Tobias Buckell, whose science fiction I read in Chapter Five, in our interview ("The Complexity of Community: Ecology, Science Fiction, and the Future of Literature—A Conversation with Tobias Buckell," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 31.1 (2022): 168-187).

Gouverneurs de la rosée and *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*, for instance, remind us that we would be utterly remiss to ignore the role of imagination, of community, and of ethics in our confrontation of the climate crisis. As Félix Guattari argues, this problem requires global answers building upon a radically reconfigured eco-epistemology, or, in his terms, *ecosophy*, defined as "une articulation éthico-politique…entre les trois registres écologiques, celui de l'environnement, celui des rapports sociaux et celui de la subjectivité humaine" (12-13). To this end, Guattari proposes a molecular approach to these ethical relationships that mirrors the perspective that the Malfini gains by observing Foufou's unwavering scrutiny of everything around him. This revolution—simultaneously political, social, and cultural—Guattari insists, "ne devra donc pas concerner uniquement les rapports de forces invisibles à grande échelle mais également des domaines moléculaires de sensibilité, d'intelligence et de désir" (14). Returning to Le Guin's dichotomy, this molecular perspective functions as a kind of "life drive." Taking a more biological and ecological view rather than an economical one allows us to reassess more adequately our relationship with other-than-human nature as one in which the human is wholly imbricated.

Imagining the end of the world due to eco-apocalypse is inherently ambivalent. While these narratives may be productive, insofar as they inspire us to rapidly reform our present modalities to realize an alternative (i.e. livable) future, hampering them is a continual commodification of nature in which it is viewed as separate from both ourselves and capitalism. It could also be argued that savior narratives promote passivity, particularly with the most common iterations that require little to no collective effort but depend instead on the machinations of one billionaire or one superhero or one technoscientific fix. Jeffrey Cohen argues that apocalypse is generally "a failure of the imagination, a giving up on the future

instead of a commitment to the difficult work of composing a better present" (285). Jason Moore is similarly dismissive of "an especially promiscuous use of this grand signifier, 'crisis,'" arguing that the word "has become more slogan than explanatory concept," which one could argue is the case for many terms in danger of greenwashing and/or desensitization, e.g. "sustainability" (2011: 10).[160]

One undeniable aspect of our obsession with eco-apocalypse and its aestheticization is that fiction continues to play a prominent role in shaping individual and collective attitudes toward climate change. For example, the primary theme of Chapter Five is on science-fiction cities and how they can help us reimagine the urban for greater adaptation, resilience, and equity when it comes to a world with more frequent and more fatal weather events. One such city is actively in the works thanks to former Walmart executive Marc Lore. Dubbed "Telosa," from the Greek *telos* ("end," "goal"), the project's website states that Telosa is "a city he [Lore] is building from scratch to test a new model for society, called Equitism."[161] Leonardo DiCaprio, known for his environmental leanings, dreamed up a would-be island eco-resort in Belize. This venture, which simultaneously failed while also paving the way for further inequitable development in the Caribbean,[162] combines the long-standing white savior trope with capitalist excess and an inattention to local economies. Whether inspired by fiction or not, these perhaps well-intentioned pipe dreams affirm a seemingly unshakeable belief in the deployment of capital and technology to fix any given problem, including those of urban sustainability or climate change more generally. The Telosa website correctly states that "the

[160] See Chapter Five for more on "sustainability" and the language of environmentalism in regards to urban development and renewal.
[161] See Chapter One for an overview of Telosa in the context of ecomodernist thought.
[162] See Colin Freeman's article "From 'wellness' to shotguns: how Leonardo DiCaprio's Belize eco-dream turned sour," *The Telegraph*, 5 November 2021.

current economic system…has led to increasing inequality," while lobbying for "Equitism" as a form of "inclusive growth." This aligns with the idea that many eco-crisis narratives enable "total personal transcendence" and "hold…the promise of a great new societal-historical transformation" (Buell 259).

Indeed, in many contemporary narratives, whether propounded in Hollywood or by groups such as the ecomodernists, impending climate doom presents a golden opportunity to save the planet while continuing to grow the capitalist economy (see, for example, the 2021 climate-change satire *Don't Look Up*). While the breadth of the "inclusive green growth" versus "degrowth" debate lies well beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth pointing out that runaway capitalism lends itself to crisis as it depends on an unsustainable praxis of exhausting both nature and labor power.[163] As political scientist James Mittelman contends, "Talking about capitalism without crisis is an oxymoron."[164] Besides, no matter how benevolent the intentions, as with Marc Lore or DiCaprio, Camus reminds us in *La Peste* (1947) that "Le mal qui est dans le monde vient presque toujours de l'ignorance, et la bonne volonté peut faire autant de dégâts que la méchanceté, si elle n'est pas éclairée." In fact, a quite reasonable position is to view all of these apocalyptic narratives as evidence that runaway capitalism depends upon the positivist narratives of technoscientific progress. As Adrian Parr argues, "The failure of liberal democracies to confront the reality of their own historical excesses in concrete terms is basically what apocalyptic images of debris-covered landscapes, drowned and charred bodies, or parched and thirsty fields present" (xvii-xviii). In

[163] For more on this debate, see Chapter Two of Adrian Parr's *Birth of a New Earth* (2017) and Giorgos Kallis' *Degrowth* (2018).
[164] See Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) for a thorough look at the intertwined nature of capital and crisis.

John Barnes' *The Mother of Storms* (1994), for example, the solution to mega-hurricanes resides in "a set of technofixes by a supercomputer-human hybrid…and ends with a utopic vision of human progress, fundamentally no different from the myths of human progress that initiated the very disaster that the novel portrays" (Murphy 426).

In his book *Culture, Catastrophe, and Rhetoric*, Robert Hariman argues that, on the other hand, the rage for (post-)apocalyptic narratives implies a drastic rethinking of our epoch's fundamental myth of progress. As such, "catastrophe…expose[s] the fragility and teleological vacuity of modern economic, technological, and political systems" (12). This affirms Hannah Arendt's epigraph to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, that "Le progrès et la catastrophe sont l'avers et le revers d'une même médaille." Indeed, it could be argued that runaway capitalism teeters precariously on an apocalyptic edge: on the one side, there is the continued devastation of the environment and the perpetuation of environmental injustice and other inequities; on the other side, however, there lies the possibility for a new way of living more ecologically—buttressed by a renewed eco-epistemology—that benefits the planet, its creatures, and a significantly larger number of its human inhabitants.

What do we have to lose? At worst, everything. Whether we like it or not, eschatological thinking will continue to loom large in the collective consciousness (and unconscious, no doubt). Of great significance is *how* this thinking frames eco-apocalypse and whether it is more likely to preclude or provoke individual and collective action. For Frederick Buell, contemporary literature tends to depict "deepening environmental crisis as a context in which people dwell and with which they are intimate, not as an apocalypse still ahead" (321-22). For Paul Virilio, who meditates on the value of art vis-à-vis catastrophe, apocalypse is simultaneously "always already present" and yet

> not now, and can never be now, without the revelatory function of representation to tip the balance away from the unthinking catastrophe of modernity that is endlessly taking place and towards the critical ecological-phenomenological demand for a new relationship between humanity, the world, and technology. (Featherstone)[165]

It is apparent that we must fight passivity and cynicism to create and consume apocalyptic fictions that enable us to see eco-apocalypse not only as an inevitable cliché and morbidly aesthetic pleasure, but as a challenge that requires a radical reconfiguration of how we think about capitalism, culture, and nature.

Conclusion

In her compelling book *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction*, E. Ann Kaplan develops the idea of "pre-trauma" fictions. The environmental discourse of our contemporary moment—including science as well as (pop) cultural expressions—emphasizes the uncertainty of the future and the real possibilities for eco-apocalyptic events. Following Kaplan, this creates a "pre-traumatized population," one for whom "pre-trauma" fictions allow us to witness what we must endeavor to stop from occurring in the first place (something reflected in the prevalence of the future anterior tense in modern and contemporary disaster fiction). In this way, eco-dystopian fictions might help spur us to action rather than paralyze us into cynical passivity.

Eva Horn has noted how the "future as catastrophe" creates a paradoxical orientation, one that yokes together "continuity and discontinuity, stability and disruption," deepening the already epistemologically complex nature of "anticipating and preventing the coming

[165] Online source without pagination.

catastrophe" (230). As this dissertation argues throughout, the imagination is fundamental to our confrontation of the climate crisis. Yet all too often this imagination yields willingly to a focalization on one hero, one technology, one strategy, etc. As Che Guevara is purported to have said, "I am not a liberator. Liberators do not exist. The people liberate themselves."[166] Ultimately, it would seem wise for us to interrogate our Sisyphean messianism and strive to fulfill Amitav Ghosh's decree that "What we need…is to find a way out of the individualizing imaginary in which we are trapped" (135).

In this way, the novels by Roumain and Chamoiseau, despite adopting savior figures, can help point us toward more ethical and equitable models in our approach to the climate crisis. Significantly, they suggest that viewing human and other-than-human nature as inextricably interconnected can engender a more enlightened ethos when it comes to eco-apocalypse. Jussi Parikka speaks to our need for an "ethics that produces more than just an apocalyptic sentiment…an ethics that does not center on the human—or its non-existence—as the only axis that is of significance… A proper ethics moves on multiple ecological scales" (qtd. in Prádanos 229). Surely, we do not need to—and should not—obey the self-destructive logic of an economic model that argues for growth at all (human and environmental) costs. The following chapter will argue that, by reframing our eco-epistemology in less anthropocentric terms that openly call for non-Western, indigenous, creole, and non-human animal perspectives, we can move toward a more ethical—and truly ecological—way of life. For our sake, we have to believe that individuals, like many drops of water—like the symbolic *rosée*—can together create a significant difference in the struggle against climate change, rather than rely on miraculous intervention. Indeed, just as the

[166] He is believed to have said this in Mexico in 1958. Quoted in *Kaplan AP World History 2005*, p. 240 (2004).

Malfini transitions away from the hierarchical mindset of an apex predator, one desperately hopes that humanity can overcome its egotism of being “at the top of the food chain” to a more modest recognition of the interconnectedness of all life.

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Chapter IV

Magic, Myth, and Mystery:
The Eco-Marvelous of Wilson Harris, Jacques Stephen Alexis, and Yanick Lahens

A commitment to scientific truth led Charles Darwin to defy the heterodox of his scientific forefathers, resulting in a stunning effort to disperse the clouds of mystery surrounding the origin of species.[167] Yet his success in doing so, and its subsequent impact, would not likely have come to pass without his exposure to the everyday marvelous[168] on the HMS Beagle. During his travels around the globe, Darwin spent considerable time in Latin America, where he wrote the following to his father: "the Peak of Teneriffe was seen amongst the clouds like another world…it would be as profitable to explain to a blind man colours, as to a person who has not been out of Europe, the total dissimilarity of a tropical view" (54). Journeying beyond Albion, beyond the quotidian life of a young, educated Englishman, led to the upending of Darwin's eco-epistemology, permitting him to recognize, as early as 1837, the significance of evolution as an opportunity to uncover "a *horizontal* history of earth within recent times" (77).[169]

Darwin's glimpse of what might be termed the "tropical sublime" exemplifies how the landscape of the Caribbean and Latin America grants an experience of the sublime through the everyday marvelous or, as Alejandro Carpentier termed it, *lo real maravilloso*.[170] In the midst of climate crisis, the tropical sublime may provide a unique opportunity to

[167] Darwin's contemporary Thomas Henry Huxley defined this question, i.e. the place of the human in relation to all other nature, as "[t]he question of questions for mankind—the problem which underlies all others, and is more deeply interesting than any other…" (313).
[168] I am adopting this term from the French Surrealist Louis Aragon's "merveilleux quotidien" (see *Le Paysan de Paris* [1926]).
[169] This comes from Darwin's "First Notebook [on Transmutation]," written between July 1837 and February 1838.
[170] Carpentier, "Lo real maravilloso."

operate in the "horizontal" mode envisioned by Darwin, a perspective that decenters the human from a scientific and historical standpoint to propose a more rigorous understanding of the human and other-than-human relation.

As seen in previous chapters, Caribbean authors frequently mobilize the ecological as a means of pointing the way to a better possible future for this relation. This chapter will continue in that vein, with texts that insist on recognizing—rather than ignoring or dismissing—our imbrication with nature, our rhizomatic embeddedness. An environmental paper on the plight of Caribbean rainforests similarly argues that "we cannot focus only on humans, nor on the biota alone. The future of tropical forests and our future are inexorably fused together, and to a large degree this future depends on the will of people" (Lugo 14). The three authors that I will examine in this chapter—the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris, and Haitian writers Jacques Stephen Alexis and Yanick Lahens—all consider the fraught relationships between humans and the environment, particularly the latter's influence on the former. Humanity, however, must remain open to the possibility of learning from nature's mystery, or risk perpetually reenacting the cycle of "regenerative violence"[171] embodied by colonialism.

As such, these novelists contribute to a less anthropocentric ethos by focalizing on the other-than-human through the prism of marvelous realism. This formal move better positions their fictional explorations by providing a different eco-epistemological framework than the dominant capitalist-colonialist-globalist model produced and perpetuated most notably in the

[171] In his landmark work *Regeneration through Violence* (2000), Richard Slotkin examines the ideologies underpinning American expansionism (e.g. Manifest Destiny) and how they depended upon a belief in regenerative violence. Slotkin's work extrapolates well to other colonial contexts, including that of the Caribbean.

Global North. Deploying marvelous (or magical) realism more readily abets the animist tendencies of indigenous Amerindian or Vodou[172] beliefs, which feature prominently in the three texts under study: Harris' *The Palace of the Peacock* (1960), Alexis' *Romancero aux étoiles* (1960), and Lahens' *Bain de lune* (2009). While confronting sociohistorical traumas, their works succeed, I will argue, in grounding humanity in terms that frame our ontology as distinctly *part of*—rather than *separate from*—nature.

My theoretical approach in this chapter draws from an eclectic variety of Caribbean and non-Caribbean sources. Although ostensibly unrelated, I join together the following literary, philosophical, and environmentalist ideologies and genres due to their shared insistence on a less anthropocentric viewpoint: deep ecology,[173] object-oriented ontology (OOO), marvelous realism, and Amerindian folklore and Vodou. These disparate but suggestively interrelated theories, genres, and worldviews provide a compelling framework for approaching the Caribbean authors under study, all of whom propound a renewed understanding of nature's vital role vis-à-vis humanity. Moreover, these critical approaches all possess a shared fondness for *depth*—digging beyond the realist, positivist surface—and unorthodox thinking, striving to deconstruct the *idées reçues* of Western culture and politics to challenge the anthropocentric logic upon which they depend. In this way, they help us

[172] Vodou (or Voodoo or Vodun) "promotes a system of theological concepts that define all energy forces as sacred, but [is] also 'a way of life, a philosophy, and a code of ethics that regulate social behavior' (Davis 73) so that each member can find his/her 'own rhythm and balance' through engagement' (Michel 12, 11)" (Toliver 177).

[173] Deep ecology has rightly been subject to many criticisms, many of which I share myself—see, for example, Ramachandra Guha's 1989 essay and Val Plumwood's 1991 essay (both referenced more fully in my fourteenth endnote). My deployment of some deep ecological tenets here is no way meant to support the movement as a whole, but rather to show some striking consonances with literary and spiritual ways of relating to nature in the Caribbean.

begin the arduous task of undercutting the hubris that has fueled humanity's willful environmental destruction (which, they observe, is always already a form of self-destruction).

Object-oriented ontology: rethinking Enlightenment anthropocentrism

With crystalline hindsight, we might wonder whether the Enlightenment did not get ahead of itself. Indeed, one could argue that the philosophical discourse of this epoch did much to valorize our seemingly innate obsession with control and understanding, helping to cement our status as *homo significans* (Roland Barthes's formulation).[174] In his insightful reading of Dipesh Chakrabarty's 2009 essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses," Amitav Ghosh contends that

> [s]ince the Enlightenment…philosophers of freedom were 'mainly, and understandably, concerned with how humans would escape the injustice, oppression, inequality, or even uniformity foisted on them by humans or human-made systems' (Chakrabarty). Nonhuman forces and systems had no place in this calculus of liberty: indeed being independent of Nature was considered one of the defining characteristics of freedom itself. (119).

This attitude meant that colonizers perceived those they colonized as lacking true human agency, and thus history, further perpetuating the idea that Western alienation from nature was a positive development. Against this current, however, object-oriented ontology (henceforth OOO) questions the metaphysical view that emerged during the Enlightenment, one which insisted on locating meaning as only possible within the realm of human perception. Aiming to deconstruct this anthropocentric perspective, OOO operates from the

[174] "L'activité structuraliste" (1959).

view that living and nonliving objects exist *beyond* human perception alone and thus possess meaning (and even agency) unto themselves. By unfastening the inviolable bonds that Enlightenment thinkers (such as Kant)[175] constructed between the object and its perception by human faculties, OOO consequently disrupts the subject/object split that this approach implies. Ultimately, a view that perceives objects as unknowable outside of the human framework necessarily fails to fully grasp the alterity of the object, and thus validates human cognition at the expense of the object-as-(unknowable-)other. It is difficult to deny that this crucial flaw did not similarly support the logic fueling centuries of the intertwined, environmentally devastating forces of industrialization and imperialism (and, with this latter, colonization and accelerated globalization). It suffices to consider conquest capitalism and its legacies of unrelenting deforestation, damming of rivers, smoke-billowing factories, and endless fields of livestock.

In its desire to relieve the world of these sufferings, the "deep ecology"[176] movement, created and spiritually led for decades by the Norwegian philosopher and environmentalist Arne Næss, shares many of OOO's philosophical underpinnings. In his reading of the deep ecological movement, Cary Wolfe argues that "the ultimate good is not harmony with nature, or even holism per se, but rather something much more specific: biodiversity" (24).

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[175] See, for example, Kant's insistence that other "thinking subject[s] [do not] submit to our investigations in such a way as to be conformable to our purposes," explicitly reinforcing the subject-object split in his epistemological framework (*The Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans. James Ellington; Library of Liberal Arts, 1970). The eco-feminist critic Val Plumwood argues that "the Kantian-rationalist framework" underpins "the anthropocentrism of the Western tradition" (6).

[176] Arne Næss invented the term in 1973 to contrast with the "shallow," short-term view of mainstream environmentalism, which he considers essentially an extension of European and North American anthropocentrism insofar as its primary goals of wilderness conservation and biodiversity preservation fall back inevitably on concerns for human welfare. Although outside the purview of this article, deep ecology has faced many compelling criticisms from both Global South and ecofeminist perspectives: see, among others, Ramachandra Guha's "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique" and Val Plumwood's "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism."

Paradigmatically anti-anthropocentric, deep ecology in Næss' formulation "rejects the human-in-environment metaphor in favor of a more realistic human-in-ecosystems and politics-in-ecosystems one" (1995: 452). This vision demands a reassessment of the human vis-à-vis other forms of life, as well as other objects. In *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, OOO proponents Graham Harman, Levi Bryant, and Nick Smicek maintain that there remains an inexorable finitude to relationships between objects, for every relation lies to some extent locked in an obscure realm of incomprehension. Timothy Morton terms this perceptual gap "the Rift," which Édouard Glissant echoes with his concept of *opacité*.[177] As Levi Bryant contends, the legacy of Kantian correlationism perpetuates the fallacy that objects, including us, can ever fully bridge these Rifts. Instead, it follows the Copernican Revolution in situating humankind at the center of the universe, privileging our own relations at the expense of how everything else relates to everything else (recalling Barry Commoner's classic ecological maxim: "everything is connected to everything else").[178] The failure to perceive the interconnectedness of all life, including our own ineluctable rhizomatic entanglements, logically leads to unbridled ecological devastation.

Somewhat surprisingly, the major founding theorists of OOO—Steven Shaviro, Ian Bogost, Graham Harman, and Levi Bryant—have spent relatively little time on the movement's ecological applications: namely, its powerful ability to undercut the anthropocentrism that largely created our current climate crisis (and continues to hinder our ability to successfully confront it). Timothy Morton's recent work on ecology, however,

[177] Glissant uses *opacité* as a means of coming to terms with alterity; he defines it in *Le Discours antillais* as "la densité irréductible de l'autre" (245). For a more prolonged examination of the term, as well as its relevance for Caribbean fiction, see Chapter Two.
[178] See Bryant, "Onticology: A Manifesto for Object-Oriented Ontology, Part I." Web.

similarly develops its epistemological framework against post-Kantian anthropocentrism.[179] In *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, where Morton most blatantly showcases an adoption of OOO, he reveals that the book's title plays on the genre of "magical realism." In his definition of the genre, Morton focuses on causality, arguing,

> in magic realist narratives, causality departs from purely mechanical functioning, in part to resist the seeming inevitability of imperialist "reality," *in part to give voice to unspeakable things*, or things that are almost impossible to speak according to imperialist ideology [emphasis mine]… Indeed, causality is a secretive affair, yet out in the open—an open secret. Causality is mysterious, in the original sense of the Greek *mysteria*, which means things that are unspeakable or secret. *Mysteria* is a neuter plural noun derived from *muein*, to close or shut. Mystery thus suggests a rich and ambiguous range of terms: secret, enclosed, withdrawn, unspeakable.[180]

In acknowledging so poignantly the Rift presented by our encounters with causal reality, Morton captures here the shared essence of both the OOO and deep ecology movements as well as magical (or marvelous) realism. Common to all three is a recognition of the ultimate mysteriousness of other-than-human nature contained in the etymological sense of "mystery," i.e. closed off from us: "secret, enclosed, withdrawn, unspeakable." (Here Morton also echoes Alan Watts' pronouncement that "Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be experienced.")[181]

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[179] In fact, Morton's ecological work garnered the attention of the OOO crowd, namely Graham Harman, who Morton claims "compelled [him] to become an object-oriented ontologist" ("Acknowledgements," *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, 9).
[180] Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, p. 17.
[181] From his Zen journal, *Cloud-hidden, Whereabouts Unknown* (1973).

In this sense, Morton follows the thinking of many posthumanist theorists.[182] Bruno Latour, for one, argues that the human species cannot be defined in distinct ontological zones but only as "hybrids of nature and culture" (qtd. in Oppermann 276). Cary Wolfe levies the same argument in critiquing what he terms "humanist posthumanism," which accords special attention and even legal rights to animals while insisting on maintaining humans in a separate sphere and thus serving as the ultimate reference point. As Jami Weinstein and Claire Colebrook add, this "does little to advance the human beyond itself" (xv). Instead, posthumanists such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argue for an acknowledgement of our relations with objects and other-than-human life in a way that "found[s] a politically and ecologically engaged ethics in which the human is not the world's sole meaning-maker, and never has been" (7). The overriding view propelling posthumanism forward is what David Abram describes as a "sense of the human as perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments" (qtd. in Oppermann 274). This porousness of the barriers between human and other-than-human matter, as well as a sense of the latter's primordial agency, infuses the novels that I examine in this chapter, as these authors all critique imperialist legacies that foreground white, Western man as the end-all, be-all.

Caught in the waves unleashed by the tragic and traumatic catastrophe of anthropogenic environmental degradation, the novelists under study join with the aforementioned theoretical perspectives in rejecting anthropocentrism.[183] Instead, they prefer to nourish an unequivocally multilateral conception of other-than-human agency. Rejecting

[182] A brief note on "posthumanism"—despite its name, which lends itself to an eclectic variety of approaches, Katherine Hayles sees the "posthuman" *not* as the signal that humanity is over, but rather "the end of a certain conception of the human" (qtd. in Oppermann 276). See Oppermann's chapter "From Material to Posthuman Ecocriticism: Hybridity, Stories, Natures" for an excellent overview of posthumanism's ecological aspects.
[183] It is somewhat more complicated for deep ecology, which I examine at greater length in the Introduction (Ch. I).

centuries of imperialist thought may in fact be a saving grace as humanity confronts the possibility of environmental destruction at an entirely untenable level. Anthropocentrism not only results in dwindling solidarity with other-than-human matter, as Morton argues, but engenders boundaries between humans as well. The consequent alienation requires radical acts of kindness and a recognition that solidarity means little if it excludes nonhumans. Such rejection of boundaries forms an irrevocable part of deep ecology—as Warwick Fox claims, "To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness" (1984; 196).[184]

For deep ecologists like Fox and Næss, the principal way out of our debilitating, boundary-building anthropocentrism is the concept and praxis of identification. Næss insists that identification "does not lead away from the singular and finite" but rather functions as a "process" that "leads deeper into Nature as a whole, [and] also deeper into unique features of particular beings" (1977: 51). By identifying to the greatest extent possible with other-than-human nature, the logic follows, there emerges an understanding that harming nature means simultaneously harming ourselves.[185] As social justice advocate Carl Anthony suggests, "the knowledge of the earth, and of our place in its long evolution, can give us a sense of identity and belonging that can act as a corrective to the hubris and pride that have been weapons of our oppressors" (203). Writing on environmental racism, Anthony uncovers the profound interconnectedness between humanity and nature, the inevitable damages wrought by our

[184] This again recalls Glissant's *opacité*, which, in Jason Herbeck's analysis, works to critique the "inherently flawed concepts of finite boundaries/origins and universal culture" (2017a: 66). For an overview of deep ecology, including a critique of this insistence on boundarylessness, see my Introduction (Ch. I).
[185] What remains unclear, and perhaps impossible to resolve, however, is to what extent we can ever overcome Morton's "Rift" and truly identify with other-than-human nature. (This is implicit in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*, which I analyze in Ch. IV).

abuse of the latter, and how capitalism and corrupt policy lead to disproportionate damage in lower-income communities that are often also communities of color.[186]

In turn, this article's literary analysis implicitly brings certain elements of OOO and deep ecology to bear on the injustices carried out through imperialist legacies in the Caribbean. As Cilano and DeLoughrey note, the monoculture plantocracy in the Caribbean "violently altered the natural and social environment," thus making it "an especially important space for theorizing the vexed relationship between nature and culture" (78). The authors under study, following Morton's definition, lean on magical (or marvelous) realism to effect a disruption of anthropocentric logic by destabilizing imperialist causality. Harris, Alexis, and Lahens each address the role of other-than-human nature through a marvelous realist framework that incorporates indigenous or Vodou belief systems and thus leans on an alternative eco-epistemology to the hegemonic one underpinning colonialism. Harris' powerful evocations of the Guyanese rainforest emphasize the porosity of the barriers between human and other-than-human nature; Alexis promotes a Pan-American humanism in his innovative retellings, which weave Haitian folklore and history together to valorize multiculturality and renewed historiographies; and Lahens both personifies other-than-human nature and casts her characters' Vodou beliefs in a way that drives a sense of humanity's position *among*—rather than at the center of—all other life. This chapter thus argues that Caribbean literature—through both ecologically focused content and full or partial adoption of marvelous realism—frequently challenges the anthropocentric logic sustaining colonialist and neoliberal expansion (or "development"), which tragically continues its devastation on both a local and planetary scale.

[186] See the Conclusion (Ch. VI) for an examination of environmental injustice in the context of COVID-19.

Wilson Harris and the porosity of being

Wilson Harris worked as a surveyor in the lush Guyanese rainforest for much of the 1940s and 1950s, playing a prominent role in the appraisal of his country's topography.[187] It was there, enmeshed in the natural world, that he became deeply attuned to the profundity of other-than-human nature: "I sensed, as a surveyor, that the landscape possessed resonance. The landscape possessed a life, because the landscape for me is like an open book, and the alphabet with which one worked was all around me" (qtd. in Noxolo 373). Harris' intimate knowledge of the environment thus informs his powerful conviction that this nature-as-text is at once rich with its own resonating voices yet impenetrable, ineffable—an open book that remains mysterious, though we might occasionally catch glimpses of its enigmatic truth.

The desire to overcome the rift between human and other-than-human nature requires a voluntary movement toward it, and for stillness, contemplation, and the willful dissolution of the ego. Would-be wanderers of the rainforest, in Harris' vision, will come to sense the primordial aspect of nature and feel its profoundly sacred/marvelous character. In this way, Harris recalls Baudelaire, who contends that "le merveilleux nous enveloppe et nous abreuve comme l'atmosphère ; mais nous ne le voyons pas" (261). In many ways, Harris' fiction is all about vision—more specifically, the recognition of what he terms "extra-human faculties" that call to us "through the elements, through all sorts of markings on the rocks, some of which perhaps were placed there by ancient cultures, some of which have been inscribed there by the sun and the rain and they resemble each other" (1997: 84). Nature and the other-

[187] Readers can find echoes of Harris the surveyor in many of his characters. For example, the narrator shares this of Stevenson, the main character of *Heartland*: "He began to indulge in the ritual calculations of the area he had come to know by heart" (21).

than-human world—or extra-human, as Harris terms it—speaks, if only we are to listen, if only we are to open ourselves up to what Morton describes as non-linear, non-mechanical causality.

Likely feeding into Harris' mystical reverence for other-than-human nature is his understanding, reflected in his fiction as well as his critical writings, of how colonialism indelibly marked both nature and culture, an irruption (and disruption) intensified by the present absence of the Amerindian peoples. Indeed, Harris stands resolutely against cultural homogeneity of any kind, which "tends to extrapolate frail genesis, the frail, alien beginnings of consciousness, into an unchanging sanction of identity. Thus pure cultures, so-called, tend to fear or scorn what is mixed or apparently impure" (1990: 175). In an echo of Mikhail Bakhtin's observation that states strive to uphold the dominant culture and suppress the "mixed or apparently impure," Harris cuts to the core of colonialism's dogmatism.[188] This same domineering approach, of course, led to the decimation of both indigenous peoples and their natural environment. Distinctly aware of Caribbean authors as products of their natural and cultural surroundings, Harris notes Western cultures' strong preference for "novels written by so-called Third World writers who work within these [realist] frames," and sees this proclivity as "an impoverishment not only of the European imagination, but certainly of the imaginations of these writers who come from other landscapes" (1997: 86).

With his rejection of the type of "Third World" literature of a V.S. Naipaul, for example, in which the periphery of the literary system strives to imitate the form generating from (and palatable to) the center, Harris simultaneously dismisses the *idées reçues* of

[188] As Bakhtin remarks in *Rabelais and His World*, "official culture is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge" (166).

Western literature writ large. In his most popular novel, *The Palace of the Peacock* (1960), the character who utterly epitomizes the colonial logic of the West is Donne—a character whose very presence and power serves as a *donné* of the world after the age of imperialism. Indeed, Donne represents sheer might and the top-down governance of a poisoned and poisonous hierarchy. Critically, in his quest from the coast to the interior—parodically reenacting "the great colonial drives of conquest"[189]—Donne embodies, for Gregory Shaw, "a certain predatory principle, the law of the jungle, a certain rapacity, primitive force and energy" (161). It is somewhat amusing that Shaw sees in Donne the "law of the jungle" when this same law is clearly related to the law of the colonizer: i.e. dominate, because you can. The key difference, however, is the supposed conscience that the colonizer *should* possess, but so woefully lacks. Like the colonial ghosts that haunt the region, Donne comes to completely conquer the area, "annihilating everyone and devouring himself in turn" (27). Here, Harris reminds us that to hurt others, including other-than-human nature, is ultimately a self-destructive act.

Donne despises the Arawaks, one of the region's indigenous peoples, because they bear titles to the lands that he covets (51). It is precisely his failure to relate to anything beyond himself on an emotional, compassionate level that separates Donne from the narrator. Despite himself, the narrator recognizes that Donne, his brother, "was myself standing outside of me while I stood inside of him" (26).[190] This porosity between human and other-than-human entities serves as the foundation upon which Harris—and deep ecology and

[189] I owe this point and turn of phrase to Islam, p. 73.
[190] Beatles fans may note a similarity in the '60s psychedelia of John Lennon's "I Am the Walrus" (1967), which starts with "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together." The Pink Floyd track "Echoes" (1971) reflects this porosity as well: "Strangers passing in the street / By chance, two separate glances meet / And I am you and what I see is me."

OOO—build their philosophies. As Bradley Peters remarks, in *Palace of the Peacock* "the individual and natural worlds suffuse each other. Wrinkles on Mariella's brow, when the crew leaves the mission to make for the waterfall, turn into breakers of foam on the river…and 'The ruffles in the water were her dress rolling and rising'" (139). This rhetorical move to dissolve the boundaries between the personal and the environmental is one that Harris makes repeatedly. In addition to emphasizing the embeddedness of humanity in the environment and vice versa, Harris' poetic language also persistently works to highlight nature's unflinching power (as Maryse Condé observed in Ch. II).

Indeed, other-than-human nature in Harris' fiction boasts significance agency and vitality, which offers a stark contrast with Donne's ageing. In some ways, Harris suggests that nature's pull is contrary to death's pull, a kind of "life drive" or "will to life." At other times, the text seems to pose nature as an utter menace: "[Donne] was an apparition that stooped before me and yet clothed me with the very frightful nature of the jungle exercising its spell over me" (49). Frequent personification drives the sense of nature's agency while undermining the sense that humanity belongs in a dominating role. The roaring river rapids that first drowned the now undead crew reinforce how nature, too, can dominate and, it would seem, even exact revenge. Harris does not portray other-than-human nature as content to merely plague humans passively with its power, but positions it as an active spectator, thus implying its own self-awareness: "the distant roar of the falls like a great electric crowd poised in space to witness an event" (*Heartland* 22). Nature even has skin and bones: "The torn skin of the water began to hiss, and the bones of the river acquired a new threatening disposition chained within the uneven moods of the sky" (ibid). Harris offers a range of appearances and emotions to other-than-human nature, reflecting the mercurial nature of

existence and how we, too, live between calm and chaos, like the vacillations between calm currents and angry rapids that Harris emphasizes.

In both *Heartland* and *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris characterizes other-than-human nature as eternal, contrasting with the ephemerality of human generations, as noted with Donne's ageing (*PP* 49). While Donne remains mired in the anthropocentric logic of colonialism, one character in *Palace*, tellingly named Vigilance, experiences powerful, unorthodox visions. The narrator describes him as "the one most alive and truly aware of everything. He saw differently and felt differently to the way the herd slept in the innocent stream of death" (85). This alternative vision permits him to recognize that nature remains beyond the human and yet human-like in the way Harris continually personifies it:

> The precipitous cliffs were of volcanic myth and substance he dreamed far older than the river's bed and stream. He seemed to sense and experience its congealment and its ancient flow as if he waded with webbed and impossible half-spidery feet in the ceaseless boiling current of creation. (82)

Vigilance's perception of the other-than-human gives him the kind of perspective that Donne and colonialism lack, for they see nature only for its instrumental value and the land therefore as something to conquer and claim. In *Heartland*, the ancient and enduring character of nature, like a village elder deserving of unequivocal respect, recurs frequently: "Beardless stone, the most enduring replica of eternal youth…lay side by side with unshaven granite, that ageless merchant"; "the ancient grey-beard of the savannahs" (78; 79).

A strand of optimism does run through the narrative via Donne's redemption. In *Palace of the Peacock*'s anagnorisis, Donne experiences a Vigilance-like vision that uproots him from his congealed world of hierarchy to the perception of a diffuse, diverse world that

speaks to nature, indeed, all creation, as a marvelous and enigmatic entity. He thus moves from a position of ignorance—in Morton's terms, distance/withdrawal—toward enlightenment/osmosis:

> A longing swept him like the wind of the muse to understand and transform his beginnings: to see the indestructible nucleus and redemption of creation, the remote and the abstract image and correspondence, in which all things and events gained their substance and universal meaning. However far from him, however distant and removed, he longed to see, *he longed to see* the atom, the very nail of moment in the universe. It would mean more to him than an idol of idols even if in seeing it there was frustration in that the distance between himself and *It* strengthened rather than weakened. The frustration would disappear he knew in his sense of a new functional inspiration and beginning and erection in living nature and scaffolding. (101)

We instinctively relate seeing to knowing (as *voir/savoir* intimates in French) and the narrator's double repetition—"However far from him, however distant and removed, he longed to see, *he longed to see*"—emphasizes the intensity of Donne's epiphany. As Paget Henry points out, Harris finds it particularly important to underscore "the ego's inability to grasp its living relationship with spirit and hence the real meaning of its completeness" (110). Thus, the further we can let go from our attachment to the ego, so malleable to the anthropocentric and superficial bent of Western culture, the greater success we will have in connecting to other-than-human nature while nonetheless recognizing the ultimately unbridgeable gap between the human and extra-human.

Indeed, Donne's egoism is precisely why he is so lost, both literally and figuratively, as he and his crew lose their way without the guidance of the Amerindian woman Mariella.

Donne's foothold on his conception of reality remains utterly bound to the ego, the narrator relating that

> [a] singular thought always secured him to the scaffolding. It was the unflinching clarity with which he looked into himself and saw that all his life he had loved no one but himself. He focused his blind eye with all penitent might on this pinpoint star and reflection as one looking into the void of oneself upon the far greater love and self-protection that have made the universe. (107)

The end of *Palace of the Peacock* thus affirms the need for an inclusive embrace of the entire cosmos, dramatizing the ultimate moment of recognition in the vision of the crew members who had died within the marvelous "Palace of the Peacock":

> In the rooms of the palace where we firmly stood—free from the chains of illusion we had made without—the sound that filled us was unlike the link of memory itself. It was the inseparable moment within ourselves of all fulfilment and understanding. Idle now to dwell upon and recall anything one had ever responded to with the sense and sensibility that were our outward manner and vanity and conceit. *One was what I am in the music—buoyed and supported above dreams by the undivided soul and anima in the universe from whom the word of dance and creation first came,* the command to the starred peacock who was instantly transported to know and to hug to himself his true invisible otherness and opposition, *his true alien spiritual love* without cruelty and confusion in the blindness and frustration of desire. (116; emphasis mine)

Critically, the text anchors its anagnorisis in the other-than-human and the nonverbal. As Syed Manzu Islam catalogs the possible source of this marvelous epiphany, "It could be the voice of the Siren, the cannibal bone flute of the Macusi, the chant of the shaman, the

overwhelming rhythm of the silence of nature—or all of them together with many more in their a-signifying continuity across cultures and the universe" (80). The splendor of the peacock and the sublime art forms of music and dance provide the portal for their entryway into enlightenment. The novel's motley, multicultural crew moves forward together—paradoxically, in death—as a melting-pot microcosm of a universe freed from anthropocentric thinking, always anathema for Harris' worldview.

Throughout his fiction, Harris offers an appraisal of nature that challenges our orthodox eco-epistemology. In the poem placed at the end of *Heartland*, we read that

> This living jungle is too filled with voices
> not to be aware of collectivity
> and too swift with unseen wings
> to capture certainty. ("Amazon," 103)

This view of nature mirrors the being-in-the-world demonstrated by the Amerindians in Harris' work. Through their intimate knowledge of the land and waters, through their rituals and beliefs, they connect to the natural world on a deeper level by appreciating the other-than-human. In *Heartland*, for example, the narrator notes that they "flitted like ghosts under a more compulsive baton, born of the spirit of place, than any a human conqueror could devise" (40). The Cortéses and Columbuses will forever remain symbols of the failure to understand the deeper eco-epistemology embodied by the Amerindians, who anchor themselves firmly within the non/extrahuman, engaging in

> [the] imitative dance of beast or fish or fowl, the inspired flight of the shaman seeking god, the incredible convolvular gyration of secret bodies with fins or feathers on their

> heads, ending and beginning again the proliferate dance and vegetative process of life. (40)

These traditions, as Toliver contends, dramatize "how the authorial imagination moves from an imperialist form of 'realist' narration to a cross-cultural form of 'mythic' narration" (179).

Indeed, the mythic and primordial provide substantial influence for *Palace,* and, in an interview, Harris describes

> a primordial reality, which you can't label and thus [needs] a profound cross-culturality in which you could perceive that the roots of the imagination lie in many places, in many cultures, in many landscapes, which we have neglected to approach as a living landscape, a living element. (1997: 93).[191]

By accepting that humanity is but one part of a larger, infinitely enigmatic whole of living and nonliving matter and, crucially, linking it to a revitalized, cross-cultural imagination, Harris offers a similar perspective to his contemporaries in the Caribbean, such as Glissant and Jacques Stephen Alexis. Much as Harris takes inspiration from Amerindian beliefs, Alexis will lean on Haitian folklore—Vodou beliefs as well as myth and history (and the spaces between)—to weave innovative retellings that similarly valorize multiculturality and an undoing of our dogmatic ties to the hegemonic, colonial logic of Western anthropocentrism.

[191] Here Harris also recalls the rhizomatic eco-epistemologies teased out in Chapter Two through his recognition that "the roots of the imagination lie in many places…many cultures…many landscapes" (ibid).

Jacques Stephen Alexis: Un retour (merveilleux) aux sources (merveilleuses)

L'Artibonite, ce grand gaillard aux bras puissants est fils des montagnes.
— Jacques Stephen Alexis[192]

From his first foray into novel-writing (cited above) to his final work, the hybrid text *Romancero aux étoiles* (henceforth *Romancero*), Jacques Stephen Alexis underwent, according to Haitian Canadian novelist Dany Laferrière, "la plus rayonnante trajectoire dans le monde des lettres contemporaines haïtiennes."[193] In his early twenties, Alexis founded the opposition journal *La Ruche*, which proved to be influential during the Revolution of 1946, an uprising that led (albeit briefly) to a more peaceful, democratic Haiti. After imprisonment for protesting the 1946 election, Alexis discovered many natural allies in Paris while practicing neurology, engaging in communist politics, and nourishing his literary sensibilities through study of the surrealist Louis Aragon, the *négritude* movement, and Latin American literature. Upon his *retour au pays natal* in 1955, Alexis wrote three of his four major works in four years, while also participating publicly in cultural and political debates, despite the considerable risk. Was this surge of creative energy by a man in his prime fueled by an ominous sense—a dreadful foreknowledge—that he would eventually perish for the causes he believed in? And what to make of Alexis' movement from social realism to a more experimental blending of the real and the marvelous with a special emphasis on Haitian folklore and the other-than-human?

In his attempt to make the world a better place through communism, Alexis certainly courted death to some extent. The Duvalier regime was notorious for brutally suppressing

[192] *La nuit respirait fortement*.
[193] Laferrière, "Jacques-Stéphen Alexis: un jeune homme éblouissant." In *L'art presque perdu de ne rien faire* (Paris, 2011).

dissent, especially the intellectual, creative, and foreign-influenced kind that leapt from Alexis' pen. Alexis' death at the hands of the *Tontons Macoutes*, described by Arnold Antonin as "mort sans sépulture,"[194] carries an awful double irony: the name of the Duvaliers' fascist militia derives from traditional Haitian folklore,[195] which Alexis embraced in his last work, and the group had support from the CIA when forming. Both Jacques Stephen and his father, Stephen, spent considerable time criticizing the interventionist policy of the U.S. In this chapter I will examine both of these aspects in *Romancero*: the dominant theme of liberation, and the powerful belief in multicultural and even multi-species rapprochement that guided Alexis' theoretical and fictional explorations, manifesting in marvelous realism and the incorporation of Vodou and folkloric archetypes and stories. Against François Duvalier's attempt to monopolize Haitian identity, a phenomenon astutely analyzed by anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot,[196] Alexis fully acknowledges the effects of its (neo)colonial past and subsequent hybridity.[197] Of the interwoven collection of stories that compose *Romancero*, I am reading "Le Dit de la Fleur d'Or" for its retelling of Haitian myth and history and the extrahuman qualities of its main protagonist, Anacaona, and "Le Sous-lieutenant enchanté" for its implicit commentary on U.S.-Haitian relations and its demonstration of nature's power to effect dramatic change. Critically, both stories deploy the marvelous in conjunction with the folkloric and ecological, developing an alternative

[194] This is the title used by Arnold Antonin for his documentary on Alexis.
[195] Haitians dubbed Duvalier's special ops unit "Les Tontons Macoutes" after an old wives' tale used to scare children into behaving, since Tonton Macoute is a child-eating bogeyman who kidnaps naughty children for his next breakfast. This is part of the dark side of the comeback of Vodou in the Duvalier era.
[196] Trouillot, "The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean, and the World," 91.
[197] Trouillot makes this point in the keynote address he delivered at an NYU conference in 1990 (and cited above). The address aims to deconstruct—and explain the prevalence of—the idea of Haitian exceptionalism.

approach to cultural and sociopolitical reality that runs wholly counter to the logic of domination underpinning the Duvalier era.

Central to Alexis' literary approach is his embrace of *le merveilleux*. In a fascinating parallel with Alejandro Carpentier's essay on *lo real maravilloso* (1949),[198] Alexis lays out his theoretical assessment and approach to Haitian literature in the 1956 essay "Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens."[199] True to form, the literary theory Alexis articulates remains grounded in a commitment to both politics and multiculturality. In echoes of Marx and Sartre—"Il ne s'agit pas de témoigner seulement pour le réel et de l'expliquer, il s'agit de transformer le monde… L'artiste doit prendre parti, il doit être un combattant"—Alexis calls for a rejuvenation of political and artistic engagement that recognizes the tripartite structure of influence on Haitian social and political life (92). With Taíno, African, and French contributions to the national DNA, Alexis valorizes a Haitian literature commensurate with this eclectic heritage, a rejection of *le même* in favor of *le divers* (to use Glissant's terms): "L'art haïtien présente en effet le réel avec son cortège d'étrange, de fantastique, de rêve de demi-jour, de mystère et de merveilleux" (105). For Alexis, the wedding of the real and its cousin *le merveilleux* establishes a form appropriate for the simultaneously rugged and elegant beauty of Haiti, the grandeur of its revolutionary origins and the misery of its tyrannical present, a world where all that is solid melts into air: "Vive un réalisme vivant, lié

[198] Incidentally, Alejandro Carpentier's famed essay was inspired by a trip to Haiti, in which he "saw the possibility of establishing certain synchronisms, American, recurrent, timeless" (84). In contrast to the Surrealist movement popularized in Europe, Carpentier believed *lo real maravilloso* was unique to Latin America and the Caribbean, its genealogy borne from the encounter between Amerindians, Africans, and Europeans.

[199] Alexis shares a similar view as Lahens and Wilson Harris, who firmly believe that Caribbean literature should not simply imitate that of Europe. Harris notes Western cultures' strong preference for "novels written by so-called Third World writers who work within these [realist] frames and I think that this is an impoverishment not only of the European imagination, but certainly of the imaginations of these writers who come from other landscapes" (1997: 86).

à la magie de l'univers, un réalisme qui ébranle non seulement l'esprit, mais aussi le cœur et tout l'arbre des nerfs !" (106). Crucially, Alexis' marvelous realism does not abandon politics and is thus no frivolous attempt to escape reality: "Il faut que dans mon œuvre entrent d'une manière objective les choses qui se sont passées et qui se passent maintenant… Nous n'avons pas le droit de rester indifférents en tant que créateurs aux événements objectifs qui surviennent dans la vie de notre people" (qtd. in Del Rossi 105). Alexis' insistence on Haitian literature's inclusion of its own history, myth, and politics is not a misguided call for jingoism but rather a belief that, in revisiting the past and present, Haiti can better understand itself and—most importantly—write itself a better future.

Pursuing the ultimate goal of his vision of marvelous realism—i.e. to arrive "à l'humain, à l'universel et à la vérité profonde de la vie"—Alexis achieves in *Romancero* his ultimate artistic expression, a hybrid work that blends folkloric and more ancient traditions. This "retour aux sources," for Élisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi,

> ne signifie nullement stagnation et statisme. Il se veut au contraire un recours à la culture traditionnelle pour la revitaliser, afin de mieux la sauvegarder. En effet, la tradition doit être vivante, admettre des éléments nouveaux susceptibles de l'enrichir : elle doit se maintenir, mais en même temps rester ouverte. (Qtd. in Del Rossi 108-109).

Alexis thus resuscitates Haiti's past in an open rather than fixed fashion, rendering it as vital as his depictions of nature.

Indeed, the human and other-than-human relation serves as an overarching theme in "Le Dit de la Fleur d'Or," which recounts a pre-Columbian time where "tous appartenait à tous" and the conquistadores had not yet begun their reign of terror (157). The storyteller, Le Vieux Vent Caraïbe, who embodies the Haitian oral tradition, establishes an implicit

connection between the collapse of the Taíno people and the degradation of the earth. While he characterizes the Taínos as engaged in a harmonious rapport with nature and constantly compares their queen Anacaona (whose name means *fleur d'or*) with the natural world, he chastises the Haitians of his interlocutor's present for a habit that it would seem they adopted from the colonizers: "vous avez massacré les oiseaux" (157). In his elevation of Anacaona, Alexis' retelling revalorizes the indigenous heritage of the Haitian people, who, notably, largely avoided disturbing nature's equilibrium, although one must be careful to not oversimplify this relation (Rumpf 227).[200]

In his portrayal of Anacaona, which serves as one of many in historical and literary sources,[201] Alexis makes abundantly clear that she symbolizes a utopian conception of nature, one where she succeeds in bridging the gap between human and nonhuman animal through her extrahuman sensibilities. In one description, for instance, she is the "calme tendresse des fluences caraïbes, douceur, plaisir de vivre, émoi d'une nature toujours radieuse et ravie" (165). Indeed, she seems to naturally mirror the beauty of the landscape: her dancing makes it seem like the sun is rising, "son corps…une énorme goutte de rosée, ses bras étaient des branches et ses doigts des ramilles"; her singing attracts sealife, reptiles, birds and, in turn, she gains their powers (166; 172-74). Anacaona serves as the majestic leader of a people deeply connected to other-than-human nature. Her valor and purity define

[200] As historian Malcom Ferdinand has pointed out, considerable deforestation has occurred at all periods of Caribbean history, even pre-dating the colonizers. The key difference, however, is that the inhabitants primarily cut trees for subsistence or spiritual purposes, while governments and corporations have deforested for profit without consideration for the environment or locals (see Ch. VI, "Reforester sans le monde [Haïti]," of his insightful work *Une écologie décoloniale*).

[201] See, for example, Bartolomé Las Casas (1552), Émile Nau's *Histoire des Caciques d'Haïti* (1926-27), and Jean Métellus's play *Anacaona* (1986).

her and, sadly, make for the perfect contrast with the ugliness to arrive uninvited on their shores.

I am referring here, of course, to the arrival of the conquistadors. “La Dit de la Fleur d’Or” evokes the horrors of colonization and the brutal end of Anacaona and everything she represents. Alexis sketches a distinct opposition between the conquistadors and Anacaona; whereas she is both respectful of nature’s beauty and radiantly beautiful herself, “Le Conquistador,” Alexis writes, “ne savait pas que la beauté existait, il ne connaissait que l’or, le Conquistador n’était pas un être humain, peut-être n’était-il même pas tout à fait un animal” (176). This diminishing of the conquistador is particularly noteworthy because it goes beyond the typical move of degrading the human via recourse to animal language: e.g. “that animal,” “that pig,” “that dog,” etc. Alexis calls into question even their status as animals, echoing the sentiment Dostoevsky expressed when he wrote that “people speak sometimes about the ‘animal’ cruelty of man, but that is terribly unjust and offensive to animals; no animal could ever be so cruel as a man, so artfully, so artistically cruel” (298). While Anacaona and the Taíno people gain so much from their respectful rapport with nature, the Spaniards prove themselves incapable of appreciating nature’s beauty and thus fail to recognize its inherent agency and mystery, which Morton identifies as a critical failure of “imperialist ‘reality’” (2013: 17). So, while they may pitilessly burn the beautiful Anacaona alive, they will never possess her insight into the powerful *merveilleux* of nature. Alexis punctuates the story by noting Anacaona’s legacy and how his contemporary Haitians

continued to maintain respect for nature's power[202]: "Nous sommes tous fils de La Fleur d'Or" (177).

Throughout *Romancero*, Alexis continues to blend the historical with the mythical and the political with the ecological. In "Le Sous-lieutenant enchanté," instead of the invading conquistadors, Alexis depicts the invading US marines who occupied Haiti in the early twentieth century. Deploying satirical elements—the main character's name is Lieutenant Wheelbarrow[203]—as well as mythical and marvelous ones, Alexis shows how racist, colonial beliefs can in fact lose ground to the more ancient Amerindian way of life, thanks to Wheelbarrow's magical love story with a *viens-viens*, or woman of the hills.[204] Not long after deciding to leave behind his life in the southern United States and settle in Haiti, the out-of-place Wheelbarrow soon receives a prophesy from a Vodou priest, or *oungan*. The moral of the story boils down to "love over money"—i.e. choose the woman and not the gold—because "chaque pièce d'or coûte une goutte de sang !" (204). In the wisdom of the *oungan*, and reflective of folkloric cultural wisdom in general, money and its attendant power struggles beget violence. A soldier himself, Wheelbarrow renounces not only his former life but his gun and bellicosity in favor of settling down in Haiti with the *viens-viens*.

Crucially, Alexis deploys the *viens-viens*, who bears a fundamental connection to Haiti and its natural environment, at a time when U.S. politicians saw Haiti's land and

[202] This continued engagement with the Anacaona figure dates in particular to Haitian independence, after which there was a significant increase of interest in and representation of the *fleur d'or* (Antoine 15).
[203] And indeed, he is something like a vessel waiting to be filled up with the alternative eco-epistemology of the *viens-viens* (see below).
[204] The *viens-viens* is a legendary part of Haitian and Caribbean culture, most often referring to those generations born from the blending of the last Taínos with African slaves and being known for surprising villagers at random times (See Del Rossi, 115; Laroche 1993, 84).

finances fall under their purview.[205] Thanks principally to the influence of the *viens-viens*, the culturally lost U.S. officer Wheelbarrow becomes, as J. Michael Dash frames it, "involved in a new kind of reality—an overwhelming sense of harmony with nature, beyond the exotic to an intimate link with the marvelous and the fantastic," an imbrication that recalls the indissolubility of our relation to other-than-human nature so beautifully and enigmatically displayed in Wilfredo Lam's 1943 painting *La Jungla*, in which Monique Allewaert identifies "a mode of personhood and politics not grounded on human exceptionalism" (67; 113).[206] In his very first encounter with her, on a "soir de lune," the *viens-viens* reinforces both of these key aspects outlined by Dash, as Alexis' writing takes (elegant) pains to detail the sensuous landscape:

> Je suis la gardienne de ces montagnes et de ces eaux, lui dit-elle… Regarde mes verts troupeaux qui se bousculent à l'infini, regarde mes eaux bleues qui montent jusqu'au plus grand bassin, l'azur du ciel… Ils dorment tranquilles avec tous mes trésors… L'heure n'est pas encore venue pour les hommes de cette terre de s'emparer des trésors enfouis… Je t'attendais… (206)

As self-proclaimed guardian of Haiti's beauty in both a materialist and aesthetic sense, the *viens-viens* does not serve as an outside *protectrice* but stands fully enmeshed in nature herself. As she opens up to Wheelbarrow, she asserts her own role while simultaneously

[205] Despite F.D.R.'s "Good neighbor policy," which resulted in the U.S.'s military exit in 1934, the U.S. continued to exert significant control over Haiti's monetary policy. Part of what led to the U.S.'s withdrawal was the fact that Haitians had roundly rejected the U.S.-backed proposal for a new constitution in 1917. Significantly, this constitution permitted foreign ownership of Haitian land, thus overturning a decision that Haiti had made precisely to diminish foreign influence over their country's politics.

[206] In his essay on the marvelous real, Carpentier contends that French artist André Masson was unable to draw the Martinican forest, whereas a Cuban (i.e. Lam) could (85). Moreover, Allewaert sees Lam's iconic piece's "indexing [of] colonialism's breaking of bodies into parts" as an example of the parahuman, i.e. it becomes "impossible to categorically distinguish between human, animal, and vegetable bodies" (113).

emphasizing the earth's power, giving it the kind of agency seen in Wilson Harris' fiction: "La terre s'ouvrira un jour pour donner ses trésors à tous les fils de cette terre. Aujourd'hui il faut veiller sur eux… Veux-tu m'aider à veiller sur eux ?... Si tu trahis les secrets de la terre, la terre te dévorera tout vif, avant même que tu aies fini d'en concevoir la pensée !" (206). In language strongly reminiscent of Annaïse in Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (see Ch. III), the *viens-viens* tells her own soon-to-be lover that betrayal of the earth carries a steep—indeed, the ultimate—price: death.[207]

As the story moves along, the *viens-viens* exerts increasing influence over Wheelbarrow, particularly in terms of his relationship with other-than-human nature. The story accentuates this newfound ecological and interpersonal intimacy by providing Wheelbarrow's first-person perspective (through the conceit of his later-discovered journals):

> Hier elle m'a dit qu'elle allait m'apprendre à rire comme les fleurs. Pendant des heures elle a guidé mes exercices. Puis j'ai ressenti une grande paix et nos corps se sont confondus… Maintenant je puis rester de longues minutes sous l'eau… Les poissons vont et viennent autour de nous, s'approchent, nous regardent, nous frôlent et repartent avec de lentes nages… Je n'arrive pas encore à les faire se blottir dans ma main comme elle le fait. (208)

Like Anacaona, the *viens-viens* possesses extrahuman abilities that borrow from the animal kingdom. The *viens-viens* also proves capable of passing along her special skills to Wheelbarrow. Their love, like that of Roumain's Manuel and Annaïse, takes part in the heart of the landscape—literally, in Alexis's depiction, insofar as they descend a deep ravine

[207] The earth-as-devourer also recalls the coal mine of Emile Zola's epic *Germinal*, which Zola characterizes throughout as a ravenous, devouring beast or, alternatively, as an insatiable tomb.

toward the molten core of the earth to feel the warmth of “des grandes eaux thermales qui dansent sous la terre charnelle” (209). Even the earth seems complicit in their lovemaking! This utopian vision, as Del Rossi percipiently observes, bears a direct connection to the transformation of Wheelbarrow “dans la nature non-contaminée par le capitalisme” (116). Unfortunately, in this case, utopia is true to its etymology (“no place”), proving elusive as ever.

Ultimately killed by U.S. marines for the alleged crime of “haute trahison et d’intelligence avec l’ennemi,” Wheelbarrow’s tragic end suggests Alexis’ willingness to resist a straightforward, facile ending (212). As in “La Dit de la Fleur d’Or,” an invasion has utterly ruined any hope of peace because, as Del Rossi argues, the foreign conquerors prefer “les richesses matérielles à la richesse intérieure” (116). This was part of what Chris Campbell and Michael Niblett describe as Duvalier’s “destructive, US-financed programme of neoliberal economic reform,” the effects of which were “catastrophic for the Haitian peasantry in particular, with local agriculture eviscerated as a consequence of policies favouring the interest of US industries” (10). Against this regressive regime, Alexis deploys the Vieux Vent Caraïbe and his interlocutor to provide an optimistic commentary on the value of transmitting such cautionary tales: “C’est une grande et belle chose pour un peuple que de conserver vivantes ses légendes” (213). This ethos perfectly captures Alexis’s own approach, i.e. to revivify Haitians’ historical and mytho-folklorical past in conversation with their political past and present. In his essay “Où va le roman,” Alexis insists that fiction must not “oublier l’essentiel” but present “le réel en se rappelant qu’il fait partie d’un immense corps vivant, la nature et l’humanité en mouvement” (1957: 107).

In this way, Alexis remains committed to a literature that refracts the material (ecological) and spiritual concerns of the Haitian people and the political struggle that they bear. As with Wilson Harris and Yanick Lahens, Alexis' idea of the *merveilleux* connects inexorably to the ecological, "rooted," as Hal Wylie notes, "in the transcendental, the sacred associated with the land" (35). For Alexis, the *merveilleux* of Haitian history and culture is a story infused with the reality of political violence—in these two stories, the violence of two different foreign invasions and occupations: the Spaniards of the sixteenth century and the U.S. marines of the twentieth. Both narratives are inevitably colored by Alexis's own time, willingly ensconced as he was in the dangerous political climate of the Duvalier era, an engagement that almost certainly led to his premature death. And yet there are glimmers of hope in *Romancero*, such as in Wheelbarrow's nature-oriented enchantment (he is, after all, "le sous-lieutenant *enchanté*") and in the ecological lessons of Anacaona transmitted from Haiti's precolonial past to Alexis's present.

In her novel *Bain de lune*, Yanick Lahens similarly fictionalizes the Duvalier era and connects, as Jason Herbeck observes, the worst period of environmental degradation to the U.S. occupation that took place from 1915 to 1934 (2017b: 87).[208] Like Alexis, Lahens challenges both the (Western) practices of conventional realist fiction and historiography in favor of an attention to the eco-marvelous and its significance within a Vodou framework.

[208] The worst deforestation in Haiti occurred in the twentieth century and has its roots in the U.S. occupation. Forestation went from 65% to 2% from 1900 to 2006 (see Paravisini-Gebert 2016: 66)

Yanick Lahens and the ecology of Vodou

Yanick Lahens has indeed taken a prominent role in shaping contemporary Haitian and, more broadly, Caribbean literature. In addition to her novels, which she began publishing in the 1990s, she has published numerous critical essays[209] and serves as a radio host for the program "Entre nous" on *Radio Haïti Inter*. A founding member of the Association des Écrivains Haïtiens, Lahens takes pains in her critical work to clarify her expectations for the future of Haitian literature, rejecting exoticism and demanding innovation:

> I refuse facility, the use of an infantilized Creole, the worn-out exotic themes, the tropical eroticism that a certain type of western reader may still be obsessed with—Noble Savage, voodoo, bananas, coconut trees. On the contrary, I expect from my country a truly innovative literature as to form, and above all, one that accepts our human condition in all its fragility, its contradictions—in a word, all its surprises. (Qtd. in Zimra 90)

Like her predecessor Alexis, Lahens seeks to move beyond a regressive, exoticizing form of literature. Both authors build on the rich myth, folklore, and religious traditions of their multicultural nation, with Lahens centering her focus on Vodou. In the process, both Alexis and Lahens lean toward marvelous realism as a means of authentically situating the essential role of ecology in Haiti's past, present, and future. They aim to leave the colonial framing of nature behind, a rejection that also serves, following Cilano and DeLoughrey, as

[209] Many of the most notable of these are collected in *L'exil entre l'ancrage et la fuite : l'écrivain haïtien* (Port-au-Prince: Henri Deschamps, 1990).

> a refusal of the 'natural' environment, which is then revealed as a colonial fantasy of the garden of Eden, or a myth of the hyperfecundity of the tropics. Notably, these idyllic of the Caribbean environment sought to mystify the brutal realities of enslaved labor in monocrop plantations. (79)

In this way, Lahens' novel *Bain de lune*, set in the fictional village Anse Bleue,[210] thus "refuses the nostalgia of pure landscape even while it grapples with the best ways of addressing the representation of the nonhuman environment" (79). In her novel, which the publisher claims as "le grand roman de la terre haïtienne,"[211] Lahens examines one small community through multiple generations to show the endurance of several key themes: personal and political violence, the barrenness of the land, and the integral role of Vodou beliefs in confronting these issues.

One of the epigraphs that Lahens selects for her novel, from Haitian poet René Depestre's "Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien," captures the intimate sense of ecology in Vodou:

> Je suis Atibon-Legba
>
> Mon chapeau vient de la Guinée
>
> De même que ma canne de bambou
>
> De même que ma vieille douleur
>
> De même que mes vieux os [...]
>
> Je suis Legba-Bois Legba-Cayes
>
> Je suis Legba-Signangon…

[210] "Anse" refers to a small bay and is a common appellation in Haiti.
[211] See Jason Herbeck's "Intertexts of the Ecological: Literary Space Revisited in Yanick Lahens's *Bain de lune*" for a commentary on this appellation.

[…]

Je veux pour ma faim des ignames

Des malangas et des giraumonts

Des bananes et des patates douces.

Here the speaker positions himself in the Vodou tradition, establishing a connection with the ancestral homeland of Africa ("Guinée") and notably grounding his body and its functions in relationship with the agricultural products of the earth: "ma canne de bamboo"; "Je veux pour ma faim des ignames," etc. Lahens' novel will continuously preoccupy itself with the earth in this pragmatic, materialist fashion. Through her scrupulous documentation of Vodou rituals and agrarian life, Lahens brings, as Robert Sapp argues, a quasi-ethnographic character to *Bain de lune*.[212]

Drought, for example, seems to afflict every generation in a similarly painful fashion, the most severe bane to characters' respective livelihoods that does not (at least ostensibly) derive directly from the malfeasance of more powerful people. In the very first pages, Lahens establishes that her novel must be understood as concerned not merely with humans but with *all life and all matter*: "Dans toute cette histoire, il faudra tenir compte du vent, du sel, de l'eau, et pas seulement des hommes et des femmes" (9). Throughout the text, Lahens develops a kind of "eco-archive," i.e. a careful collation of environmental issues that documents the consequences of "slow violence," or the insidious effects of climate change in the *longue durée*. Accordingly, I read *Bain de lune* as a powerful example of a less anthropocentric worldview, one profoundly shaped by the influence of the syncretic Vodou

[212] See Sapp, "The Talking Dead: Narrating the Past in Yanick Lahens's *Bain de lune*," p. 123-124.

religion as well as the material concerns of multiple generations of Haitians and, significantly, their interaction, wherein Vodou serves as a central mediator of the ecological.

Lahens' novel, like Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* or Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, paints a multi-generational fresco, one that centers itself primarily within the Duvalier era in Haiti. The Mésidor family rules the region in which the Lafleur family lives, dominating in some ways like feudal lords. Through their patriarch Tertulien in partulciar, the Mésidors represent the pure greed and short-sightedness of the colonial—i.e. instrumentalist—view of nature: "Les Mésidor…avaient depuis toujours convoité la terre, les femmes et les biens" (19). Building on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's definition of the rhizome in *Mille plateaux*, Glissant contrasts *identité-racine* with *identité-rhizome* to establish a binary wherein the former adheres to vertical rootedness and hierarchy, and the latter reflects multidirectional entanglement and a more egalitarian means of relation.[213] Within *Bain de lune*, the Mésidor family embodies *identité-racine* through their forceful acquisition of land and contemptuous demeanor, whereas the Lafleur family embodies *identité-rhizome* through their subsistence farming and greater sense of community. Despite their lack of Mésidorean might, the village rumor is that the Lafleurs possess a formidable power of their own, conferred to them by *oungans* (20).

Indeed, the significance of Vodou runs throughout the novel, with ample attention given to the various divinities invoked by the Lafleur family during special situations as well as in their daily life. Of particular importance to the Lafleurs are Gran Bwa (*Grand Bois*, divinity of the forest), Agwé (divinity of the ocean), and Zaka (divinity of the land/agriculture). In addition to reinforcing a worldview that places significantly more

[213] I explore Glissant's theoretical work most fully in Chapter Two.

agency in other-than-human nature,[214] the divinities receive much solicitation from the Lafleurs because the land and sea have become so painfully infertile. In a parallel with the previous quotation, the narrator recounts that "dans cette histoire, il faudra tenir compte du vent, de son souffle salin sur nos lèvres, de la lune, de la mer… de la terre qui ne donne plus. De la mer avare" (40). Their livelihoods tightly imbricated with the land and sea, the Lafleurs possess a profoundly intimate rapport with the environment: to cite one example of many, the narrator makes casual mention of "les perroquets venus des montagnes lointaines criaillaient, annonçant l'imminence des pluies" (57).[215] This type of ecological understanding—what I term eco-epistemology[216]—and dependence on the earth for sustenance contrasts starkly with the mindset of Tertulien Mésidor, who simply takes what he desires by force. Furthering this distinction between the Mésidors and Lafleurs is their positioning at the local market: while some of the Lafleurs sell their goods there, the Mésidors come only in the role of buyers, or, perhaps more accurately, as *consumers*.[217]

Ultimately, although the Lafleurs attempt to exert control over nature, nature frequently overpowers the human. This move symbolizes how, after humanity has forsaken nature, the latter takes its revenge, subverting the "human can and should dominate nature" given (*donné*, as in Harris) that underpins the instrumentalist worldview. One of the novel's narrators, Cétoute Lafleur, whose discourse comes from beyond the grave, struggles to speak after being left lifeless in the sea: "*Ma voix se casse tout au fond de ma gorge. C'est encore à*

[214] As one example of many that shows how Lahens keeps in mind all forms of life, the narrator shares that "La chaleur pesait déjà sur les sentiers menant au morne Peletier, engourdissant *chrétiens-vivants*, bêtes et plantes" (43).
[215] To cite another example—in teaching his grandson Dieudonné how to fish, Orvil tells him not to be afraid "du grand large tant qu'on pouvait lire la carte du ciel" (166).
[216] See Chapters One and Two for the most extensive development of the term "eco-epistemology."
[217] I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Haitian Studies* for this insight.

cause du vent, du sel et de l'eau" (9). The ability to speak, a trait primarily associated with human beings, becomes stifled here as other-than-human nature comes to speak in its own way, with its own violence, its own impartial reckoning.[218] Lahens constantly reinforces this sense of nature's agency through personification, sprinkling descriptions such as the following throughout the text: "Olmène regarda la mer, qui lui sembla respirer pareillement à une bête étendue sur le dos, agitée par le flux et le reflux du sang de toutes les créatures et des âmes, là, dans son flanc" (35). The sheer power of nature and its embeddedness in the Lafleurs' worldview also comes across through the frequent analogy of the family as a tree: "Nous étions les branches d'un même arbre, soudées au même tronc, et nous devions le rester" (33).[219] The tree, with its manifold branches, symbolizes the horizontal collectivity of the *lakou*, as well as the vertical hierarchy of the *potomitan*[220] and the *danti*, or patriarch.

Even the Lafleur's *danti,* Orvil, reveals a bleakly fatalist view of the world after so many years of drought and the enduring struggle to provide for his family. He feels that it is his ultimate failure that nothing substantive has been accomplished against the environmental trauma of slow violence that plagues the community of Anse-Bleue. Upon the return of one son,[221] Léosthène, after fifteen years, the narrator describes the elapsed time through a laundry list of ecological devastations: "La terre vidée de son sang, de sa chair, montrant ses

[218] The ocean's centrality to the marvelous aspects of *Bain de lune* seems to affirm Elizabeth DeLoughrey's point that narratives tend to mark oceanic space as profoundly exceptional to human experience" (2015: 357).
[219] This analogy recurs on pages 82, 106, 173, 179, and 185 (among others). This language, like much of the novel, recalls the ecologically dense language of Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (see Herbeck's "Intertexts of the Ecological" essay for a more extended comparison of these two texts).
[220] In Haitian Vodou, the *potomitan* is a wooden post (or sometimes living tree) that stands in the center of the temple (*ounfo*). Following Vodou beliefs, it permits the *lwa* to descend into the earthly realm, from where they can then possess the bodies of the living.
[221] As John Walsh has pointed out, there is a striking parallel here with the return of the prodigal son (Manuel) in Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. Whereas Manuel vows to stay and solve the problem of drought, however, "Léosthène finds no reason to attempt to nurture the land back to health, and so his stay is temporary" (Walsh 135).

zo genoux, la mer avare, l'éradication des porcs, la mort des petits métiers, la maladie du café, celle des palmistes et des citronniers" (174). After a particularly brutal and unyielding day of fishing, Orvil laments that "vivre et souffrir sont une même chose" (59). Despite this dreary view, Orvil retains an unceasing belief in the Vodou divinities. Perhaps naturally for a fisherman, his *mèt tèt*, or personal divinity, is Agwé. Orvil's solicitations of Agwé and the other divinities create a sense of a larger world, one beyond humans alone. In this way, the Vodou religion reconnects—and here it is worth recalling the etymology of religion, *religare* ("to re-bind")[222]—the Lafleurs to a spiritual understanding of the universe, one that furnishes more equal agency to all manner of life and matter, in alignment with Vodou's traditional role as, in the words of Patrick Taylor, a "nonhierarchical religion centered in the local community" (80).

Deeply antithetical to this egalitarian worldview is the approach of Tertulien Mésidor as well as that of an emergent, insidious force in the country: "L'homme à chapeau noir et lunettes épaisses," Lahens' winking appellation—a kind of "he-who-must-not-be-named"—for François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Ostensibly a proponent of a more egalitarian and prosperous Haiti, Duvalier in reality weaponized a dictatorial form of *négritude* and co-opted Vodou for his own benefit, carrying out a reign of terror that lasted nearly fifteen years (and beyond, through the succession of his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier). On the one hand, Lahens thus draws a clear distinction between the Lafleurs of the world—those who peacefully subsist—and the Mésidors and Duvaliers, who violently take; on the other hand, she complicates this distinction by narrating how several Lafleurs become swept up in the Duvalier movement, joining his army of "hommes en bleu" (136). For the most part,

[222] This was, in any case, St. Augustine's interpretation.

however, the Lafleurs remain true to their values. For example, even Léosthène, when he departs the family again, first takes time to honor the trees ("saluer les arbres"):

> Un léger vent frais lui entra par tous les pores, et sa chair et cette terre ne firent qu'un. Ce vent qui tourmentait les branches nous disait qu'elles avaient comme nous résisté à tout. Exposées à la poussière des saisons, à la corrosion du sel, au passage des ouragans, à la lente fermentation végétale, à la fureur des hommes, aux pluies torrentielles. Elles avaient résisté à tout. (185)

The deep, tangible connection that Léosthène feels with the land—here, branches that have endured just like the Lafleurs—engenders a quasi-mystical experience that takes him back to the "regard neuf de l'enfance,"[223] where he can turn his back "un moment aux blessures de la terre, à ses cicatrices profondes" (187). Conscientious of his position as one small component of an immeasurably vast network of living and nonliving matter, Léosthène here encapsulates the Lafleur's eco-epistemology.

Bain de lune, however, generally expresses a profound fatalism about Haiti, both politically and ecologically. It recalls this description of resignation from Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*: "The old man began to lose heart at this endless return of chains, this rebirth of shackles, this proliferation of suffering, which the more resigned began to accept as proof of the uselessness of all revolt" (qtd. in Kramer 223). The seemingly endless cycle of revolutions (which is, after all, its etymological meaning) affirms this sense that there is ultimately no substantive change, which finds expression throughout Lahens' depiction of Haiti. Part of the tragedy lies in the fact that the actions of others, those in positions of power,

[223] Recalling Baudelaire's conviction in *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1863) that "Le génie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée à volonté."

have made them complicit in the degradation of the environment. A new priest, who serves as a mouthpiece for the new resistance party (the *Démunis*, or "have-nots"),[224] communicates this by critiquing "ceux qui avaient tué tous les petits métiers, qui ne ne nous laissaient aucun autre choix que de couper les arbres" (212).[225]

Nonetheless, there are moments and aspects that suggest a brighter future lies ahead. Despite the brutal murder of Cétoute, we nonetheless hear her first-hand retelling thanks to the liminal space in which, following Vodou tradition, she resides. She shares a belief passed on by her father Dieudonné, which suggests an intimate inhabiting of nature by not only the Vodou spirits but also their ancestors:

> Mon père disait que toutes les voix des Ancêtres et des Morts, même de ceux venus dans les cales des navires il y a longtemps, soufflent encore dans la végétation marine, remontent parfois jusqu'à la surface des eaux comme des rumeurs mêlées à la nuit. (224)

Her body itself dissolves in the harsh saltwater and returns to the earth, a melancholic and symbolic move that once again reiterates the interconnectedness of humankind with other-than-human nature (251). And even though the land has been so fallow for so long, the novel ends with a gesture toward a better tomorrow, thanks to irrigation carried out via cooperative labor (259-60). Although the irrigation project is quite clearly a human-centered plan with a self-interested objective, its collective spirit (that of the *coumbite*, as seen with *Gouverneurs*

[224] Lahens' earlier novel *La couleur de l'aube* (2008) features as its major theme the conflict between the haves and have-nots.

[225] The significance of this cannot be understated in terms of understanding the root causes of environmental degradation in the Global South and marginalized communities everywhere.

de la rosée in Ch. III) continues to distinguish the Lafleurs from the Mésidors and does not, in my view, significantly diminish the ecological thrust of Lahens' novel.

Indeed, with this ending, Lahens perhaps answers some of the pointed questions she raised in her 1992 article "Exile: Between Writing and Place," interrogating herself and her fellow Haitians:

> Can our literature be this space where individualism and humanism do not exclude each other? And what if we broke with the aesthetics of powerlessness? What if we opened the sphere of imaginary territory by first accepting exile and thereby the alterity within ourselves? (745)

In her departure from anthropocentrism and embrace of alterity, Lahens leans on the fantastic aspects of Vodou beliefs, namely, by having Cétoute narrate posthumously, a possibility since she has not yet passed into the spiritual plane (Sapp 126). Cétoute speaks of the fragments of her personal and family history, motivated, as Sapp suggests, by a desire to collect and reconstitute them (ibid).[226] This web of narration and memory reflects the interconnectedness of the human and other-than-human relation, reaffirming ecology as one of *Bain de lune*'s principal themes and structuring elements.

Conclusion

In the spectral, Sisyphean re-enactment carried out by the crew of ghosts in Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock*, one can draw a parallel with Cétoute's narration from beyond the grave (as well as the cyclical violence characterizing (post)colonial states everywhere).

[226] In Sapp's insightful article on *Bain de lune*, he writes that "one area of future study is the role of Vodou in the novel," and this chapter has attempted to help fill that void (130).

There is, as Régis Antoine argues is often the case in francophone Caribbean literature, “une parole de fantôme” (14). With these characters, “the subject no longer occupies a realm of rigid stability, but is deterritorialised, liberated and released into a ‘nomadic’ mode of existence” (Goodbody 254). From this position outside of the living, inhabiting a dream-like, liminal womb, Harris and Lahens’ characters must relive the violent events that cost them their lives. This violence mirrors the environmental degradation that their respective countries—Guyana and Haiti—have undergone since the early days of colonialism, such as the kind narrated by Alexis in *Romancero aux étoiles*. But what exactly is the point of chronicling this deterritorialization and ecological destruction?

I would argue that these novels all—albeit differently—stage human tragedies in a way that shows how they are commensurate to the devastation suffered by other-than-human nature. In addition, they each feature implicit and/or explicit commentaries on humankind’s imbrication with the natural environment. Not necessarily a diminishing of the human, this ecological and less anthropocentric viewpoint simply places humans alongside other-than-human nature. For Deleuze and Guattari, who stress a rhizomatic, non-hierarchical ontology, it is the “erasure of the boundaries of human identity through recognition of species’ irreducible interdependence” that allows for “an emancipatory movement from being to becoming” (Goodbody 254). Alexis, Lahens, and Harris all contribute to this “emancipatory movement” in their frequent blurring of the lines between human, animal, tree, rock, water, and so forth. Their powerful imaginations permit them to confront “the multiple landscapes, aesthetics and histories of the Caribbean and beyond, without ever resolving them into one over-riding explanatory dynamic or outcome,” as Pat Noxolo writes of Harris (378). Harris himself was resolutely anti-dogmatic, determined to unleash a poetic prose more attuned to

the complex mysteries of the natural world. In his last novel, *The Ghost of Memory*, for example, Harris writes that "Absolutes…reinforce partialities until they conceal them from view…promot[ing] terrifying divides we cannot see" (381).

These authors perform the important task of innovating formally so as to better convey their respective eco-epistemologies. Each of them, as the narrator tells us in Harris' *Heartland*, characterize other-than-human nature in a way that "force[s] one [in this case, the reader] to venture into an interior where one s[ees] oneself turned inside out" (58). Unmooring readers—at least partially—from their innately anthropocentric bearings, these texts encourage both inner reflection and external confrontation regarding the environmental issues affecting us locally and planetarily. In an interview, Harris reiterates the importance of the imagination in facing the existential crisis caused by climate change, which remains for many of us beyond direct, quotidian experience:

> The destruction of the rainforests of the globe may seem remote to dwellers in cities. But we need imaginations that are sensitive to inner-city decay and the lungs of the globe orchestrated into forests and rivers and skies. We need to build afresh through the brokenness of our world. (194)

Working within a marvelous realist framework and pulling from the rich history and mythology of the Caribbean, Harris, Alexis, and Lahens all "build afresh" by nourishing our imaginations and opening us up to a less anthropocentric worldview.

Another way of building afresh comes via constructing fictions that interrogate the madness of the status quo, affirming a world in which "our beliefs are unfixed rather than static," as Peters writes of Harris' *Palace*. For Harris, he continues,

> our beliefs must keep pace with our ever-changing perceptions of the world, and that, behind our beliefs (which we must choose and test carefully in order to be guided to the wisest humane ends), there is a dream consciousness—the very deepest and most mystical function of imagination—which constantly bombards us with new ways of seeing until we are able to attain, and not distort, an understanding of our rightful position in the cosmos. (128)

This question of a deeper consciousness, perhaps accessible by contact with the other-than-human, forms an enduring theme of science fiction. "Genre fiction," such as science fiction and speculative fiction, works in its own way to "build afresh" by working from the present and the past to devise future scenarios about our "position in the cosmos." In the following chapter, I will thus examine several works of Caribbean science fiction that raise compelling questions about the direction we are headed in terms of our relationship to other-than-human nature. More specifically, I will explore how these works allow us to imagine more sustainable urbanisms via a Caribbean-inflected eco-epistemology.

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Chapter V

Sci-Fi Cities:
Reimagining Urban Ecology

> Phantasmagoria, magic-lantern shows, spectacles… They achieved complete sensory experiences through noise, incense, lighting, water. There may be a time when we'll attend Weather Theatres to recall the sensation of rain.[227]
>
> — Jim Morrison

Jim Morrison of The Doors considered himself more of a poet-prophet than a singer, and his words here resonate presciently indeed given the recent state of the California climate[228] he departed more than fifty years ago. His notion of "Weather Theatres" points to art's representational power, i.e. its ability to deliver convincing simulacra of what once was. Such future-situated yet backwards-looking verisimilitude (anchored in the future anterior tense) has long been science fiction's raison d'être—building upon present media and other material conditions to speculate on humanity's fate. In the previous chapter I explored marvelous realism, and science fiction (SF) and speculative fiction similarly allow us, as Amitav Ghosh writes, "to approach the world in a subjunctive mode, to conceive of it *as if* it were other than it is…mak[ing] possible the imagining of possibilities" (128). SF holds a kind of circus mirror up to the world, offering calculated distortions of the present under a future guise, simultaneously probing humanity's past, present and many possible futures. The characteristically speculative nature of SF sets scenarios that allow us to imagine possible

[227] *AUM Magazine*, 1 May 1969. Morrison here offers a striking meditation on cinema and its impact on spectators.
[228] I'm referring primarily to the 2021 California wildfires, in which more than 2.2 million acres burned (as of September 12th, 2021), of which nearly one million belong to the Dixie fire alone (https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/).

futures by casting conjecture on our increasingly catastrophic present, not shying away from uncertainty but embracing it wholeheartedly.

Given that humanity now lives with the ominous sense that progressively more devastating climate disasters are imminent, it is unsurprising that SF has become increasingly concerned with ecology and life in post-apocalyptic environments. With more than half of the global population now living in cities,[229] it is essential that urban environments become more efficient and more resilient. As Mike Davis argues, urbanization is both a primary driver of climate change as well as "potentially the principal solution to the problem of human survival in the later twenty-first century" (2010: 30). In some senses, Davis continues, "city life is rapidly destroying the ecological niche—Holocene climate stability—which made its evolution into complexity possible" (41). Depictions of SF cities can allow us to reconsider our own urban environments and reimagine them for a more sustainable future—or what we may be forced to reckon with should our worst climate fears materialize. The preceding chapter argued that marvelous realism allows for a deeper exploration of less anthropocentric perspectives, and SF provides a similarly defamiliarized viewpoint that may help us overcome our inherent past- and present-bound frameworks. By deploying SF as a means of interrogating the hard truths of our present and the latent possibilities therein, SF authors build fundamentally upon present and past reality (echoing Jacques Stephen Alexis' perspective on marvelous realism).[230]

[229] According to the World Bank (https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview).
[230] "Il faut que dans mon œuvre entrent d'une manière objective les choses qui se sont passées et qui se passent maintenant" (qtd. in Del Rossi 105).

If we subscribe to Marx's well-worn pronouncement that "the traditions of the dead weigh on the brains of the living like a nightmare,"[231] then Caribbean authors must necessarily grapple with the heavy history of colonialism and its neo/postcolonial repercussions.[232] This legacy, coupled with the prospect of an intensification in the force and frequency of "natural" disasters, compels Caribbean authors to seize upon SF's patent malleability and suitability as a critical and artistic tool for reflecting Caribbean reality. In the words of Junot Díaz's Oscar Wao, "What more sci-fi than Santo Domingo? What more fantasy than the Antilles?" (224). Although heretofore relatively little studied (or self-formulated) as a particular "school" of SF,[233] Caribbean and Caribbean-heritage writers of SF and fantasy frequently present shared themes—such as environmental injustice and urban-nature hybridity—that reflect the Caribbean eco-epistemology that this dissertation has begun sketching.[234] Moreover, their meditations on identity and diaspora lend a heightened sense to spatial and urban considerations, such as the space of the home and the city. Indeed, much Caribbean literature takes up a strong spatial focus in its interrogation of questions regarding urban living, diaspora/exile, and the environment.[235] Within recent Caribbean SF, however, these primary themes take on greater urgency given the dire implications of a

[231] "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoléon" (1852).
[232] Authors such as Patrick Chamoiseau and Yanick Lahens, among others, testify to feelings of constraint as Caribbean writers: "[On] est relativement contrainte, dans la mesure où nous sommes forcés de prendre en compte un certain nombre de difficultés concernant l'identité, l'exploration de l'histoire, la mémoire, les mutations identitaires, la question de la diversité, etc. […] Ce sont des problèmes qui, en quelque sorte, ne nous permettent pas de 'liberté littéraire'" (Chamoiseau, qtd. in De Bleeker 92). See the start of Chapter Two for more on Caribbean literature and/as "World Literature."
[233] There are, however, two volumes of SF and speculative fiction edited by Caribbean writers: *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*, by Nalo Hopkinson (with Uppinder Mehan), and *Diverse Energies*, by Tobias Buckell (with Joe Monti). Both anthologies feature many authors of multicultural heritage and/or postcolonial background.
[234] See the Introduction (Ch. I) for the most thorough definition of "eco-epistemology."
[235] See, for example, Édouard Glissant's *La Lézarde* (1958), Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989), and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992), all studied in Chapter Two.

climate-threatened future for the low-lying tropical islands of the Caribbean. As such, Caribbean SF allows readers to reflect on the impact of climate catastrophes and the prospect of apocalypse, which has become a tired and tiring theme not only in literature[236] but in popular media more generally. More importantly, it promotes a perspective that "let[s] go of the boundaries of our own discourse and make[s] more room for Indigenous and non-western voices to modify, critique, and undermine" traditional SF tropes (Ingwersen 423).

Indeed, Caribbean SF can offer alternative pathways forward that resist the formulaic Western narrative that sees a hero or technological achievement singlehandedly surmount the threat of climate change.[237] Instead, as with Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, these texts often suggest that humans will find a more sustainable way forward in the wake of climate catastrophe. Critically, this involves rethinking and reshaping the urban. After a theoretical overview of SF and its expression among Caribbean writers, including its fraught relationship with utopia and related issues of representation, I will present an analysis of urban political ecology. Taken together, these sections will provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for a close reading of novels by Stephanie Saulter and Tobias Buckell, whose Caribbean SF, I argue, offers an important reimagining of urban ecology.

[236] For example, N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy begins with a tongue-in-cheek criticism of our catastrophe fetish: "Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we? Get it over with and move on to more interesting things" (1).

[237] See Chapter Three for an exploration of the savior trope in modern environmentalist thought and ecologically focused literature. The Introduction (Ch. I) provides a critical overview of ecomodernism, a movement that expounds the same faith in technoscientific miracles.

Science fiction: from (European) center to (Caribbean) periphery

Science fiction (SF) has long stretched the borders of representation. Coalescing as a remarkably well-formed genre in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, particularly with the contributions of Jules Verne (1828-1905) and H. G. Wells (1866-1946), SF's primary characteristic is its speculative nature. It seizes the obvious and latent possibilities of technology, political strife, and (with greater frequency) climate catastrophe in order to project and stage future scenarios. "If science fiction is the mythology of modern technology," however, "then its myth is tragic," as Ursula K. Le Guin suggestively argues (1989b: 153). Notably, modern technologies tend to be double-edged swords; while they may help pull countless millions out of poverty or make our lives more convenient, they also tend to put extensive strain on the environment—to a degree that we have perhaps reached a climatic point of no return. In response, some writers, environmentalists, and governments double down and continue to propose technology as our only saving grace. Others seek alternative approaches, and it is those that interest me at present.

It is essential, as this dissertation has maintained, to understand that our problem is largely representational. Climate, to extrapolate from the work of Timothy Morton, might be conceived as a "hyperobject"—i.e. it lies beyond our ability to properly conceive and understand it.[238] Despite the advances of meteorology and the impassioned work of climate scientists, so much of the fight against climate change lies in a perceptual and representational rift. Both climate and capitalism—with the former's immense alterity and the latter's alienated orientation toward unfettered growth—are representational nightmares,

[238] Delving into Morton's theory of hyperobjects lies beyond the scope of this chapter. For more, see *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013).

sets of innumerable processes that compose an infinitely more complex entity than the mere (or rather monstrous) sum of their parts. Sheryl Hamilton draws out a powerful dichotomy between science and SF—as they mutually inform each other, science undergoes both disenchantment and re-enchantment:

> The re-enchantment of science links science epistemologically to the wondrous elements of the SF imagination, injecting a pre-reflexive wonder back into science. Science becomes again about curiosity, braving the unknown, and the positive values of scientific inquiry. With the disenchantment of science, we have a return to the values of the scientific method as a set of techniques for the production of legitimate knowledge. (277)[239]

As such, SF remains in a bind vis-à-vis science—it alternatively disenchants, by acknowledging the scientific underpinnings of seemingly magical phenomena, and re-enchants, by building upon a sense of the marvelousness of techno-scientific innovation and constructing alternative futures.

As incessantly interpellated subjects of capitalism, we easily fall prey to the enchanting refrains of such innovation. Herein lies an essential aspect of SF—i.e. its inherently defamiliarizing orientation. As Fredric Jameson argues, rather than simply project future "images," SF works to "defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present" (1982: 151). SF deploying a kind of Brechtian estrangement capable of stirring us from our passive stupor as content consumers has long been theorized within SF studies.[240]

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[239] I've amended this citation to fit my chapter's style—"reenchantment" has been hyphenated and "sf" capitalized. Hamilton would likely agree with Eva Horn's observation that "the convergence of aesthetic and scientific depictions of the future demonstrates how literature and science, fiction and politics mutually inform and comment on one another" (15-16).

[240] For example, see Melody Jue's "Performative Science Fiction," which cites Darko Suvin on SF as the genre par excellence of estrangement, "jolting the audience out of passive viewership" (424).

How, then, might SF of the Anthropocene defamiliarize nature? Especially when the Anthropocene, under Timothy Morton's analysis, "is Nature in its toxic nightmare form," and nature, in turn, "the latent form of the Anthropocene waiting to emerge as catastrophe" (59; qtd. in Berressem 184). Following Vandana Singh's eloquent exhortation, the climate-oriented author in the Anthropocene (or Capitalocene)[241] must tell the kinds of stories that shift the prevailing narrative of what it means to be human, and thereby to free our imaginations beyond dystopia porn, the easy techno-fix, or the escape-to-another-planet—so we might once more learn what it means to belong." (429-30). Caribbean SF, to which I will now turn, often challenges and resists these low-hanging tropes of climate fiction ("cli-fi") and SF, presenting instead a more nuanced elaboration of the problems engendered by climate change.

Following centuries of slavery, colonialism, and now, for many, the legacies of post/neocolonialism, Caribbean countries necessarily share many challenges—poverty, illiteracy, crime, and climate change, to name some of the most pressing. It is unsurprising, given these struggles, that Caribbean SF has developed more gradually than in the Global North. In her "Introduction" to the postcolonial SF and fantasy anthology that she co-edited, Jamaican SF writer Nalo Hopkinson acknowledges that

> the form in which I write is European. Arguably, one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives, and as I've said elsewhere, for many of us, that's not a thrilling adventure story; it's non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of

[241] See Chapter One for an overview of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, et al.

> nowhere. To be a person of colour writing SF is to be under suspicion of having internalized one's colonization. (7)

In addition to this skepticism—that of using "the master's tools to dismantle the master's house[242]—Caribbean writers of SF generally receive less attention than writers of the Global North. While the global republic of letters is undoubtedly a complex market,[243] this might affirm to some degree how Western culture tends to construe "Blackness," or, more generally, the Global South, as "oppositional to technologically driven chronicles of progress" (Alondra Nelson, qtd. in Bould 181). A common feeling of Caribbean and other SF writers of the Global South, as expressed by Hopkinson in an interview, is that SF "speaks so much about the experience of being alienated but contains so little written by alienated people themselves" (qtd. in Nevins 2019a: 104). Indeed, politically and socioecologically oriented genres and subgenres of SF such as postcolonial SF and Afrofuturism gain additional potency and urgency when emerging from inhabitants and exiles of countries grappling seriously with neo/postcolonial conditions. In his study of Nigerian SF author Nnedi Okorafor, Joshua Yu Burnett argues that SF and speculative fiction, by dint of its unyoking from realist frameworks, is uniquely well positioned to address neo/postcolonialism (136-37). SF writ large, on the other hand, tends to remain bound, as Moritz Ingwersen argues, to a Eurocentric "epistemological-ontological system…that entertains the re-enchantment of the world as a theoretical plaything, as fiction" (422). The

[242] Hopkinson addresses this famous comment from Audre Lorde in her introduction. For context, see Lorde's 1984 talk, which came at (and heavily critiqued) NYU's Institute for the Humanities conference, published as "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007).

[243] See, for example, Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999), which scrutinizes the very relationship between center and periphery (in the context of the global literary market, translation, and more) on which Hopkinson meditates in her introduction.

stakes are much more dire for citizens of the Global South, where climate catastrophes present particularly devastating consequences. If SF, following Lisa Yaszek, "lends itself to critical methodologies of cultural history because it has always been a hybrid form," Caribbean SF builds doubly on this hybridity through its own ethnocultural polyphony (200).

By consequence, Caribbean and Caribbean-heritage SF authors tend to dispel binaries (good versus evil, colonizer versus colonized, etc.) in favor of stressing a more flexible, nuanced poetics of multicultural futurity instead. Authors such as Karen Lord and Tobias Buckell imagine distant futures populated with creolized cities; Nalo Hopkinson and Curdella Forbes consider the role of feminine, indigenous knowledges in near-future scenarios where climate change disrupts the lived urban experience; and Stephanie Saulter weaves a posthumanist paean to community in the face of both corporate and societal oppression.[244] While countless theses could—and I hope, will—emerge from these texts that have heretofore been largely overlooked within academia, this chapter will focus on urban ecology while keeping in mind the broader questions posed by SF, both in the specific context of the Caribbean and more generally.

As such, I will limit my focus in this chapter to two of the more environmentally and city-oriented texts by the above authors: Tobias Buckell's *Sly Mongoose* (2006), and Stephanie Saulter's *Regeneration* (2015). While both novels share a rather Caribbean perspective on creolization and neo/postcolonialism, and both reimagine the urban under radically different material conditions, my analyses of them will draw on differing theoretical

[244] See, for example: Lord's *The Best of All Possible Worlds* (New York: Del Rey, 2014); Buckell's *Crystal Rain* (Tor: New York, 2006); Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (New York: Warner Books, 1998); Forbes' *Ghosts* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2012); and Saulter's *Revolution* trilogy (London: Jo Fletcher, 2013-15). This is in no way meant to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a brief bibliography that shares many of the themes common to Caribbean SF and speculative fiction.

frameworks. For Buckell's novel, I will apply urban political ecology (UPE) and spatial theory; for Saulter's, my approach will also build on UPE but with greater consideration of technological and posthumanist aspects. Before turning to each author's fiction, however, I will provide an overview of UPE and spatial theory, since these perspectives provide a critical *point de départ* for my close readings.

Urban political ecology: deconstructing the urban/nature binary

The scholarship developed around urban political ecology (UPE) over the past twenty-five years or so belongs to a lineage comprising (among others) Marxist urban geography, cybernetics, urban ecology, and political economy. Largely spurred on by the work of geographer Erik Swyngedouw, UPE develops a broad framework for the study of urbanization. It does so by deploying historically and materially informed analyses of the polyphonic processes and power relations that constitute not only the urban (the local), but also the global infrastructure that continually shapes it, both materially and ideologically. UPE insists unequivocally on dispelling the fallacy that "nature and society are ontologically distinct" (Cook and Swyngedouw 1965). In doing so, many theorists of UPE draw from the actor-network theory developed by thinkers such as Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway to call attention to the innate hybridity of the urban, which ceaselessly blends the cultural and natural as well as the environmental and social (Kaika and Swyngedouw 121). Critics of UPE have argued that some scholars working within the relatively nascent discipline have "reinforced the nature-society divide it was attempting to dissolve by reinforcing its analog, the urban-rural divide" (McKinnon et al. 8). Fortunately, more recent work in UPE attempts

to rectify this via a "Lefebvrian redirection"[245] that requires moving beyond the singular urban core: "The notion of suburbanization as dependent on one centre has to be discarded as the form and life of the global suburb take shape through multiple centralizations and decentralizations" (Keil 496). Urban political ecologists have thus mobilized the foundations of their theoretical perspective to address "extended urbanization" (Lefebvre's term), or "suburbanization," in the Global South.[246]

Since at least the nineteenth century, city planners and architects have increasingly envisioned the environment as a tool for the improvement of urban living conditions, a process realized for example in the Haussmannization of Paris (Cook and Swyngedouw 1959).[247] By manipulating the city's metabolic flows, the urban space functions as "a particular process of environmental production" that necessarily operates under certain paradigms (namely capitalism) that produce "socio-environmental inequalities" (ibid, 1965). Since metabolic processes translate various materials into commodities through human labor, the resulting commodity fetishism conceals both the exploitation of labor and metabolic flows. Indeed, cities depend upon miles and miles of unseen (or little-noticed) networks of pipes, cables, electronic waves, etc. (Kaika and Swyngedouw 121). Building upon Marx's brief but suggestive writings on urban metabolism,[248] Brett Clark and John Bellamy Foster

[245] Tzaninis et al. 235. This refers to Henri Lefebvre, considered by some as the father of Marxist urban geography and perhaps best known for *La Production de l'espace* (1974) and "Le droit à la ville" (1968). For another Lefebvrian approach, see Hillary Angelo and David Wachsmuth's "Urbanizing Political Ecology: A Critique of Methodological Cityism" (2014).
[246] For instance, see Martin Arboleda's article, "In the Nature of the Non-City: Expanded Infrastructural Networks and the Political Ecology of Planetary Urbanisation," for a consideration of how UPE's focus on metabolic flows can easily extend to the sites of the Global South where raw materials are extracted. Arboleda's case study is Huasco, a rural mining village in northern Chile.
[247] See, for example, David Harvey's *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and Christopher Prendergast's *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992).
[248] Marx, for instance, defined labor as "a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature" (*Capital*, vol. 1, qtd. in Clark and Bellamy Foster 145).

point out that "rather than abiding to sustainability needs of natural systems, capital attempts to bridge whatever rifts it creates through technological fixes…without properly addressing the social causes of the metabolic rift" (147).[249] This approach, which builds upon the instrumentalist logic of settler colonialism,[250] produces further disequilibrium and thus further exploitation and injustice, which are, ultimately, ineluctably bound up "in the metabolic making and remaking of the urban under capitalism" (Cook and Swyngedouw 1967).

In response, UPE targets the "political-economic processes involved in the rewiring of human-nonhuman assemblages" and the inequalities generated thereby (ibid 1965). Bolstering this critical strategy is a more recent and strident call within UPE to incorporate perspectives of the Global South, which more frequently draw on important alternative epistemologies and methodologies, such as indigenous political ecologies and decolonizing practices (Tzaninis et al. 236). These frameworks, powerfully deployed by many Caribbean writers and activists, become increasingly essential tools in the struggle against the climate crisis and the metabolic rifts fueling it. Moreover, such non-Western approaches prove vital for combatting the growing hegemony of discourse around "sustainability," all too often a floating signifier that thrives on a "fantasy of socio-ecological cohesion" made possible by the processes of "growth-oriented neoliberal market[s]" (Cook and Swyngedouw 1962). Since many science fiction (SF) metanarratives and many large-scale urban development programs draw from utopian elements, UPE provides a compelling framework for addressing

[249] See Chapter Three for a longer discussion of metabolic rift in the context of green growth.
[250] Ecomodernism, for example, tends to envision technology as our primary hope of salvation from the climate crisis while overlooking the colonial and capitalist context underpinning this "techno-solutionnisme" (François Jarrige's term; see Ch's. I and III).

the question of utopia in both SF and sub/urbanization. Stefan Kipfer's view of the urban, for instance, extrapolates eloquently to SF and speculative fiction in that both "mediat[e] between macro- and micro-levels of reality and possibility" (68).

From within the realm of SF, authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin savage the "utopian imagination" as "trapped, like capitalism and industrialism…in a one-way future consisting only of growth" (1989a: 85). The growth-oriented models of neoliberal capitalism, however, prioritize technological developments and economic advancements for an elite global minority at the expense of the environment and workers. Cook and Swyngedouw criticize the rhetoric of sustainability because it typically privileges economic imperatives ahead of environmental ones, and little if ever addresses problems of inequality and environmental (in)justice. Discourse around sustainability often seems particularly intent on assuaging the conscience of the guilt-ridden Western consumer. In this way, it is not unlike utopian fiction as theorized by Fredric Jameson, who argues that the "devices of spatial closure and separation" fundamental to the genre "[are] formally required for the establishment of some 'pure' and positive utopian space, thus always tend[ing] to betray the ultimate contradictions in the production of utopian figures and narratives" (155). Utopian literature, Jameson contends, ultimately reinforces "our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself," which is fitting given utopia's etymological definition of "no-place" (153). "Sustainability" similarly offers the appearance of a solution that remains largely illusory, a figurative "no-place" akin to the massive gap between discourse and action on sustainability from fossil fuel companies (which would be laughable if it were not so lamentable). While much of the current conversation around utopia and sustainability is commendable and well-meaning, much of it is also, unfortunately, disingenuous and a product of the very uncertainties that

arise from excessive faith in technoscientific progress. In many ways, this serves as a continuation of the positivism perpetuated by thinkers of urban modernity in the nineteenth century (e.g. Haussmann). UPE, on the other hand, resists the distracting monolith of "sustainability" as a force that "sidelines other ethical concerns" (Sharachchandra 48). With a focus instead on the pragmatic, material concerns of urbanization—such as urban resilience and adaptation—UPE openly prefers an acceptance of complexity and uncertainty that necessarily emerges from the unfathomably intricate processes of capital, climate, and sub/urbanization.

Grasping the urban thus requires a certain degree of demystification from neoliberal development programs and discourses of sustainability. To better understand the role of space and place in processes of social exclusion and injustice, spatial theory nicely complements UPE, as both attempt to strip away at the fetish character of the surface to analyze the mechanisms below. In "Effets de lieux," for instance, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu notes precisely this phantasmagoric character of urban space: "l'espace social se retraduit dans l'espace physique, mais toujours de manière plus ou moins *brouillée*" (160). Taken together, spatial theory and UPE present a multi-faceted approach that aligns well with Félix Guattari's "ecosophy," which contends that we cannot "recreate a healthy relationship to the biosphere except by reinventing the socius and the psyche" ("Drawing, Cities, Nomads" 118). Guattari's "three ecologies"—environmental, social, and psychical—require accompanying engagements with creativity and unorthodox epistemologies to productively reimagine urbanism. In this spirit, I now turn to the fiction (and interviews) of Tobias Buckell and Stephanie Saulter, two Caribbean SF authors who pose important questions

about urban resiliency and adaptability, the potential answers to which may prove vital to renewing our vision of urban ecology.

Tobias Buckell and the urban inequalities of the Global North/South

Science-fiction (SF) and fantasy author Tobias Buckell grew up on boats in Grenada and the Virgin Islands. Given his eventual relocation to the U.S., and now long-standing residency there, Buckell describes himself "as an in-between sort of person" when it comes to defining his idea of home (qtd. in Nevins 136). He also considers himself a "climate refugee," as the devastation of the 1995 Atlantic hurricane season drove his family from the Virgin Islands—that year saw five major hurricanes, eleven hurricanes, nineteen (named) storms, and twenty-one tropical cyclones.[251] Before the cataclysmic arrivals of Luis and Marilyn, among others, Buckell felt an innate desire to imbue his Caribbean surroundings with the otherworldly inhabitants and objects he voraciously consumed in SF and fantasy stories:

> I have memories from seventh grade sitting in Charlotte Amalie harbour and drawing these giant starships as if they were cruise ships and trying to bring in the landscape around me with science fictional content… I'd draw aliens or spaceships in the Caribbean, but then looking at all the fiction I'm reading, I didn't see anything like that. How do I get in there and carve a space for myself? At first it was by doing exactly what they were doing with little tweaks, then later realizing that I could be more radical than that and see if it works. (Vivian 2022a: 173-74)

[251] For perspective, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) considers an average season to produce roughly twelve named storms, six hurricanes, and two major hurricanes.

Publishing his very first stories at only eighteen or nineteen, Buckell's fiction raised urban and ecological issues from the outset, though he acknowledges that it took him some time to enter the more ecologically focused niche of later works such as *Arctic Rising* (2012) and *Hurricane Fever* (2014).

When asked about the importance of addressing environmental themes in SF, Buckell makes a compelling comparison to the "atomic fiction" of the 1950s. Following the development of atomic and nuclear weapons during the Cold War, it comes as little surprise that this theme dominated that era's SF. Yet, Buckell argues, that doesn't mean it should have been the *only* focus. Nonetheless, he shares that he "wrote those novels out of a kind of sense of wonderment that SF wasn't dealing with climate change in the way that we dealt with the atomic age in the '50s and '60s" (ibid, 171). He also takes issue with how popular culture frequently portrays climate catastrophes, à la films such as *San Andreas*, featuring Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, in which people immediately lose their humanity and begin looting. Instead of rapid social dissolution in the face of external, climate-driven threats, his novels tend to focus on communities and their ultimate perseverance: "One of the things I'm trying to figure out how to do, both as a human being and a writer," he shared in our interview, "is communicate the complexity of community" (ibid, 178). Buckell also recognizes the distinct precarity of the Caribbean as a low-lying archipelago "on the leading edge of climate change" and also the last link of the supply chain:

> I look at these complex systems…look at what happened just during COVID-19 when manufacturing was disrupted. [For] example, when one of the last hurricanes hit

> Puerto Rico, we had saline-bag crises all across the US because so many of our saline bags were produced there. (ibid, 172)[252]

In the third novel of his Xenowealth series, *Sly Mongoose*, to which I will now turn, Buckell shows precisely how the marginalized people of the planet Chilo face supply-chain issues and struggle to acquire the parts they need to make a living.

Buckell's construction of Chilo, the setting of *Sly Mongoose*, takes inspiration from Venus as they are both planets with "sulfuric acid-laced clouds, crushing pressure, no breathable atmosphere"—as the narrator wryly understates, "not somewhere most would call home" (7). At a certain elevation, however, the Venusian atmosphere loses its toxicity, compelling Buckell to imagine cities that could theoretically float there (given the laws of gravity).[253] The novel thus develops Chilo as a compelling microcosm of our own planetary struggles with climate change, (sub)urbanization, and the inequities and political power struggles contained within these two interrelated processes. Despite the "hurricanelike winds" and 800-degree temperatures of the surface, two groups do call Chilo home: the people of Yapatek, who are poor, technologically constrained, and live closer to the surface; and the Aeolians, who are wealthier, more technologically sophisticated, and live higher above. It is thus tempting to read the two peoples as generally representative of the Global South and Global North, respectively. That said, the novel resists this black-and-white

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[252] In our interview, I seconded that climate catastrophes bring particular focus to otherwise largely ignored processes such as supply chain movements. Ben Lerner's novel *10:04* expresses this, for instance, when the narrator recounts what it was like in New York City as Hurricane Sandy arrived:

> It was as if the social relations that produced the object in my hand began to glow within it as they were threatened, stirred inside their packaging, lending it a certain aura—the majesty and murderous stupidity of that organization of time and space and fuel and labor becoming visible in the commodity itself now that planes were grounded and the highways were starting to close. (19)

[253] Buckell confided in our interview that the idea for *Sly Mongoose*'s setting emerged directly from his attendance of a conference on Venus by Geoffrey Landis, a NASA scientist and award-winning hard SF author (174).

characterization by making both peoples refugees, which captures a point Buckell stresses about Caribbean identity: there are common bonds that Caribbean people share as former colonial subjects in the same region, but they are nonetheless quite diverse—as Buckell puts it, that's a key part of "what makes the Caribbean fascinating—it's not just one thing" (qtd. in Nevins 107).

These two peoples, despite both inhabiting Chilo, similarly reveal commonalities as well as stark differences, which are expressed in their agriculture, economies, urban planning (or lack thereof), political systems, technologies, etc. The precarity of the slums of Yapatek evokes the *favelas*, *bidonvilles*, and other informal urban settlements found throughout our contemporary world (and especially in the postcolonial Global South). While the lower levels of Yapatek suffer somewhat from the toxicity of Venus' surface, the Aeolians live in well-designed, hyper-efficient cities that float up higher with better air quality. The Yapatek largely survive through their system of *xocoyotzin*, which was inherited from their more technologically advanced ancestors and involves mining precious metals at the toxic surface of Chilo. The problem is that this work requires special "groundsuits," which are quite small and fit primarily young, skinny boys. One of the main characters, Timas, is a *xocoyotzin* whose family encourages him to purge himself after meals and restrict his eating in order to maintain the slight form required to fit the suits. They lack the wealth and materials to make new, larger ones, and whereas their ancestors could take a pill or get surgery to be svelte, the impoverished inhabitants of Yapatek must rely on a group of malnourished boys. By contrast, the Aeolians, with their more advanced society and higher altitude, cull their "ores and materials from asteroids" in space (31).

The vast financial, ideological, and technological rifts between these two peoples allows Buckell to present and interrogate the subsequent differences in urban development. The only comfortable part of Yapatek is the topmost layer where the *xocoyotzin* and their families live, with the majority of the space devoted to agriculture. The Aeolians, however, live much more efficiently in terms of land use. Rather than large tracts of traditional agriculture, the Aeolians grow food with hydroponic gardens at the core of their cities. In fact, Katerina, the young Aeolian delegate who visits Timas and his family, seems perturbed by the prospect of eating meat and opts for rice and beans instead,[254] suggesting perhaps a more evolved sense of morality and environmental harmony that moves beyond unsustainable anthropocentrism. Indeed, the narrator directly compares the structure of Aeolian cities to that of bees:

> It was packed with catwalks, tramlines, tube elevators, and a densely packed honeycomb of houses connected by latticework. It was like looking into a human hive. Some advanced materials, stretching with the city, but holding millions of people in that space where Yapatek had nothing but air and sun shining through the upper layer over its crops. (259)

The text further evokes Global North/South relations through tourism—a hallmark, of course, of the Caribbean economy:

> [Timas] knew [the Aeolians] like to fly out to Yapatek to enjoy the large and open upper layer for vacations. No wide-open spaces in their packed cities. Hand-made

[254] "Meat, even for xocoyotzin, is not very plentiful," Timas said. "We don't have the land for grazing." "Grazing…animals." Katerina looked upset for a second. "I'll have beans and rice."

> Timas felt like he'd failed some test with her. She had this look on her face like his mother did when she'd had to visit one of her cousins in the lower layers, deep in the city near the recycling plains. (37)

> crafts from the lower-level markets also attracted them. For the Aeolians the price of a flight here cost little, even though most on Yapatek couldn't afford to leave. (32)

In fact, the narrative has a habit of concretizing the importance of space and its relation to capital. The people of Yapatek, as Pierre Bourdieu observes of the impoverished,

> sont tenus à distance, soit physiquement, soit symboliquement, des biens socialement les plus rares et condamnés à côtoyer les personnes ou les biens les plus indésirables et les moins rares. Le défaut de capital intensifie l'expérience de la finitude : il enchaîne à un lieu. (165)

Effectively chained in place, the impoverished Yapatek citizens suffer as the inevitable underclass of a system that relies on hierarchical divisions, reinforced both literally and symbolically by their patriarchal form of governance (a council of male elders) and the verticality of their city and relation to the Aeolians.

This spatial aspect that dominates the novel thus contains the socioecological concerns inherent to (sub)urbanization while also affirming SF's inclination for highly visual tropes that correspond well with the practices of urban planning and architectural design. Indeed, the French architect Le Corbusier envisioned a future urban landscape recast as "a *vertical* city…high above the earth, bathed in light and air,"[255] just like the upper layer of Yapatek and the Aeolian cities. SF and urban planning/design have long been mutually generative, and a generation prior to Le Corbusier, H. G. Wells imagined vertical cities for two works, *The Sleeper Awakes* and "A Story of Days to Come." In them, the industrial poor live in dark, insalubrious underworlds, while the wealthy live high up above in

[255] From the 1925 text *Urbanisme*, translated by Frederick Etchells as *The City of To-Morrow and its Planning* (New York: Dover, 1987; qtd. in Hewitt and Graham 924).

interconnected luxury hotels. As with *Sly Mongoose*, the "vertical city…[is] not simply a transformation of space…[but] fundamentally connected to new forms of social organisation" (Hewitt and Graham 927). Indeed, while Timas and his family, thanks to his status as *xocoyotzin*, live in the relative comfort of the top layer—it features gardens, clean air, and constant sunlight—the rest of the populace suffers in the layers below. After the death of one *xocoyotzin*, his family must relocate to the lower levels, "where the city crowded on top of itself, where little light reached the buildings, and the alleys smelled of humanity, industry, and badly recycled air" (29). While the Aeolians have apparently mastered the art of cleanly and efficiently constructing and maintaining a densely populated urban grid, the middle levels of Yapatek reveal "houses jammed together…many of [which] looked unsuited to stand, strung between wires reaching from the bottom of one lay er down to the next… Tight alleyways, dirty and filled with litter, disappeared behind the doors as they shut" (23).

Sly Mongoose thus takes full advantage of its verticalized setting and its inherent connection to class relations. As Hewitt and Graham observe,

> The use of the vertical axis to explore social divisions appeals to a symbolic gesture…frequently grounded in the metaphor of spatial geometry. In social terms, the vertical implies hierarchy; deployed in spatial terms the vertical highlights and concretises inequities. (929)

In addition to socioecological issues, the novel also poses political questions related to just governance. While a small council of male elders governs the people of Yapatek, the Aeolians participate in a highly horizontalized form of democracy in which every member

constantly votes on every issue at hand.[256] Ostensibly a better form of government, Buckell's novel raises important questions about the strengths and weaknesses of both systems. As Erik Swyngedouw warns,

> The socially innovative figures of horizontally organised stakeholder arrangements of governance that appear to empower civil society in the face of an apparently overcrowded and "excessive" state, may, in the end, prove to be the Trojan Horse that diffuses and consolidates the "market" as the principal institutional form. (2005: 2003)

In the context of Chilo, the Yapatek people pejoratively refer to Aeolians as "zombies" because they often interact in a strange and halting manner—à la Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—as they process information and refer to their fellow citizens' input. In her analysis of the novel, Andrea Shaw Nevins believes this may imply that "the collective behavior of Western societies is not unlike the thoughtless and robotic behavior of the Swarm [an alien intelligence that serves as the novel's primary threat]" (119).

While I would argue that *Sly Mongoose* in many ways resists purely black-and-white delineations, it is true that this perspective maps well onto a reading of the novel as an allegory for the Global North/South. In this context, the global poor must learn to live in suboptimal conditions by recycling, mining, and developing resilient informal urbanisms.[257]

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[256] Referred to as "the Consensus," the Aeolian form of governance often leads Aeolians (such as Katerina, the main Aeolian character in the novel) to speak in the first-person plural. Through free and indirect discourse, Timas even wonders, "Had that been the Aeolians speaking, or just her?" (113). When another character, Pepper, critiques their system of government, Katerina makes the analogy that "governing without consent" is akin to rape, i.e. "sex without consent" (112).

[257] For a UPE-inflected case study on urban waste and recycling, see Henrik Ernston et al., "Turning Livelihood to Rubbish? The Politics of Value and Valuation in South Africa's Urban Waste Sector" (*African Cities and Collaborative Futures*, eds. Michael Keith and Andreza Aruska de Souza Santos. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2021).

As Buckell shared in our interview, he was thinking "of those developing world groups that basically subsist off of another country's trash" (175). Meanwhile, the global rich continue to live and consume relatively mindlessly as it pertains to the impact of their own way of life on other parts of the world and the environmental degradation to which they contribute both directly and indirectly. In *Sly Mongoose*, at least, the Aeolians live in a far more harmonious and intelligent rapport with their environment, mastering urban and agricultural efficiency precisely by melding the two. The citizens of Yapatek, on the other hand, exiled from their lush home planet, New Anegada, struggle to adapt to the conditions of Chilo, where only the topmost layer of their city can support agriculture. Making things more difficult is a lack of means to raise themselves out of poverty. For example, Katerina quizzes Timas about a "rusted machine" they walk by, asking, "Is that a harvester?" (35) Timas replies, "*The* harvester," which had broken down again (ibid). "Nothing unusual there," Timas thinks to himself (ibid). The brute reality of poverty keeps the people of Yapatek in a despair-inducing cycle of scarcity (much as we saw in the Haiti of Jacques Roumain and Yanick Lahens in Ch's. III and IV).

As for the Aeolians, the obvious "North" of this Global South/North dichotomy, their form of government, the Aeolian Consensus, "uses techno-democracy to handle self-governance" (38). An unabashed integration of technology with radically democratic ideals enables the Aeolians to live in compact, dense cities with relative ease. Katerina tells Timas, "You have, what, forty thousand people living in Yapatek? In Eupatoria it's more like a quarter of a million, and our city is the same size" (38). Buckell's insistence on forms of governance—something like a tribal council in Yapatek and "techno-democracy" for the Aeolians—points to an unescapable fact of sustainable urban development: governments

shape material and ideological conditions, and these in turn shape social bonds and quality of life. In her reading of Sheila Foster's work, Adrian Parr argues that "Social capital…creates an urban commons through which the bonds of neighborliness, community activities and revitalization projects, and networks of trust return and turn around the blight associated with 'unproductive' land" (105).[258] The Yapatek people's (sub)urban chaos reflects their poor social cohesion, whereas the Aeolians' urban orderliness mirrors their strong social cohesion, which serves as both prerequisite and motor for governmental efficiency. Ultimately, however, this level of governance relies on relatively stable material well-being, something the Yapatek clearly lack. When it comes to successful urban development, the novel strongly suggests, capital and democratic governance are crucial. In this way, the Aeolians stand in for the Global North but also move beyond it, due to their superior governance and urbanization. They remind us that capital fuels development, whether sustainable or not, and that the Global North largely built itself up—literally in the case of Chilo—on the backs of the Global South (i.e. via their labor and resources). As we will see, the primary protagonists of Stephanie Saulter's *Revolution* trilogy emerge, like the Aeolians, from a downtrodden position as refugees into leaders of urban ecology, innovation, and resilience, all the while revealing how crises and marginalization can spur more equitable (and ecological) forms of governance.

[258] See Parr's compelling argument, in *Birth of a New Earth: The Radical Politics of Environmentalism* (2017), that our "environmental and climate crises contain the political potential to radically change social life so it evolves into a more equitable, inclusive, collaborative, and voluntary social system" (xii).

Stephanie Saulter's posthumanist allegory: Greening the sci-fi city

Born in Jamaica, Stephanie Saulter grew up, like Tobias Buckell, absorbing a great deal of science fiction (SF) and fantasy. As an undergraduate at MIT, she pivoted from the sciences to the humanities, taking courses in literature and anthropology. She has lived in London for many years now and has long worked in urban regeneration, which is a key theme of her largely London-set *Revolution* trilogy, comprising *Gemsigns*, *Binary*, and *Regeneration*. In our first interview, she acknowledges literary inspirations such as *Brave New World, The Chrysalids, Dune,* and *Frankenstein*, noting, of the latter, that "he's only a monster because someone else was a monster first. And that's something that I certainly wanted to pick up on because my writing was about how damage perpetuates" (Vivian 2022b).[259] Well-equipped to write literary SF given her hybrid academic background, Saulter felt a desire to write the kinds of stories—biomedical and social SF—that she wasn't seeing, and her keen interest in genetics and technology led her to consider the ways we're living "in a world that we didn't evolve for" (ibid).

The darkly latent possibilities within technological development thus provide inspiration for the trilogy's backstory, which involves "the Syndrome," a neurological disorder that wipes out huge numbers of the youth population due to the deleterious effects of too much "infotech." In the wake of the Syndrome and the subsequent population die-off (what is sometimes referred to as a "genetic bottleneck"), companies begin engineering humans to fulfill a dire need for labor. The thrust of the *Revolution* trilogy thus grapples with the ethical and sociopolitical ramifications of the genetic manipulation of humans. A far cry from the caped heroes with farfetched and whimsical backstories that we often see in the DC

[259] My first interview with Saulter is published online in *sx salon* 40 without pagination.

and Marvel universes, these genetically modified humans are designed for specific and pragmatic purposes—e.g. altitude resistance for mountaintop mining; superhuman sense of smell for toxic waste detection; or the ability to breathe underwater. These designer humans, created in labs à la *Brave New World*, are known as "gems" (in contrast to "norms") and powerfully evoke the marginalized people of the past and present while also speculating on the superhuman-cum-posthuman.[260] Saulter does not hide this fact, relating in our interview that "the gems are essentially the descendants of slavery" (ibid). "What does it mean," she wanted to ask in the trilogy, "to come into existence as a being who has been commodified and only understood in terms of your financial value?" (ibid). Conscious of avoiding simplistic binaries such as colonizer/colonized, master/slave, etc., Saulter ensures that the gem/norm relation is a nuanced one:

> One of the things I'm very conscious of, and it's particularly present for me as a mixed-race but light-skinned Caribbean person, is the way in which dominant cultures often regard the minority groups as monolithic—Muslims are…; African Americans are…; disabled people are… —without taking into account that everyone is an individual and all these aspects are intersectional…
>
> So, it was very important for me that for the most part the gems are all different from each other and not just different from the norms. (ibid)

The gems, the novels make clear, must also be understood on their own terms and not only vis-à-vis the "norm," i.e. the norms. This recalls Cary Wolfe's criticism of what he terms

[260] My sense of the posthuman follows this overview presented by Jami Weinstein and Claire Colebrook: "In addition to the three senses already described—the literal disappearance of humans, enhancement of humans (Bostrom), and technological coupling (Hayles)—Cary Wolfe deploys the posthuman as a method for destabilizing the human species' claims for distinction" (xv). In spite of the "post" prefix, I am using posthuman here as Katherine Hayles does, in the sense of "the end of a certain conception of the human" (qtd. in Oppermann 276).

"humanist posthumanism," which attempts to add animals to a humanist paradigm "while keeping the category of the human coherent and distinct…do[ing] little to advance the human beyond itself" (Weinstein and Colebrook xv).

As such, Saulter focuses on both the commonalities and differences within the gem population, particularly with the gillungs in the trilogy's final novel, *Regeneration*. This chapter will primarily analyze *Regeneration* as it offers the most extensive interrogation of socioecological questions, such as the development of new renewable energy sources and a redefinition of urban sustainability. It is the "gillungs" who allow her not only to consider both a cohesive unit within the diversity of the gems, but also the long-term effects of climate change and the next possible energy revolution: "Coming up with the gillungs was…a recognition that this would be a world with more sea. So there would have been a commercial imperative to create the gillungs as an amphibious subspecies." Brilliant engineers who have had to adapt to a hostile environment as part of their very existence, gillungs lead the way following the "Declaration," which emancipates the gems from indentured servitude and their creators, the "bioindustrialist conglomerates" known as "gemtechs." Saulter's trilogy, with the help of the gillungs and *Regeneration* in particular, helps us reimagine both the human and the urban for a more resilient and egalitarian future.

Skeptical of the city/nature binary that traditional urban political ecology (UPE) a priori dismisses, Saulter believes that writers of SF and speculative fiction are missing out on the potential to explore the efficiency of "green" cities. In her trilogy, descriptions of the "Squats," the home of the gem refugees, attest to a renewed sense of the possibilities of the urban. In the wake of the Syndrome, the once fashionable center of London emptied out as

people "dispersed into the more spacious suburbs that ringed the center" (I, 10).[261] Now, following the "international edicts outlawing retrieval and indenture, the derelict buildings had become a haven for thousands of gems suddenly released into communities unprepared, ill-equipped, and often unwilling to handle the influx" (II, 13). Due to widespread prejudice, the gem refugees prefer to live among other gems in the Squats, with "ninety percent of the gems in London" living there (I, 31). The Squats reveal a unique predilection for natural materials, bricolage, recycling, and efficiency. They embody Andrew Ballantyne's observation that "what buildings produce most often is a territory—a space where a particular order prevails or seems implicit" (60). The way of life in the Squats is not only environmentally friendly, with solar collectors, water capture, waste reclamation, and rooftop gardens, but highly practical, showing how "green tech" can be "low tech" and still create a much higher quality of life. The narrator takes pains to describe the ways in which the gems recycle and reuse,[262] and Saulter shared in our interview that she made a point of including

> people having to recycle and repurpose in the Squats with the rooftop gardens. It's probably because they're outcasts and they have no resources, and because they're living in a world that's still recovering from catastrophe so there aren't a lot of shiny new resources lying around anyway, but it's also what poor people do wherever they live. You don't just throw something away. You find a way to repurpose it. And that I think is something which isn't explored enough in an urban context. (Vivian 2022b)

[261] My citations from Saulter's trilogy will list the volume number—I, II, or III, corresponding to *Gemsigns*, *Binary*, and *Regeneration*—and then page number.

[262] To cite one example:

> [Aryel's] seat was one of the many bits and pieces of waste material that the people of the Squats had recycled to a new purpose, sparking a wave of retro-industrial chic: an old piece of metal ventilation tubing, capped and upended into a stubby cylinder. Normally it served as a stool for stepping up to harvest from the higher branches [of the apple trees], or sitting beneath them to rest. Now it formed a plinth for the still life she made… (II; 276)

The trilogy capitalizes on its multi-generational framework to underline the evolution of the Squats from an impoverished, informal settlement to a shining example of not only the gems' innovation but also their ascendancy from social exclusion to inclusion and even celebrity.[263] *Gemsigns*, for instance, the first volume, notes that the Squats "had been barely noticeable" for a long time, "a tiny tract of alien territory carved out of the heart of London" (I, 8). By the time we get to *Regeneration*, however, the Squats have been rebranded as "Riveredge Village," since no one is technically squatting anymore (III, 29).

In *Regeneration* another vitally important setting is the Sinkat basin, home to much of the gillung population and the epicenter of much of the novel's conflict. We learn how the gillung prototypes restored the channel connecting the basin to the river, then, following the emancipatory Declaration, reclaimed the area "as the fruits of their forebears' uncompensated labor" (III, 89).[264] Thames Tidal Power, the renewable energy project of the gillungs, also plans to invest in building an estuary town. The simple fact that everything would be designed (i.e. optimized) for gillungs is an immense benefit; the downside is that this might create a further sense of segregation. In this way, Saulter's trilogy is particularly attuned to the role of urban ecology in the binary of inclusion-exclusion. While the gems establish themselves as a chic presence in the heart of London, the narrator describes "an uneasy amalgamation of undecided environments" just outside of the city (III, 150). We see how other-than-human nature take its revenge where what was once suburbia has become "a hinterland, neither city nor country…neither tamed nor truly wild" (ibid). The "corpse of a

[263] My interview with Tobias Buckell also discusses this, i.e. how trilogies/extended series allow for the writer to "show change and transition, adaptation," etc. (175). By the second volume *Binary* certain gems have capitalized on their superhuman abilities, becoming chic and popular in the process.
[264] This echoes, of course, the concept of reparations, yet another parallel between the gems and the history of slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas.

commercial district" at once personifies architecture, extending humanness to objects of our design, and repeats a common trope in the post-apocalyptic/post-climate imaginary, as "the land humans had abandoned was being reclaimed, slowly and untidily, but steadily nonetheless" (ibid). The narrator then juxtaposes this brief but visually potent scene with the arrival to London and its crowded buildings of "polished aggregate and biosynthetic finishes" (III, 151). The novel thus shows how urban centers can thrive more durably than their suburbanized outskirts, particularly when attention is paid to equitable distribution of goods and property. As Mike Davis argues, "the cornerstone of the low-carbon city, far more than any particular green design or technology, is the priority given to public affluence over private wealth" (43).[265]

Above all, what *Regeneration* shows is that the "ecological genius of the city" can, in fact, save it, so long as "we are willing to make democratic public space, rather than modular, private consumption, the engine of sustainable equality" (ibid). As Patrick Chamoiseau does in *Texaco* (see Ch. II), Saulter insists on an upstart urbanism that may not adhere to conventional modalities but reflects the innovation and diversity of its inhabitants. Writing on Martinique, urbanist and politician Serge Letchimy contends that "Il y a…immanence de nouveaux modes de vie et de nouvelles pratiques, issues du processus d'appropriation de l'espace urbain par les ruraux" (29). What Letchimy sees with informal urbanism in

[265] Take, for example, the city of Teotihuacan in the pre-Aztec Americas, where a "lack" of modern technology did not preclude them from high-functioning, egalitarian urban renewal:

> founded around 100 BC…[it] was almost certainly the largest city in the pre-colonial Americas. The metropolis was first constructed on a monumental scale, with the kind of pyramids and palaces that indicate social hierarchy. At a certain point, however, the people of Teotihuacan decided against investing in more fancy villas. Instead, Graeber and Wengrow write, 'the citizens embarked on a remarkable project of urban renewal, supplying high-quality apartments for nearly all the city's population, regardless of wealth or status.' They accomplished all of this without wheeled vehicles, sailing ships, animal-powered traction, or advanced metallurgy. (Gideon Lewis-Kraus, "Early Civilizations Had It All Figured Out," *The New Yorker*, 1 November 2021)

Martinique finds expression in Saulter via the outsider gems' adoption and adaptation of urban space. As writers such as Stewart Brand[266] and Hewitt and Graham argue, the adaptability and resilience shown by such forms of informal urbanism reveal the kind of robust creativity needed to develop the urban in more innovative and sustainable ways (926). There is another aspect to this resilience that stems from marginalization. In his nonfiction work *The Great Derangement,* Amitav Ghosh suggests that people in developing countries are often more resilient in crises simply because they are accustomed to it. Implying a kind of habitus of resiliency, he writes that, "in many parts of the global south, breakdowns [such as power failures] are a way of life, and everybody is used to improvisations and work-arounds" (147). In *Regeneration* it is the gillungs who epitomize this kind of resiliency (but also innovation and sustainability), most notably through Thames Tidal Power, whose very architecture embodies these elements.[267]

Indeed, the same elements of adaptability and innovation shown in the Squats find expression in the technologies developed by the gillungs, about whom we start learning more in the second book, *Binary*. Although just glimpses, they are revealing. For example, we learn that the gillungs produce algae-based textiles as well as surplus energy that they can

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[266] In his *Whole Earth Discipline,* Brand contends that "The magic of squatter cities is that they are improved steadily and gradually, increment by increment, by the people living there. Each home is built that way and so is the whole community" (42). While Brand's book quite arguably takes an overly optimistic view of life in informal urban settlements, the development of the Squats in Saulter's trilogy very much reflects his point about incremental improvement.

[267] The most thorough (and sumptuous) description of the building comes early in *Regeneration* and foreshadows the outsized role that Thames Tidal Power and the gillungs will have in the trilogy finale:

> The ovoid building sat at the terminus of the quay, all shiny, pearl-white curves soaring high above the hard edges of recycled stone and reinforced concrete, plunging down into the waves that lapped against it. Twelve convex wedges of tough, translucent thermal membrane, like the segments of a giant, elongated orange, were supported on a dense biopolymer scaffold embedded with the nanoscale capacitors of the company's quantum-battery technology. Two-thirds of the structure gleamed solid in the sunshine topside; the rest appeared to waver and flex in the dappling brown water below. The energy efficiency and seductively organic design of the building had made it famous, and celebrated. Gabriel felt a familiar surge of pride in his revolutionary workplace. (III, 13).

then sell to the city (II, 128-29). We also see how they have better business practices that stand in stark contrast with the gemtechs—who, ironically, created them—as well as the biomass conglomerates that fear the competition created by the gillungs' tidal energy in *Regeneration*: "Apparently the aquatech buyers," a gillung relates, "don't see why they should be required to maintain the same environmental standards in their onshore operations as well. Don't think it should be any of the gillungs' concern" (II, 211). The gillungs' insistence on high environmental standards and a more horizontally structured business model adheres to Lele Sharachchandra's belief that we need to be "insisting upon much greater democratic control over the innovation process than capitalism and technological hubris has hitherto allowed" (60). Pilan, who heads the operations of Thames Tidal Power (henceforth TTP), defends the plant in the course of an investigation into sabotage by arguing that "no one here is *employed* in the usual way. This is a cooperative—so *everyone* owns a share of the business. Everyone stands to win if it does well, and we all lose out if it doesn't" (III, 53). Unfortunately, TTP must contend with hysterical backlash to their efforts, due to anti-gem zealots and spambots unleashed by rivals such as Standard BioSolutions. On the "socialstreams," a loose analogue of Twitter, these people and bots offer up anonymous criticisms such as the following:

> — Quantum storage could be a catastrophe for Thames Estuary.
>
> — What about fishes crabs plants etc. [sic] Power radiation equipment, what will it do to them?
>
> — What'll it do to US? Eat quantum-farmed lobster! Grow your own gills!
>
> — Is that true?
>
> — Guess we'll find out! (III, 57)

TTP must counteract the misinformation by appealing to science and common sense (e.g. "Environmental Management confirms healthy ecosystems, no damage to wildlife"), but also through the aesthetics of their green technology (e.g. via "a beautifully composed vid sequence that conveyed the immense power of the tides, [and] showed how that power was captured by the turbine and contained in the delicate cells of the quantum batteries") (III, 58; 61).

Yet despite their contributions to the city through TTP and serving as a model for sustainable living, the gillungs face stiff and insidious competition from the biomass conglomerates. Standard BioSolutions recognizes that TTP's quantum storage carries "the potential to wipe out the biomass industry completely" and thus seek out a deal where they would gain access to TTP's "nanoscale bioelectric storage, the secret to growing the layers of cellular substrate that could safely sequester vast amounts of energy" (III, 27; 40). TTP declines, however, resulting in the wrath of "Bankside BioMass and agricultural technicians-turned-terrorists" who engineer a toxin to poison the gillungs, which they hope will sow doubts about TTP and create concerns about the safety of the gillungs integrating fully into society (III, 211). Ultimately, the gillungs, with the help of other gems and the London Metropolitan Police, uncover the bioterrorist plot. Nonetheless, Saulter's novel points to a worrying concern: to what depths will the long-standing titans of industry go to undermine renewable energy—as well as the kind of green urban innovations found among the gems/gillungs—to protect their bottom line? This underlines the ethical concerns perpetually present when science, technology, and commerce interact under growth-at-all-costs capitalism.

Such fears motivate Lele Sharachchandra's call for training scientists and engineers in ethics and sociology, and Mike Davis' belief that tackling sustainable urban development "presupposes a radical willingness to think beyond the horizon of neo-liberal capitalism toward a global revolution that reintegrates the labour of the informal working classes, as well as the rural poor, in the sustainable reconstruction of their built environments and livelihoods," two scenarios that Saulter eloquently stages via the multicultural and resilient gems of her *Revolution* trilogy (63; 45).

Conclusion

The Caribbean, the urban, and science fiction (SF)—all hybrid places/spaces/forms—work together in Buckell and Saulter's novels to potent effect. Against the hegemonic discourses of Western imperialism and their legacies of oppression, Caribbean SF authors frequently subvert the discourses on which they depend—patriarchy, colonialism, market-fueled climate devastation and wealth inequality—and instead point the way to a more egalitarian, community-based, socioecologically sound future. Literature, particularly the modern novel, with its Bakhtinian plasticity,[268] can help us attain greater empathy and a desire for more just and collective action. As Rob Nixon has pointed out, writers (e.g. Émile Zola and Upton Sinclair) have long treated "individual character as secondary to collective metamorphosis," which I would argue is the case for the Buckell and Saulter novels

[268] In Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis, the novel is "plasticity itself," the "sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted" and contains "a certain semantic open-endedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the open-ended present)" (39; 3; 7). Moreover, theorists such as Adam Trexler have argued that the novel's "multivocal and dialogical nature" makes it "approximately akin to the complex networking of ideas needed to make sense of our new epoch [the Anthropocene]" (qtd. in Craps and Crownshaw 3). Craps and Crownshaw further elaborate that the novel's ability—particularly in SF, horror, and speculative fiction—to represent "vast scales of time and space" enables it to cover ground "commensurate with the planetary processes of climate change" (ibid).

examined in this chapter. In particular, novels of "science fiction," understood via its most basic and obvious definition, i.e. as "science" *and* "fiction," fuse two seemingly incompatible modes, resulting in the often heady melding of scientific rationality and fictional possibility. On biotechnology, a highly science fictional domain[269] and crucial aspect of Saulter's *Revolution* trilogy, Sheryl N. Hamilton argues that "[it] takes on some of the sense of wonder of science fiction. It is anchored in a present that is the visionary future of an historical imagination. To know the future, we must combine imagination with science" (273). Intellectual curiosity cannot occur without an openness to wonder, to the unknown. And, as Eva Horn points out, science fictional scenarios "are more poignant than sociological averages… [and they] create not only the future but, above all, the present, that is, the reality in which we live, or at least our notion of it" (10-11).

Eschewing runaway capitalism's unsustainable dogma of endless growth, both SF and urban political ecology (UPE) allow us to imagine more adaptable, efficient, resilient, and equitable urbanisms. Creatives naturally think about posterity, and future (i.e. long-distant) reception of SF is no guarantee (for many possible reasons). All one can really hope for is that one's work will carry some future value, an idea Saulter gestured at poignantly during our interview: "I don't want to write the *end* of stories; I want to write stories that implicitly allow other great stories within that frame I've built to continue to happen, even if I'm not writing them" (Vivian 2022b). Sustainability makes for perhaps an unsurprising theme, then, when writing with the intent that your stories bear the potential to germinate and

[269] See, for example, books such as Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*, Jeff VanderMeer's *Borne*, Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, Andy Weir's *The Martian*, James S.A. Corey's *Expanse* series, and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, as well as films and series such as *Gattaca*, *The Andromeda Strain*, *Elysium*, *Contagion*, and *Orphan Black*, among many others.

blossom and spread through cross-pollination—or, to use a different metaphor, find new life through recycling and repurposing. Saulter and Buckell, however, depict a form of urban sustainability that moves beyond our current, often hollow discourse (the kind held in contempt by UPE theorists such as Swyngedouw). Rather than corporate, greenwashed "sustainability," this is a model of urban ecology built collectively and democratically (in the case of both Buckell's Aeolians and Saulter's gems). By reimagining urban life and emphasizing the necessity of adaptation, resilience, and inclusion, both authors better prepare us for a future where those traits will be increasingly necessary under the political and ecological crises that threaten social cohesion so gravely.

Indeed, Anthony Giddens believes that our current world is a "runaway world," one that "has introduced new kinds of unpredictability, new kinds of risk, [and] new kinds of uncertainty" (qtd. in Hamilton 277). He underlines the irony that "some of these uncertainties come from the very sources that were supposed to make the world predictable," i.e. the logical positivism underpinning technoscientific rationalism (ibid). It would behoove us, then, to live with and mitigate uncertainty through communal action that seeks greater environmental and social justice. The conventional history and logic of (sub)urbanism subordinates nature and regulates the metabolic flows of cities in a way that is not always beneficial to its inhabitants. As such, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw argue,

> the dystopian present and future we face emphasizes further that the matter of concern should not be environments, or cities per se, but rather: "the urbanization of nature," i.e. the process through which all types of nature are socially mobilized, economically incorporated (commodified), and physically metabolized/transformed in order to support the urbanization process. (2014: 462)

Any given contemporary urban environment, after all, functions within a dense, convoluted network whose connections extend far beyond the local to the regional, national, and global. By focusing on the "urbanization of nature" and its socioecological significance for human and nonhuman matter, Caribbean SF authors will continue to help us make sense of where we're going. Fortunately, the field is growing and well-positioned to stage scenarios that allow us to imagine more sustainable and equitable future urbanisms, thus inspiring us to reimagine and revise our current urban ecologies to create more just and climate-proofed cities.

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Conclusion

What Can We Learn from Contemporary Crises?

> Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul.
>
> — Marcus Aurelius[270]

> Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquest of nature. For each such conquest takes revenge on us… At every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage of all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.
>
> — Friedrich Engels[271]

In their descriptions of "the universe" and "nature," Aurelius and Engels valorize a view of other-than-human nature that offers a counterpoint to the long-dominant perspective in the West, one in which the human would somehow "stand outside" an abstracted "Nature."[272] Engels explicitly connects this perspective with coloniality, wherein the *Anthropos* "rule[s] over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people." To offer more insight into the human-environment relation within the related contexts of empire and capitalism, this dissertation has deployed a postcolonial-ecocritical (PCE) approach with the aim of teasing out a specifically Caribbean eco-epistemology. This work is meant to act as both a

[270] From *The Meditations (*167 CE), trans. George Long.
[271] From *The Dialectics of Nature* (1874-80), specifically "The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man" (written 1876 and first published in *Die Neue Zeit* 1895-06), trans. Clemens Dutt.
[272] This follows Jason Moore's use of "nature" and "Nature" in his various works on "world-ecology."

contrast and complement to extant scholarship under various banners and concepts, such as "green postcolonialism," "decolonial ecology," "urban political ecology," "Marxist geography," "the Plantationocene," etc.[273] As carried out at length in the preceding chapters, the PCE approach turns to literature as a welcome reservoir of environmental thinking, as a place where "l'on peut imaginer de nouveaux modes de vivre, de nouvelles réalités, et donc, de nouveaux rapports au monde…qui permet de mettre en évidence les limites, les possibilités et les impossibilités des représentations du monde" (Posthumus 86). As I have tried to show, literature reveals important insights into the human and other-than-human relation and how it colors our confrontation with climate crisis. What has become clear is that we cannot focus on the environment at the expense of the human, nor the human at the expense of the environment. The PCE approach focalizes on the rhizomatic intersections and interstices of the cultural and the natural, proceeding from the view that everything human is enmeshed in the planetary ecosystem, as Engels argued above, not somehow above it or beside it. The oppression of one is intimately linked to oppression writ large, and a greater understanding of our prejudices against other human and nonhuman animals better informs our struggle against climate change. An eco-epistemology that decenters the human, as this dissertation has argued, is thus a vital starting point for meaningful environmental discourse and praxis.

To "test" the PCE approach (that I sketched out most fully in Ch. II), as well as the importance of a renewed eco-epistemology (Ch. I and throughout), I will now briefly examine two crises—that of COVID-19 and the pesticide chlordecone—both of which emerge from the historical process of globalization, itself driven by what Félix Guattari calls

[273] See the Introduction (Ch. I) for an extensive reading of these various strains of environmental thought.

capitalisme mondial intégré (*CMI*).[274] Each in their own way, these crises demonstrate a number of interrelated concerns that run throughout this dissertation: the *oikos* of economics and ecology, globalization, slow violence, the (mis)treatment of animals and their habitats, environmental injustice, and an arguably misguided faith in market forces and techno-capitalism to solve our problems. Separately, and together, they remind us as Darwin did "how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life" (120).[275] In many ways, these crises are what Eva Horn terms a "catastrophe without event": examples of outbreaks within a continuity of current policies, lifestyles, and "modes of managing the future" that disregard socioecological concerns at our grave peril (9).

COVID-19, or the consequences of our current eco-epistemology

In 2008, the scientific journal *Nature* published a paper entitled "Global trends in emerging infectious diseases."[276] In this article, for which work began roughly thirteen years before the emergence of COVID-19, Kate E. Jones et al. analyzed the "linkages" that underpin emerging infectious diseases, or EIDs, which they describe as "[being] driven largely by socio-economic, environmental and ecological factors" (990). This formulation succinctly captures the importance of the PCE approach, which insists on seeing other-than-human nature in holistic terms, including the ways that humans relate to it socioeconomically and politically. Following Jones et. al, the vast majority of EIDs are zoonotic, that is,

[274] In *Les trois écologies* (1989).
[275] From "Natural Selection; or the Survival of the Fittest," Ch. IV of *The Origin of Species*.
[276] Jones, Kate E. and Nikkita G. Patel, et al. "Global trends in emerging infectious diseases." *Nature* 451 (2008): 990-993.

originating in nonhuman animals, with zoonoses making up roughly 60% of EIDs, and approximately 72% of these zoonoses stemming from wildlife (SARs, Ebola, "swine flu," "avian flu," etc.) (990). One major conclusion drawn is that "efforts to conserve areas rich in wildlife diversity by reducing anthropogenic activity may have added value in reducing the likelihood of future zoonotic disease emergence" (992). In the wake of COVID-19, two key ecological characteristics of our contemporary moment become abundantly clear: 1) we are all inextricably connected, and 2) our current way of life is entirely unsustainable. While these points may border on the banal, what is far from banal, or obvious, however, is our pathway forward. How can we rectify our current situation and work to best mitigate future pandemics and ecological crises?

One way to begin is by reflecting on how the pandemic offered us a glimpse of what might be possible, as writer and director Julio Vincent Gambuto suggests:

> A carless Los Angeles [that] has clear blue skies… In a quiet New York, you can hear the birds chirp in the middle of Madison Avenue. Coyotes have been spotted on the Golden Gate Bridge. These are the postcard images of what the world might be like if we could find a way to have a less deadly effect on the planet. (Qtd. in Burkeman 2021: 206)

As I explored at length in Chapter Three, this sense of catastrophe connects to its etymological sense of "revelation." As Eva Horn frames it, catastrophes "expose a hidden 'truth' about humanity, both about the inner essence of individuals and about the bonds that constitute the texture of society" (11-12). A disruption of COVID-19's magnitude affected nearly every aspect of our lives, exposing the myriad connections that we take for granted on

a daily basis. It also showed how quickly some societies give into panic and how quickly situations can escalate, as when toilet paper suddenly began disappearing from shelves.

In this way, the "catastrophe scenario" of COVID-19 did what literature, particularly speculative literature, aims to do: it showed a state of exception that may become all too real. A result of our unreflective "mastery" over animals, like so many other infectious diseases, COVID-19 reminds us that we must more consciously use our considerable power as *homo sapiens*, particularly if we want to merit that moniker. For what is all our discerning [*sapiēns*] worth if we use it to actively destroy animals and their habitats and thus, ultimately, our own? Take, for instance, the case of Nipah virus in Malaysia that broke out in the fall of 1998 and lasted through the spring of 1999.[277] Pig farms that displaced and disrupted existing ecosystems led to bats biting and infecting pigs. The disease then spread to pig farmers, killing more than 100 of them between Malaysia and Singapore, who imported pigs from Malaysia. To control the outbreak, the Malaysian government ordered the culling, i.e. slaughtering, of more than one million pigs. All this in a country where roughly two-thirds of the population is Muslim and does not therefore consume the meat of pigs! We see, yet again, the inextricably interconnected and fragile nature of links between market forces (in this case, an increase in global demand of meat, driven by the West and China), ecosystem disruption, and EIDs that gravely endanger human and non-human animals alike.

Marx saw, in such "irrational destruction of the environment and the relevant experience of alienation created by capital," Kohei Saito writes, "a chance for building a new revolutionary subjectivity that consciously demands a radical transformation of the mode of

[277] For a thorough breakdown of this outbreak, see Asok Kurup's article, "From Bats to Pigs to Man: The Story of Nipah Virus," *Infectious Diseases in Clinical Practice* 11.2 (2002): 52-57.

production so as to realize free and sustainable human development" (20-21). If we forget that COVID-19 derived directly from our (dysfunctional) relation to nature, but instead see it as a black swan event, we do ourselves a great disservice and make it that much harder to move toward a renewed "revolutionary subjectivity." Moreover, COVID-19 shows the ways in which crises—whether environmental or of public health—expose issues of income inequality and social justice. This was the case throughout the United States, for example, when meat processing plants, whose workers are predominately impoverished people of color (and also children, as was recently reported[278]), experienced some of the worst outbreaks of coronavirus.

In the wake of COVID-19, the Caribbean must confront not only the likelihood of a catastrophic future as one of the most vulnerable places to the effects of climate change,[279] it also faces, in Martinique and Guadeloupe, an ongoing public health crisis due to the long-term use of the pesticide chlordecone. As we shall see, this crisis stems directly from a neocolonial relation undergirded by the intertwined historical forces of empire and capitalism, both of which exploit unequal relations of power to maximize the environment's profitability at the expense of both human and other-than-human life.

Chlordecone: A neocolonial nightmare

Developed in the U.S. under the name of Kepone and related to now obsolete insecticides such as DDT (made infamous by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*), the pesticide

[278] See, for example, Robert Carey and Terri Gerstein, "How Did Children End Up as Factory Workers in America Again?" *Slate*, 1 March 2023.
[279] See Taylor et al. (2012), who point out that Caribbean region "is highly susceptible to short (climate variability) [and] long timescale (climate change)" impacts (172).

chlordecone was only regulated after workers at the Hopewell chemical factory in Virginia, who handled the substance without masks or gloves, experienced concerning health problems, notably tremors. Doctors and others accused the men of being drunks, assuming it was alcohol-induced tremors, before the state intervened and conducted blood tests that found high levels of Kepone. Twenty-nine workers ended up hospitalized, the facility was shuttered, and environmental scientists estimate that some 200,000 pounds of Kepone made its way into the environment, primarily via the James River.[280] While some of the Kepone was used domestically for roach and ant traps, the majority was shipped to places like Africa and South America to wage war against agricultural pests such as fire ants and potato beetles—and, in the case of Guadeloupe and Martinique, the banana weevil.

Although banned in the U.S. in 1975 following the Hopewell incident, and in 1990 in France, chlordecone was still in use until 1993 in Guadeloupe and Martinique. According to a 2013 study by France's Public Health Agency, some 95% of Guadeloupe's population and 92% of Martinique's population bear traces of chlordecone in their blood.[281] Distressingly, Martinique possesses the world's highest rate of prostate cancer, which has been linked to chlordecone.[282] Professor Luc Multinger, of Université de Rennes, notes that epidemiological studies show an elevated risk of premature births and adverse brain development in children at the exposure levels found in Guadeloupe and Martinique due to their contaminated food and water supply. A leading expert on chlordecone, Multinger plainly states that "There is enough toxicological and experimental data to conclude that

[280] One worker, Thurman Dykes, claimed to have tremors until 1995. Trace amounts of Kepone are still found in fish in the James River today. See Richard Foster's article, "Kepone: The 'Flour' Factory." *Richmond Magazine*, 8 July 2005.
[281] Cited in Faustine Vincent's article, "Chlordécone : les Antilles empoisonnées pour des générations." *Le Monde,* 6 June 2008.
[282] See Belpomme et al. (2009 ; qtd. in Ferdinand 2016: 181).

chlordecone is carcinogenic" (qtd. in Whewell). As is the case with many synthetic substances (as we have seen abundantly of late in the case of PFAS, or "forever chemicals,"[283] or even more recently via the discovery of high concentrations of pure DDT off the California coast[284]), studies show that the pesticide persists in soil for hundreds of years.

Unfortunately, the chlordecone crisis in the Antilles, and this type of catastrophe in general, is nothing new under the neoliberal capitalist model, wherein companies, facing little regulation, engage in a "race to the bottom" to ensure maximum profits—at the expense of workers, the environment, and the people most directly affected by environmental degradation. While the chlordecone problem in the Caribbean dates back decades, it has only recently begun getting more media attention. And even now, it remains fairly unknown among the French public.[285] One of the only reasons that the issue has received coverage of any kind in mainland France and via other Western media outlets[286] is due to activism on the part of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans. In 2013, for example, a large group of fishermen barricaded the port of Fort-de-France (Martinique) until the French government promised

[283] Recent studies show PFAS, a group of toxic fluorinated chemicals, in everything from fast food wrappers to our toilet paper and now our blood.

[284] Research led by UC Santa Barbara scientist David Valentine, and covered in the *Los Angeles Times*, shows how original DDT is "not breaking down the way that [we] once thought it should…and what we're seeing now is that there is DDT…all over the place." As is typical, this problem stems from dumping on the part of what was once the nation's largest manufacturer of DDT, with as many as 500,000 barrels poured directly into the ocean. (See Rosanna Xia, "Scientists uncover startling concentrations of pure DDT along seafloor off L.A. coast," 23 March 2023.)

[285] In Spring of 2022 I taught at Université Paris-VIII and polled my students about the chlordecone crisis. Fewer than 50% of them were aware of it. While this is of course anecdotal, it corresponds with the answers given by the dozens of other French citizens I asked during my six-month *séjour* in Paris.

[286] See, for example, "Pesticide poisoned French paradise islands in Caribbean." *BBC News*, 25 Oct 2019. This title leaves much to be desired; it participates in the Othering, Edenic view of the Caribbean islands and also deploys the past tense, when the poisoning—a manifestation of slow violence—is very much ongoing. To be fair, however, the article does give voice to Martinicans who express a linkage between coloniality and the chlordecone crisis.

them aid. One of the fishermen wondered aloud to a journalist, "I've been eating pesticides for 30 years, so I carry on eating my fish. But what will happen to my grandchildren?" (qtd. in Peter). There have been guerilla theater performances, street protests, and social media campaigns. And yet, fairly little has been accomplished in terms of aid and reparations. Serge Letchimy, one of Martinique's MPs at the time, testified to the generalized sense of second-class treatment, lamenting that the central problem "is how overseas territories get treated. There's contempt, distance, condescension, lack of respect…the measures adopted to deal with this drama bear no relation to its gravity" (ibid).[287]

We thus see how the chlordecone crisis encapsulates the continuation of a colonial treatment of Martinique and Guadeloupe that prioritizes them far less than *l'Hexagone*. The bitterness is palpable among Martinicans, with one interviewee explicitly and succinctly drawing out the historical context behind the neocolonial relation that endures: "First we were enslaved. Then we were poisoned" (ibid). According to Guy Cabort-Masson, there were roughly ten major families serving as the primary landowners (known as *békés*) emerging from colonialism, thus leading to an economic situation wherein the *oligos* benefit far more than the *demos* (Ferdinand 2016: 181). Moreover, this neocolonial relation reinforces an instrumentalist view of nature that sees it only as matter ripe for commodification and exploitation. The result? Greater and cheaper banana production. The real cost? Nothing less than the poisoning of the Antillean populace.

[287] Letchimy was trained as an urban planner, and I cite his work on urbanism in the Martinican context in Chapters Two and Five.

Through the phenomenon of slow violence, the nefarious effects of chlordecone were obscured and allowed to continue unabated for years. In Maryse Condé's novel *Traversée de la mangrove* (close read in Ch. II), one character remarks,

> Comme c'est vrai ! Les problèmes de la vie, c'est comme les arbres. On voit le tronc, on voit les branches et les feuilles. Mais on ne voit pas les racines, cachées dans le fin fond de la terre. Or ce qu'il faudrait connaître, c'est leur forme, leur nature, jusqu'où elles s'enfoncent pour chercher l'eau, le terreau gras. Alors peut-être, on comprendrait. (180-81)

We thus see how the sinister chlordecone, without affecting the bananas themselves,[288] poisoned the soil, the roots, and, via runoff, the waters. And indeed, so much of humanity's current climate crisis lies in a failure to see beyond the surface, a surface under which myriad human and environmental costs accrue due to a prioritization of convenience and profit above all else.

Unfortunately, the French government has essentially ignored the chlordecone crisis for so long that staggeringly little has been accomplished in terms of understanding the full extent of the dangers to public health. In addition to financial investment, the French state must provide scientific and intellectual capital to work toward an equal quality of life for its citizens in the Antilles. While President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged the crisis in 2018, he was recorded shortly thereafter denying the toxicity of the pesticide, saying that "it should not be said that it is carcinogenic." One can't help but wryly wonder if Macron would dip his madeleine, à la Marcel Proust, in a chlordecone-spiked tea?

[288] Malcom Ferdinand notes the vicious cycle perpetuated by the bananas' imperviousness to chlordecone: since they are unaffected, there is greater impetus to grow more of them since other crops won't work, thus worsening the phenomenon of the monocrop (2020: 111).

Offering a glimmer of hope is a research partnership between William & Mary's Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the Université Paris Saclay, and other universities and agencies in France and the Antilles. Professor Steve Kuehl, from the Institute at William & Mary, applauds the international collaboration and notes that "The dramatic environmental differences between the James River and the French West Indies provide a natural laboratory for studying chlordecone breakdown processes" (qtd. in Malmquist).

This type of work is crucial because there are, unfortunately, so many contemporary parallels with the chlordecone crisis, both here and abroad. To give just one recent example, The National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) began running a campaign in 2021 on California's need for community pesticide notifications, as numerous studies reveal that those living near fields where pesticides are used show increased risk of cancer, Parkinson's, respiratory diseases, learning disabilities, birth defects, and autism.[289] One study, for example, found that 17.1 million pounds of pesticides were sprayed in Ventura County (California) from 2016 to 2018, where farmworkers and agricultural communities are almost exclusively Latine (as in the rest of the state).[290] Here again there are strong parallels with the COVID-19 crisis—for example, with the marginalized workers propping up factory farms (as well as the communities that surround them) experiencing more risk of a coronavirus outbreak (and bearing the brunt of the environmental harm produced). These issues remind us, to quote Dana Mount and Susie O'Brien, of the extent that "the projects of social and environmental justice must be symbiotically intertwined" (1).

[289] See Miriam Rotkin-Ellman's blog post, "No More Secrets: CA Needs Community Pesticide Notification." *NRDC*, 7 May 2021.
[290] See Temkin et. al. 2022.

Moving forward

Indeed, learning from crisis and moving toward a better future will require us to "integrate," as exhorted by Pope Francis, "questions of justice…so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (qtd. in Ghosh 157). As evinced by this quote, Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* (2015) insists on a recognition of the intersections of ecology, economic policies, and social justice. In stark contrast, the text of the Paris Accord (published later that year) fails to establish this basic connection. It even includes the caveat that the agreement "does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation" (ibid, 158). This refusal to codify any system of economic responsibility or solidarity could prove catastrophic for the Caribbean (and the Global South in general). In the wake of climate disaster, who will step up? Who will provide aid and welcome refugees when climate crises, fueled both historically and currently to a large extent by the wealthier nations of the Global North, render their homes uninhabitable?

As Amitav Ghosh astutely observes in his parallel reading of the two texts, Pope Francis focuses on climate justice while the Paris accord makes one single mention (and, notably, it is placed in scare quotes as an example of a concern held "by some"). Instead of focusing on the interconnections between ecology and economics, the latter document instead maintains a market-driven view with the goal of "accelerating, encouraging and enabling innovation" (ibid). Meanwhile, as Ghosh points out, it relies heavily on a vocabulary of neo-liberal development: "*stakeholder, good practices, insurance solutions, public and private participation, technology development,* and so on" (156). An approach to climate crisis devoid of compassion for the marginalized and concern for socioeconomic equity, however, only reifies existing structures of imbalance that continue to deepen

disparities between the wealthiest and the poorest, which, in the context of climate crisis, generally means the most secure and the most vulnerable, respectively. (Unfortunately, climate change discourse continues to suffer from a general disregard for the most marginalized, and greenwashing and lobbying play a substantial role in this—take for instance, the extreme watering down of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's March 2023 report.)[291]

Indeed, if nothing changes, the climate crisis will continue to expose and worsen existing inequalities, whether economic, social (racist, ableist), etc. Tackling inequality is thus key to the climate fight, a viewpoint at the core of the Martinican environmental group ASSAUPAMAR (*Association pour la sauvegarde du patrimoine martiniquais*). In Malcom Ferdinand's view, ASSAUPAMAR "articulat[e]s a way of preserving the environment in the pursuit of a world free from its (post)colonial inequalities and power relations passed on since the time of slavery" (16). Among their largest successes is the prevention of the diversion of the Grand-Rivière (in the community that shares its name) by *béké* farmers, who received the go-ahead from the French state without consulting or even informing the locals (Ferdinand 2016: 181). While there are certain shortcomings to ASSAUPAMAR—including perhaps too much of a focus on identity politics—they resolutely insist on a yoking of

[291] In a draft leaked by activist group Scientist Rebellion, the IPCC report recommended shifting to plant-based diets, as they "can reduce GHG emissions by up to 50% compared to the average emission-intensive Western diet." Lobbying by Argentina and Brazil—huge players in the global beef industry—led to this vague sentence replacing it: "balanced, sustainable healthy diets acknowledging nutritional needs." This shows once again how the discourse around "sustainability" is all too often seized as an opportunity to deliver vague promises rather than specific, actionable discourse. Similarly, Saudi Arabia's delegation, with support of other fossil-fuel economic powers, worked to change language that cited fossil fuels as the primary driver of climate change. (See Michael Thomas, "How Meat and Fossil Fuel Producers Watered Down the Latest IPCC Report," *Distilled* 23 March 2023.) Another critical issue with the IPCC's recent report is the unequal distribution of agency in negotiations. According to a report by Earth Negotiations Bulletin, the IPCC's 58th session dragged into the weekend instead of ending on Friday as scheduled, meaning that many of the most vulnerable nations (e.g. Haiti, Somalia, the Maldives, etc.)—as well as none from South America nor Africa—no longer had a voice at the table as the IPCC's text continued to get watered down.

ecology and politics, which recognizes the relationality of the human with other-than-human nature. Above all, they privilege the dignity of every Martinican over the short-term economic interests of the few. As Lovins, Lovins, and Hawken ask, "A pesticide may sell for thirty-five dollars a gallon, but *what does it cost society* as it makes its way into wells, rivers, and bloodstreams? Just because markets do not address value, goodness, justice, and morals does not mean that such concerns can be safely ignored" (qtd. in Buell 54; emphasis mine).[292]

Without a radical re-assessment of our relationship to the environment, one that understands the human as *part of* nature—and, at the same time, that we have historically exercised an outsized influence upon it—we will struggle to respond adequately to the climate crisis. Similarly, the Caribbean, despite its tiny size, has played an integral role in the historical development of global capitalism. Despite—and indeed, perhaps to a large degree *because of*—the hegemony of Western imperialism, Caribbean writers have largely anchored their reality in a less anthropocentric framework, one that foregrounds nature as an essential component of understanding identity, via a self that is always already envisioned as multiple and rhizomatic. The eco-epistemology that informs this perspective is interrogative and relational, rather than imperative and universalist. In this way, Caribbean culture can help us move toward a more sustainable model of being-in-the-world, one that insists on recognizing the inextricable connections between ecology and the twinned forces of empire and capital.

[292] From their work *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution* (US Green Building Council, 2000).

Conclusion

Striving toward a renewed eco-epistemology—such as the one this dissertation has sought to sketch through a reading of Caribbean literature and theory—will prove vital in the coming years and decades as it reminds us of the fundamental link between knowledge and environment. As we aim to develop more sustainable and equitable forms of living together on this one planet we share, we will continue to run into the law of unintended consequences. For every wind turbine built, birds will inevitably die. For every electric vehicle created, mining must inevitably occur, and all too often with steep human and environmental costs. This law is a fundamental aspect of ecology, wherein "everything is connected to everything else" (Barry Commoner); or, as John Muir once expressed in a moment of revelation, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe" (110). Eco-epistemology presupposes a relational worldview, one which must necessarily accept ambiguity, opacity, and uncertainty. While this can be an uncomfortable position, any other is illusory, and the acceptance of uncertainty can be quite generative. As Erich Fromm argues, our desire for certainty "blocks the search for meaning," while uncertainty forms "the very condition to impel [us] to unfold [our] powers" (qtd. in Burkeman 2012: 99).

Darwin himself seems compelled, in his earlier work, by the classic Enlightenment ideal of progress. In *The Origin of Species*, he argues that,

> As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before the Cambrian epoch, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of great

> length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection. (198)

While this may be generally true of evolution, it seems hard to apply to the *anthropos* given the self-destructive tendencies on display in recent centuries. Despite incredible technoscientific and medical advances, it is hard to contend that *all* our "corporeal and mental endowments" have "progress[ed] towards perfection." In his second magisterial work, however, *The Descent of Man*, Darwin offers something of a corrective to this notion, writing that, because our species "tends to increase at a greater rate than [its] means of subsistence, consequently [we are] occasionally subjected to a severe struggle for existence" (265).

Such a recognition might strike us today as obvious, even banal. After all, we are facing a genuine existential threat to our individual and collective well-being. Yet optimism often seems to win the day. We see it, for example, in the Pollyannish belief that technological innovation alone, driven by "free" markets, will miraculously mitigate the worst of climate change, allowing us to continue living unexamined lifestyles of excess. We see it in a truly astounding article from the March 1912 edition of *Popular Mechanics*, where even coal mining fulfills the intoxicating promise of a more livable earth due to technological progress:

> It is perhaps somewhat hazardous to make conjectures for centuries yet to come, but in the light of all that is known it is reasonable to conclude that not only has the brain of man contrived machines by means of which he can travel faster than the wind, navigate the ocean depths, fly above the clouds, and do the work of a hundred, but also that indirectly by these very things, which change the constitution of the atmosphere, have his activities reached beyond the near at hand and the immediate

> present and modified the cosmic processes themselves. It is largely the courageous, enterprising, and ingenious American whose brains are changing the world. Yet even the dull foreigner, who burrows in the earth by the faint gleam of his miner's lamp, not only supports his family and helps to feed the consuming furnaces of modern industry, but by his toil in the dirt and darkness adds to the carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere so that men in generations to come shall enjoy milder breezes and live under sunnier skies. (Qtd. in Molena 342)

It is clear that to create a more just and livable future, education is crucial. While understanding basic principles of climate science (which would obviously contradict the author's view above) and developing a more circular economy will no doubt be essential, above all we need a fundamental change to our largely alienated relation to other-than-human nature. In a radio interview,[293] Cyril Dion, director of the documentaries *Demain* and *Animal*, refers to an American study on youth in poor suburbs that revealed a critical lack of vocabulary for flora and fauna. These kids might possess only one or two words to designate different trees or birds, but hundreds if not thousands of words for different brand names (e.g. Adidas, BMW, Burger King, McDonalds, Mercedes, Nike, etc.). As Dion points out, this is a direct product of contemporary urban culture. It's what we see—sneakers, clothes, billboards, ads, etc.—and what we *don't* see—forests, lakes, animals, etc. Dion goes on to argue that the children in the study "n'ont aucune raison de connaître tout cela [la nature]…et si on ne connaît pas, on n'a pas envie de protéger. Enfin, on protège ce qu'on aime, et on aime ce qu'on connaît, donc on a vraiment besoin de recommencer à fréquenter [la nature]."

[293] "Les hommes, le vivant et le monde sauvage : pourquoi si peu d'amour ?" *France Culture* 30 July 2022.

While Dion reinforces the binary view of nature as something external to the human, he affirms the vital connection between knowledge and environment that has been fundamental to this dissertation. If we strive to better know other-than-human nature, we will more likely desire to protect it, resulting in a healthier planetary ecosystem and ultimately creating a positive feedback loop that strengthens our own chances of not just surviving but, ideally, thriving. On this point, I end with a brief reflection on Martha Nussbaum's elegant meditation on an ethical way of life, one which encapsulates the ethos of the eco-epistemology this dissertation has sought to define:

> To be a good human being is to have a kind of openness to the world, an ability to trust uncertain things beyond your own control… [T]he human condition of the ethical life…is based on a trust in the uncertain and on a willingness to be exposed; it's based on being more like a plant than like a jewel, something rather fragile, but whose very particular beauty is inseparable from its fragility.[294]

Nussbaum here echoes the movement from messiahs to mangroves, as our savior complex seems to stem from an *in*ability "to trust uncertain things beyond [our] control." Ideally, in the confrontation with crisis, an acceptance of the opaque and brackish waters of the mangrove, and an understanding that the tangled roots mirror our own rhizomatic entanglements with other-than-human nature, will together help point the way to pragmatic theory and collective praxis rather than resigned and regressive appeals to a singular savior.

[294] Nussbaum, Martha. In *Bill Moyers: A World of Ideas*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

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