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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

*PoCo MAS / A POETICS OF SALVAGE AND SPECULATION IN
THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

with a designated emphasis in CRITICAL RACE and ETHNIC STUDIES

by

Cathy T. Thomas

September 2019

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*PoCo MAS / A POETICS OF SALVAGE AND SPECULATION IN
THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA*

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ABSTRACT

PoCo MAS / A POETICS OF SALVAGE AND SPECULATION IN THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA

Cathy Thomas

In this hybrid dissertation, "*Poco Mas / A Poetics of Salvage and Speculation in the Caribbean Diaspora*," I address broader questions of how the concept of salvage,—in its conflicting dualism of its ability to describe the prior experience of wreck and loss or to describe an experience of recovery and repair—engages the ways blackness and sexualized embodiment take up space in the Western imagination. I look at racial and gendered representations of (mostly) Afrodiasporic bodies of the Anglophone Caribbean and the material realities they experience(d) as diasporic subjects to generate discussions interested in exploring a historically unprecedented "post-human" future attentive to long histories of racialization, colonization, and enslavement. I assert that diaspora is a key site for theorizing Caribbean writing from where a generative consciousness opens up a corresponding archive—enmeshing salvage and speculation—between fictive and actual bodies that allows the writing, and thus the writer, to simultaneously represent allegorical and political sites across space and time.

Part One of the dissertation, "*Cartographies of Salvage and Speculation*," is divided into two sections and considers the lasting effects and slow violences of colonial knowledge-production. In section one, "'Come Back to Jamaica:' Notes on Salvaging Paradise," I close read novels by Oonya Kempadoo locating tourism, migration, carnival, and dark humor in desires shaped from a diverse legacy of epistemologies and imaginaries but connected by diasporic and transnational identities and dislocations. In section two, "*Wynter is Coming: Or, How the Creative Critical Speculations of 'Semantically-Neurochemically Activated' Cosmogonies*

Narrates the Caribbean,” I bring into focus Sylvia Wynter’s transdisciplinary critique of *liberal* humanism. Wynter’s concept of science of the word is a generative site of inquiry for which I critically and creatively engage growing scholarship on feminist epistemology and methodology, Caribbean carnival, as well as Afrofuturism and Afrosurrealism. Drawing on this and my own theoretic impulses, I conceptualize new discursive frames from which the survival of social, political, and physical life rely.

Part Two, *PoCo Mas*, are linked stories. Plotting reverberates from 2036, when cataclysmic storm systems and their life-altering impact are collectively renamed and remembered as *Diáspora*. Subsequent oceanic disasters cause tide-altering currents from which human, plant, animal, and manufacturing detritus make a reverse Middle Passage voyage where mourners, auctioneers, and scientists collect tissue samples and the sea. Decades after *Diáspora*, these natural(ized) disasters reshape human-nature-word relations. Epigraphs mobilizing a range of intellectual histories float between stories as *Detritus* to carry provocations inciting relationality rather than rationality to examine extreme loss. From the wreck, people salvage a unique set of sumptuary codes, linguistic creolizations, politico-spiritual alignments, and manners bringing forth a “semantically-neurochemically activated” (Wynter) cosmology. In this way, my protagonist is a sociogenic figuration of what could be called Wynter’s *Man3*, the post-human post-“*Diáspora*” being.

My writing is conceptually and intellectually positioned within a series of expanding frames in which humanism, race, and catastrophe overlap. With both halves of this dissertation, it is possible to trace and understand, in a broad sense, the continuities of epistemic and ontological anti-black racism registered in the Caribbean. This dissertation is informed by the (re)turn to experimental poetics and

autoethnography in Black Studies, a synthesis of feminist thought drawn from prose, poetry, critique, and decolonial science fiction and fantasy, the attention to carnival's paradoxical transnational context as both cultural disseminator and global commodity in Caribbean Studies, and the turn to ecology in Postcolonial Studies.

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Jump an' wave!

APOLOGIA

wreckless boughs, the delicate
projections of a germinating seed
under earth, over water, splintering
a fourth dimension with its molecules and stealth

My research as a Literature scholar and my interests as a creative writer looks at the Caribbean —from within, outside, below, above, behind, toward, and very often *beyond*— as a complex network of its different races, politics, spiritualities, histories and mutable cartographies. By cartography, I point to origins blending Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas and the stories that created the Caribbean and the eventual Caribbean communities that dispersed themselves onto the panorama of the globe, but mostly London, Toronto, and New York...and for me the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Indiana. Yes, goat curry and melanin made moves west of I-95. And should ever I wonder at where new concentrations of Caribbean flux sublimate in the world, I now have so many ‘family dem’ in the virtual realm that I feel re-birthed. When I see family dem online or in person, they ask, “You writing family history?” Yes, I say because I have been, since 1994, writing and recording what I can from relatives during trips to Guyana and London. Stories like: There was someone named Oilabone who got the name because when he bought a container of cooking oil, there was a bone in it. Talkname was a gossip. Rifle was a racist Madras Indian who supported the PPP (People’s Progressive Party). Addar was a teacher and a loan shark; he took Jumpy’s home and Johnny—who may or may not have been related to me—cursed Addar’s children, “none of you will enjoy

this house.” And, shortly thereafter, Addar was hit by a tapir bus.¹ Ironically, Addar’s brother, an alleged thief, was known as Curse.

All these bits float to me from my aunts, uncles, parents, and new family dem, afraid that both their needing-to-tell and their trying-to-forget stories may disappear under new concentrations of modern flux. Conceptually, I call this flux of people and their personal connections to the Caribbean landscape and culture *moving worlds*. A moving world carries the diaspora across generational dilutions for in it, there remains the ability to represent real and imagined relationships meaningfully. When and where is truth important to proliferating their storytelling expressions? When and where is truth important to proliferating an understanding of their culture? *And history?*

“You writing a family history?” They ask.

But also, no. I am not writing a history now. I am writing an end to history: a heretical historiography. “But why are you destroying the Caribbean?” Yes, brows raise at the dinner table and at the Caribbean conference roundtables—yes, Opal Adisa Palmer, I remember (LOL). Is destruction an assertion or an insertion of truth? Is the unescapable ocean wave a plot twist or twisted plot? That depends. Is the Middle Passage an event or a process? *While weighing these questions, my protagonist will undergo its first cleavage all the while determining how to renarrate their im/possible return.* How am I not sure that I am *not* in my apocalypse? What are the limits of an apocalypse?

“How much of the Caribbean have you killed off?” They ask.

¹ A boxed shaped mini-bus that should seat seven passengers but will be most likely crammed with twice that. Used as public transportation, the tapir is often highly decorated as fits the owner’s style. Versions exist elsewhere; for example, the Haitian tap tap and the Trinidadian maxi-taxi.

“How much of the Caribbean have you killed off?” They ask.

A follow-up question is posed by someone in my family. Cue the suck teeth and concern. The provocation provokes. It seems strange, but I really don’t know who has or who could have survived my twisted oceanic plot twist. Not many. I will only name Haiti as a mappable still-there land mass in my story because in my speculative world, global warming loves irony. I just know diaspora has a way of creating wholeness from fragments. So, the drama of an end is the drama of beginnings, and perhaps leads me to a clearer understanding of how narrative gestates outside the Western womb. However, I am incubating in one—*in utero academici*—as I type, think, critique.

PoCo Mas is first and foremost a creative project begun, in stages, before I knew a Fanon, a Foucault, before I encountered Barthes, Bradotti, Benjamin, Boyce-Davies, Brathwaite, before my “christening” by the Césaire’s, Aimé and Suzanne, and before I oriented myself within the many other alphabet-by-theoretician phases. Derrida! Yet, I come to Wynter just in time. Through her lit-anthro-bio-socio-philosophical unsettling of decolonial space-time-bodies, her heretical history of how Man and Man’s Other shows up on the planet should generate discussions outside the sole realm of academia and into broader cultural considerations of how the Human is remembered. Thus, cataclysm is not my sf go-to response to the anthropocene, the comic book scene, or movies I have seen. It is, in part, a response to this encounter:

I once shared with a fellow scholar of the Caribbean that my family was from Guyana. What started as a cordial exchange of academic and pop culture tidbits ranging from Queen Victoria, sugar exports, and Jim Jones, (d)evolved into a very bizarre reasoning duel. The scene of alterity unfolds.

*Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me...by the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more.*²

Throughout our ten-minute conversation—with me repeating the name of my parent’s country—they continued to mispronounce Guyana with certainty and flourish: Gui-naya, Ghee-ana—perhaps, with or without a tilde—Ghee-aña, Guinea, Ghana, Grianna. And, with each worded instantiation, each “geo-historical and biographic loci of enunciation,” we moved back and forth between Africa and Australia and South America and oceans. Cartography.³ Then, we finally land on “Rihanna.” There is no joke as good as a Lacanian slippage.

*Even if it communicates nothing, discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the obvious, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is destined to deceive, it relies on faith in testimony. Thus the psychoanalyst knows better than anyone else that the point is to figure out [entendre] to which ‘part’ of this discourse the significant term is relegated, and this is how he proceeds in the best of cases: he takes the description of an everyday event as a fable addressed as a word to the wise, a long prosopopeia as a direction interjection, and, contrariwise, a simple slip of the tongue as a highly complex statement, and even the rest of a silence as the whole lyrical development it stands for.*⁴

² Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*. (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2008) 84.

³ Walter Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom” in *Theory, Culture, and Society* 26.7-8: (2009), 2.

⁴ Jaques Lacan, *Ecrits*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 251-252

The “long prosopopoeia,” or the thing being abstracted was Guyana, or the Caribbean, or was it me?

there is a difference to limn
alien or not, to the western slope folding
light and remains
so that you feel all
together too close to the oracle’s black hole theories.

...This is how regression can occur, regression being but the bringing into the present the subject’s discourse of the fantasmatic relations discharged by an ego at each stage in the decomposition of its structure.⁵*

The long prosopopoeia was the fart that had sounded off in the proverbial elevator and yet the whole academy stunk. A beautiful slippage, nonetheless, and yet, no acknowledgement. Yes, they said, “Rihanna,” the Bajan one-woman empire. Though, back then, in 2010, she was mostly known for topping charts with her “diasporic” guest appearances on other artists’ albums. What I remember is that I wanted to put one good cuff pun dey mou’. What I also remember doing—because I tend to do so when I am affronted or awed by things people say—was spelling my reaction with the word “wow,” in my head, all-cap, san serif, 14 point font, possibly Optima. Simply, WOW.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The Caribbean space, remember, is saturated with messages—“language games,” Lyotard would call them—sent out in five different languages (Spanish, English, French, Dutch, Portuguese), not counting aboriginal languages [...] This geographical accident gives the entire area, including a continental foci, the character of the archipelago, that is, a discontinuous conjunction (of what?): unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpool, clumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagulls squawking, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification; in short, a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of Chaos.⁶

Had my peer’s ideas about Guyana always been racially and geographically flattened or had Rhianna’s catchy “o nah nah, what’s my name?” taken more than a metaphoric hold of them? What is “Guyana’s” name? What is it about knowledge that makes it so hard to learn new things? Unlearn fixed things? But then, whose knowledge was the “new” thing? The scholar with a Caribbean crib sheet or the writer raised in a Caribbean crib? Was their ethnographic and historical research on Guyana more “knowledgeable” than my biography and family memory? After all, I did remind them my parents are Guyanese. I have been there. Her name and taste is on my tongue often. I also recognize people interchange the pronunciation of “Guy-ana” and “Ghee-ana,” but if they had said one or the other, they never asked me for a clarification. For my knowledge.

⁶ Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. (NC: Duke University Press, 1997) 2

*Geo-politics of knowledge goes hand in hand with geo-politics of knowing. Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated (rather than produced, like cars or cell phones)? Asking these questions means to shift the attention from the enunciated to the enunciation.*⁷

They could not settle on a version of their imagination. I respect the imagination. I do so have a weakness for the imagination. Yet, the name—the place—was not important, just the information they knew and could say in a pitch perfect way, an unwavering way, a way to re/produce expertise. *I quite liked this person's research and personhood. So, the insult does not manifest for a year. After all, I am an MFA student taking this grad English seminar on the Black Atlantic as a requirement. My world is analogy and conjure. Their world is citation and ism's. This is an English department problem, not Creative Writing. A problem for criticism not creativity. Yet, I am self-assured for less than that year.*

This experience tickles me, eats me, burns me, shames me.

This experience is nothing new. There is an implicit ascendancy in the received wisdom from “books” and the hierarchical methodologies used to create said “books.” Being *ascended upon* by audacious outsiders is a prominent theme in the literature of Jamaica Kincaid and other Caribbean authors. It is why Sylvia Wynter advocates for a disenchantment and rethinking of how we synthesize our literature, an emancipatory project targeting Humanism and many of the Westernized deposits it leaves in our “semantically-neurochemically opiate-induced” I-was-raised-to-think-and-act-this-way brains.⁸ I also recognize that I am a

⁷ See Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom,” in *Theory, Culture, and Society*

⁸ Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 25

moving world with diluted diasporic flux running through my veins. I am a second generation baby with a passport and health insurance that would cover, if necessary, the airlifting of my whole diasporic body back to the U.S should the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* make a home in my small intestine while doing research abroad. I also have a crib sheet to my history. I learn myself from listening to family and reading texts. And yet, and yet, and yet...my flux marks this encounter, this “long prosopopeia,” by re-emphasizing the importance of using my personal experience and narrative in the process of my psychic restoration. For me, restorative work is dynamic in how it seeds the present moment with the incontrovertible effects of the non-linear past. I build and conceptualize narrative that is future-oriented rather than stubbornly retrospective.

All that you touch

You change.

All that you Change

Changes you.

The only lasting truth

Is Change

God is Change

(Earthseed: The Books of the Living. Saturday, July 20, 2024)⁹

Arising from a praxis of restoration, is the dynamic engagement between of salvage and speculation. They are useful methodologies to examine the aesthetic and

⁹ Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000). Lauren Oya Olamina, Butler’s main character is motivated to survive a post-apocalyptic “nation” with words in her journal.

political possibilities within histories of dislocation. To salvage is to rescue. To speculate is to risk. From linguistic domination to linguistic self-invention, salvage and speculation also describe a persistent poetics that is always being worked through in Afrodiasporic narratives and testimony. This graduate school encounter that unfolded in the span of a three-hour seminar's ten minute break does not give my work plausibility but purchase on a situation that, left unchecked, proliferates in academia and media in a top-down design. Bleakness aside, this failure of communication between myself and a fellow scholar became an opportunity to ask how the Caribbean could be envisioned outside of a traditional Western literary lens, outside an Italian transatlantic navigator getting lost in 1492, outside of the all-inclusive Sandals Resorts, outside the American college campus quad blasting Bob Marley on 4/20, outside the anointing of "shit hole countries," outside FEMA tents. "Inside the objectives of Chaos."¹⁰ What can the intersection of creative and critical work bring to bear on questions of knowledge, language, space, and identity?

To create this answer I begin with a question: who's producing whom?

*Soon as you go, the text that I write is gon' say.*¹¹

¹⁰ See Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*

¹¹ Robyn Rihanna Fenty, lyrics to "What's my Name?" on Genius.com ([genius.com/Rihanna-whats-my-name-lyrics](https://www.genius.com/Rihanna-whats-my-name-lyrics), 2019)

PART ONE: CARTOGRAPHIES OF SALVAGE AND SPECULATION

INTRODUCTION

What had been the cost that had to be paid for the bringing into existence of the above, uniquely human, non-primate-like level of existence? What had been the cost of its law-likely mandated mutational singularity that, as a species, wherein, with respect to all our behaviors, we alone no longer had to remain subordinated to the sole set of instructions of our genome's DNA code? The answer to the above is one of which we must now for the first time in our existence imperatively become aware. The cost of that exchange? That of our subordination, instead, to our genre-specific storytelling codes of symbolic life/death!

—Sylvia Wynter, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*

The very word erotic comes from the Greek word eros, the personification of love in all its aspects — born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

—Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic*

Fuck your white horse and a carriage.

—Robyn Rihanna Fenty, "Needed Me"

While the Caribbean has always been an astonishing source of production and imagination for visitors, natives, and admirers, spending time in any of its regions raises questions about the near-mythic articulation of life in the archipelago where explorers, writers, and tourist boards lure minds with talk of pristine beaches and complaisant locals. This dissertation examines the slow violence of carbon footprints, disposable bodies, racism, and various curated social and ecological encounters to upend the presumption that beauty is the only criteria for appreciation. Rather, the Caribbean's rich history as measured in the diversity of its society and environment, struggles with movement (political and bodily), and the

primacy of its art (visual, musical, textual, and philosophical), comes from a long history of trauma. Caribbean art, most decisively writing, has a life-long engagement with transatlantic movement, material exchange, language exchange, memory, and self-invention. Because of the continuity of dislocation in the region, the hybrid nature of writing is able to capture the Caribbean's beauty and its violent history. This paradoxical relationship is apparent in fluid cultural praxis (i.e., carnival, Négritude, Afrosurrealism) burgeoning alongside narratives of restoration (e.g., Philip's *Zong!*, Booker's "Saltfish," Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*). I assert that capturing the conditions of Caribbean life in language, as imparted on it, by the formation of its diasporas, relies on a poetics of salvage and speculation.

This dissertation examines a diverse body of work by artists and thinkers, predominantly Afro-Caribbean women, who are attentive to the relational trait of structures influencing social order while also seeking to locate marginality and the imaginary as sites of resistance. Thus, I engage counter hegemonic expression as both focal point and lens to consider modes of Caribbean (re)presentation and social formations within the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. I take my scholarly cues from work within a rhizome of creative-critical figures such as: Gloria Anzaldúa, Kamau Braithwaite, Erna Brodber, Octavia Butler, Suzanne Césaire, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Albert Chong, Sonya Clark, Marcia Douglas, Damiela Eltit, Frantz Fanon, Coco Fusco, Roxane Gay, Édouard Glissant, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Stuart Hall, George Herriman, bell hooks, Nalo Hopkinson, Zora Neal Hurston, Claudia Jones, Adrienne Kennedy, Myung Mi Kim, Audre Lorde, Shani Mootoo, Harryette Mullen, Chiamanda Ngozi Adichie, Angelique V. Nixon, Jackie Ormes, Opal Adisa Palmer, M. Nourbese Philip, Adrian Piper, Claudia Rankin, Alice Sheldon, Hortense Spillers, Kara Walker, and Karen Tei Yamashita. The intellectual breadth of my inspiration traces through theory, philosophy, poetry, literary fiction, visual art, theater, comic

strips, hard science, and science fiction. Thinking relationally across a range of intellectual disciplines and histories is my way of undisciplining a discipline.

Furthermore, understanding that all literature is, of course, salvaged material being constantly revised and augmented through publication history and citational practices, this dissertation—both its creative and critical halves— engages salvage poetics as a lens allowing me to raise critical questions about ways cultural sites, (e.g.: carnival, cane fields, ocean floors, resorts) simultaneously archive and transmit Caribbean identity. Furthermore, who I cite is an active effort to promote scholarship from women, women of color, Caribbean scholars and memory. It is, as Sara Ahmed suggests in *Living a Feminist Life*, “Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we diverted from the paths we were.”¹² I salvage at an intersection of genre, race, geography, gender, and biology. “[I]f our texts are worlds, they need to be made out of feminist materials.”¹³

Who is Producing Whom

With regards to Marcia Douglas, Nalo Hopkinson, and I include novelist Oonya Kempadoo, who each work with textiles such as doll fabrication, there is a meta-conceptual approach to how they create metaphor and pun.¹⁴ I attribute the

¹²Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (NC: Duke University Press, 2016) 14-16

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For her novel *Notes from a Writer's Book of Cures and Spells* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2005), Douglas created a series of hand sculpted dolls, The Flamingo Tongue Dolls, from objects and natural fiber. A selection of these dolls were exhibited at the Rex Nettleford Arts Conference/Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, Jamaica. They have also been featured in *Art Doll Quarterly*. An example, “Willa,” can be seen on her website. At UCLA's Imagining Caribbean Futures (2014) conference, a conversation with Nalo Hopkinson and Oonya Kempadoo, Hopkinson displayed a project of textiles and prints. Hopkinson also constructs handmade dolls and figures from found objects some of which are figures of Black mermaids or water deities inspired by the Mama Wati figure. See author website for examples. As the writer for the comic book series *House of Whispers* (DC Comics) she recreates the Afrodiasporic spiritual figure Erzulie. For further discussion on Afrodiasporic spiritual figures who are manifested in contemporary contexts see book

fluidity of their language play to the fluidity between their creative making and creative writing. As a result, their writing has the ability to evoke a sense of life embodied within nonhuman forms that can both think and speak on the page. For example, Marcia Douglas's *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread: a Novel in Bass Riddim*, we can trace the Lion of Judah ring given to Bob Marley in 1977 by the Emperor Haile Selassie I's son to understand how the Rastafarian movement addresses the dislocation of Black people. Rastafarianism developed in Jamaica in the 1930s as an Abrahamic religion and a social movement holding that Emperor Selassie is the reincarnated Messiah and that Black people will return to Africa. In 1966, Marley had a dream that a man dressed similar to Selassie had placed a ring on his finger saying, "This is all I give you."¹⁵ The ring is said to have belonged to King Solomon himself. This object is rooted to a complex transcultural religion and Marley's celebrity bringing the African continent into dialogue with hegemonic cultural knowledge based on, for example, privileging Eurocentric Christian myth-history-figures over the presence of Black bodies in Judeo-Christian scripture. In the novel, "Barbary lions are in the news."¹⁶ These lions are the images carved into the ring but they have been extinct since the nineteenth century due to overhunting. News that "someone found some standing at the brink of death in a zoo in Addis Ababa" becomes a metaphor attached to survival and fantasy.¹⁷ The ring becomes both a discursive and material emphasis connecting Black people, royalty, and the animal spirit to multiple national identities to ask, "Can a roar return from extinction?"¹⁸

chapter: Cathy Thomas, "Get Your Freak On: The Monstrous Seduction of Mattel's Monster High," *Articulating the Action Figure Essay on the Toys and Their Messages*. (NC: MacFarland Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Rogers Steffans, *So Much Things to Say: Oral History of Bob Marley*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), 190

¹⁶ Douglas, Marcia. *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread: a Novel in Bass Riddim*. Leeds: Peepal Tress Press 2016.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Through a lens of salvage and speculation, diaspora animates an engagement with the world, and thus, world order. Douglas's human-nonhuman open dialogue is an example of the "opening out of the category of the human, meant to recuperate a different kind of planetary life" that is key to our understanding of the link between history, trauma, and place.¹⁹ Thus, material design is a language that helps to interpret cartography and character outside of anthropocentric representations. Throughout the creative portion of this dissertation, my language focuses on texture and the apocalyptic-adaptive sartorial quality of life salvaged from debris and post-flood detritus. I continue to address this fluidity of place, time, and matter as various forms of environmental and social degradation occur. My project attempts to uncover ways in which Caribbean life is understood, refashioned, and transmitted through diasporas and the new emergence of transnational social formations within neocolonial and postcolonial experiences.

If postcolonialism is marked by the discourse and response to colonial independence from imperial political influence, then neocolonialism is embedded with economic imperialism from that separation. The term "neocolonialism" was coined by Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah to describe the surreptitious propagation of socio-economic and political activity exercised by former colonial rulers encouraging social, cultural, and most significantly, capitalist subjugation of their former colonies. Neocolonialism is pervasive and the economic arrangements are evidenced by the disproportionate presence of de facto modern capitalist businesses within the economy of developing countries. There is a tendency for the international community, often represented by human rights organizations located and operating within a neocolonist country, to lay the blame of corruption and foul

¹⁹ Rinaldo Walcott, "Reconstructing Manhood; or, The Drag of Black Masculinity" in *Small Axe*. 13.1, (March 2009), 89.

play on the local governments. For example, when the UK-based organization War on Want, whose mission is to tackle global poverty, singled out Bermuda as complicit in the international problem of tackling global tax havens, its Premier Craig Cannonier exchanged some strong words²⁰ Cannonier insisted that “London” doesn’t have the right to impose what it believes is right on Bermuda. He continued with, “I think you are barking up the wrong tree, I think you need to talk to the UK first. I think you need to talk to the US first. That’s where the real power is.”²¹ He went further to say, “But for you to impose upon Bermuda and many of the other countries on trying to decide how they raise revenues, quite frankly, is astounding to me.”²² According to Bermuda’s Minister of Finance, their tax structure goes back 150 years. Premier Cannonier brought to light the ridiculousness of thinking that the 60,000 people in Bermuda have the power to shape the global economy—a global economy, ironically, had been forged centuries earlier by war and want from America and Europe. In addition to challenges presented by foreign powers, there exists other (dis)economies of scale entangled within Caribbean life that create social polarization and social exclusion. There are the individual people who emigrate and travel between two homelands: the archipelago and an elsewhere. The emerging global patterns of people moving between countries of origin and countries of opportunity create diasporas and new transnational spaces and communities. Thus, the notion of place becomes spatially, temporally, and psychically charged in narratives of the Caribbean.

There is an overlap in the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism.

“[W]hile diaspora and transnationalism are sometimes used interchangeably, the two

²⁰Premier Craig Cannonier NPR radio interview streams on “Bermuda-The Case for Defense.” from BBC World Service Business. 27, November 2017.

<https://audioboom.com/posts/1762369-bermuda-the-case-for-the-defence>

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid.

terms reflect different intellectual genealogies."²³ On one hand, there is diaspora with the image of seed dispersal, from the Greek from *dia* (across) and *speirein* (scatter). When read in the context of its biblical roots, the Black Atlantic experience, or Asian and Indian indentured labor migrations, it connotes a politicized movement by or forced upon a body of objectified people leaving their homeland. Transnationalism may also be a politicized experience but has come to connote the activities of a migrant group that may be inclusive of "reciprocity and solidarity within kinship networks, political participation not only in the country of emigration but also of immigration, small-scale entrepreneurship of migrants across borders and the transfer and re-transfer of cultural customs and practices."²⁴ Functioning across, through, and beyond borders while surpassing, in degrees, the limits of a particular nation-state-island, is a quality I attach to economic structures such as Caribbean tourism, plantations, and the desire-driven Westernized consumerism that I bring up in Part One, the critical writing portion of this dissertation.

So then, because of the interchangeable nature of the two terms diaspora and transnationalism, I will predominantly use diaspora to set up the stakes of my project. However, given diasporic subjects' transnational practices and sensibilities, I may resist both terms and use the phrase *moving worlds*. I conceptualize moving worlds as the movement of people, consciousness, culture, and material alongside the subsequent refashioning of a cosmopolitan world with reclaimed parts from the *old world*. The diasporic body and what it encodes symbolically is the prêt-à-port woven from the fabric of (Caribbean) life: *moving worlds*. I return to this textual metaphor of fabric and fashion in Part Two, the creative portion of this dissertation,

²³ Thomas Faist, "Diaspora and Transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners?" *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. (Amsterdam University Press), 9.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

to reflect the paradoxical interrelationship between symbolic and actual *elsewheres* that construct the Caribbean.

Who is a “West Indian,” and what can be said about the maintenance and creation of that identity, uncovers multiple layers of syncretic temporalities revealing an epistemological force constructing the self through tradition, anecdotes, and memory. For example, food and music persist through such mobilizations and so, a plate of pepper pot, made from sweetened juice of the bitter cassava root, and Soca Chutney, produced by the sound of the South-Asian dholak percussion, represent ways of being and knowing the Caribbean through time and across place. Maintenance of identity is precisely how diaspora remembers its past of Mami Wata prayers, cargo holds, and the taste of sea water, making possible a connection among cultural expressions and social practices miles away, even generations away from “home.”

However, my goal is not to propose coherent understandings of cultural forms and social structures outside the Caribbean basin as they relate to literature. Instead, I investigate how boundary-crossing mobilizes their integration into moving worlds using a conceptualization of salvage and salvaging in both Afro-Caribbean literary texts and lived experiences. Here, it is helpful to think about the text as having an attentive homology to bodies (re)presented by the text. It is this literary constituency, the way Caribbean writers mobilize a multiplicity of voice and a performativity of language on the page, which I have been exploring, with specific attention to the three novels of Oonya Kempadoo. Across her three novels, Kempadoo communicates the process of diaspora and transnationalism with dual focalizers, one character who is tethered to the archipelago (in the form of a mango tree, a local, a reborn version of the narrator) and the other character who has a foreign passport (from the UK or America). Since I contend that diaspora is a key site

of memory and imagination, a poetics of salvage and speculation means and makes apparent the role of intertextuality in these novels.

In doing so, I ask “who is producing whom” with regards to the historical archive and cultural transmission. This question is in line with Mignolo’s discussion of geo-political configurations via the enunciation of knowledge in *Epistemic Disobedience*. Mignolo writes, “Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated [...]?”²⁵ Enunciation is “located by and through the making and transformation of the colonial matrix” and to delink from it is to decolonize knowledge.²⁶ Reading Wynter through Fanon, informs Mignolo’s options for decolonizing knowledge and it lies within the concept of body-politics. A body-politic holds that because epistemology is bound to language and, as humans, we *have* and *become* language, it is something embedded in our bodies and where they are geo-historically located. For example, an Amerindian person from regions of Guyana who were shaped by rules and patterns of the Patomona language would have needed to, by necessity, contend with rules and patterns from imperial languages like English and Spanish. By contrast, a person shaped by English or Spanish would not have contended with such a knowledge gap. And it follows, because our modernity is territorial and Eurocentric, that this gap becomes an epistemic marker for knowledge and subjectivities leading to the ongoing—conscious or unconscious—ranking of the globe’s people by their perceived intellectual capacities and contributions. Another example I will offer comes not from an analogy but from two art exhibitions.

In Havana’s Fabrica (Cuban Art Factory) art curation space, Enrique Rottenberg was an artist in resident exhibiting his 2018 *La Serie Anarcofeminista*

²⁵ See Mignolo in “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom”

²⁶ Ibid.

(*Anarchofeminist Series*).²⁷ The images were displayed across several spaces, one of which was set in a room where hung, at the entrance, the slit plastic curtains one might find in an abattoir or butcher shop. The large scale photograph, “Ve y di que yo soy” (Go and say that I am), featured over eighteen nude (mostly) black and brown women being hung by their ankles and suspending like meat. The large picture took up the surface of a wall, almost life-sized. When I asked the artist about his work, which included other scenes of lynching and the Black body spectacles, he did not seem to have a clear grasp on the histories of violence on Black bodies, nor could he offer a statement of critical inquiry located within a discussion of parody, intersectionality, or Cuba’s own colonial history. He did, however, assure me he was born in Argentina and that the plurality of his origins, which include Israel, Poland and Cuba, gave him purchase on this theme. The lack of context or critical investment could be the reason why the reaction/interaction of some spectators, whom I watched for over thirty minutes, engaged the work by taking comical selfies near parts of the subjects’ naked body parts.

The hanging Black body in the Caribbean has been captured in John Stedman’s *Narrative*.²⁸ William Blake’s “Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave” (1796) is such an image that illustrates Stedman’s text. This image and other quintessential depictions of colonial violence are put on shirts that male mannequins wear in Rogelio Lopez Cuenca’s *Aloha Shirt* series for his 2019 Reina Sofia museum exhibit, *La Islas*. The mannequins are a gloss white featureless male forms one might find in a sporting goods store as the expressions on their mouths and bodies gesture

²⁷ A year later and Rottenberg’s *Anarchofeminista Series* is no longer on his webpage, <https://www.enriquerottenberg.com/series>. Perhaps, like removing a tweet written inadvertently in poor taste, it has been vanquished to amnesia. I have been working toward a collaborative essay on black female figures in the art economy with Caribbean scholar Sophie Pappenheim who also had an opportunity to speak with the artist, *in situ*, at his exhibition.

²⁸ See John Gabriel Stedman. *Stedman’s Surinam: Life in Eighteenth-Century Slave Society*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.)

to scoring a goal. Of his work Cuenca writes, "In the contemporary tourism industry, the aspiration to consume a colonial fantasy: of discovery and total freedom, without break, the absolute power - all inclusive - over goods and lives, over virgin bodies and lands."²⁹ Here, Cuenca's choice of mannequin gestures at the past and present ideas of power, from the sword to the dollar. The surreal "game," from 1492, is ongoing. The difference that exists between these two exhibits is a difference in enunciation, "[w]ho and when, why and where is knowledge generated." In one exhibit there is a selective disregard for Caribbean history and an ignorance of the lynching motif as a visual signifier. One could do a resistant reading on the Rottenberg's photographs of black and brown women hung like meat by locating it within a history of spectacle, or as Hortense Spillers calls it, pornotroping³⁰. But, unfortunately, the artist's own words bias such a generous assessment. In the other instance, Cuenca's art puts into conversation one form of historical violence with contemporary abuses and exploitation. One artist enunciates an unexamined patriarchal and racial foundation of knowledge in their exhibit with unfounded poise; the other engages the conversation with a inquisitive stutter.

Mignolo's body-politic of knowledge is a call to valorize knowledge-making "from local experiences and needs."³¹ It is this remapping of power through the body's geo-bio-politico-dia-trans-ontologic potential that animates my question,

²⁹ Lopez's other works, language and Picasso, are also on display at the National Art Museum. It is interesting to consider how the museum's web page highlights his other work and that a translation of Michele de Cuneo letter produced by Reina Sofia National Art Center Museum for the exhibit may belie a hesitant commitment to decolonial projects. Of the letter, I am thinking of first phrase, which has been translated various ways: I caught, I took, I captured...the Caribe, the Cannibal, the Caribbean. However, the museum's translation of "Mientras estaba en la barca, hice cautela a una hermosísima mujer Caribe" read in English as "While I was in the boat, I captivated a beautiful Caribbean woman," or perhaps, Cuneo "cautioned." My observation on word usage, is of course, how the source material was interpreted and translated.

³⁰ Hortense Spillers, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book.* *Diacritics*, 17.2 (Summer 1987) pp 64-81.

³¹ *Ibid*, 19.

“who is producing whom,” as a way of being human that is relational to the very deprivation of *humanness*. The decolonial human is becoming-human *in spite of* and not *because of* the perceived knowledge gap. This unfilled space, formless and unified, holds the intersections of marginalized identities and their attending anachronisms—because, a body-politic disrupting notions of linear temporality in national culture disrupts hegemony.³²

Salvage

From a conceptualization of debris and salvage, I borrow the term salvage poetics from Sheila E. Jelen, who has used it to describe how iconic literary styles or specific texts inflected with post/apocalyptic sensibility are used by contemporary post-Holocaust communities to make sense of living. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to engage with this fascinating and transmedial project prior to its publishing. In her work, Jelen examines how hybrid texts, ethnographic and literary texts, “facilitated American Jews’ reclamation of their ethnic ‘Jewishness’ as a reaction against what came to be known as the ‘protestantization’ of American Jewish culture.”³³ Jelen opens *Salvage Poetics: Anecdotes, Artifacts, Antidotes, and Art* with the provocation, “How do American Jews know what they think they know about pre-Holocaust East-European Jewish life? On what do they base their impressions, assumptions, and suppositions about the world destroyed in the Holocaust.”³⁴ Jelen analyzes the work of Jewish scholar Martin Buber who took up the study of Hasidism in the early 1900s as a way to remedy what he saw as the

³² Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality*, (Albany: SUNY, 2009), ix-xvi for a discussion on how analogies of race and sexuality in literature and psychoanalysis are structured by notions of time and untimeliness that carry tropes of backwardness, regression, and arrested development.

³³ Sheila E. Jelen, *Salvage Poetics: Anecdotes, Artifacts, Antidotes, and Art*, (in press)

³⁴ *Ibid.*

malaise of Judaism and the alienation of man across three vital relationships: between mankind, with god, and with nature. Buber chose his primary texts carefully and deliberately excluded anything not “anecdotal,” anything that was not a “little story” from the mix. Buber’s description of his process of “filtering”—his identification, translation, adaptation, and mediation of a particular aesthetic form as the catalyst for the renewal of Jewish identity and spirituality in a post-Enlightenment moment serves as a good starting point for our discussion of salvage poetics.³⁵ Buber’s “particular aesthetic” is influential and is, thus, repeated alongside a variety of other articulations of pre-Holocaust East European Jewish experience as in Jerome Robbins’s Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. The musical was inspired by Sholem Aleichem’s Tevye stories and Cornell Capa’s 1955 black and white photograph, “Hebrew Lesson,” featuring a man in traditional Hasidic dress hovering over three little boys. The man points to the open texts that lay open before the boys who sit at desks. It is a scene of a closed-off world nurturing its next generation.

The signifying power of the Hasidic image operates as identity politics in which certain visuals, like a dark beard and garb, simply read “Jewish” and as ethnic authenticity. In spoken and silent ways, the signifying image of the Hasidic man operates in news, media, and culture. This easily detectable imagery demonstrates how a shared visual vocabulary, around which a group may coalesce, forecloses a more complex Jewish history of belonging and alienation. Jelen’s hybrid pre-Holocaust artifacts, Hassidic texts, works written in Yiddish, and visuals are mobilized as salvage poetic texts. These “artifacts” from which Buber and others translated, in degrees, “are often forcibly married through hermeneutic means” to minimize what “they perceive to be a significant gap” between the primary source

³⁵ Ibid.

and the salvage product itself.³⁶ This perceived gap relies on form and style that not only represents a cohesive Jewish historical and spiritual past, but mimics it. The gap is being filled with identity-politic “artifacts” to such a cohesive extent that, for example, the process directs attention to Zionism and those who criticize rightwing discourse promoting a Jewish state as being un-Jewish or anti-Semitic.³⁷ Yet, a similar perceived knowledge gap for the Caribbean and its diaspora, paradoxically, invites cultural mimicry while devaluing it.

The gap, created in four imperial languages, namely English, French, Dutch, and Spanish, contain values, habits, ideas, and traditions that are at odds with its past, present and future. If the project of Jewish salvage poetic texts constructs an identity politics to filter artifacts for an archive, then Caribbean identity politics are, accordingly, less determinate. The artifacts of the Caribbean and its diaspora may also be textual, visual, and sonic, however, my conceptualization of a Caribbean salvage model complicates any creation of a unified historic archive because the nature of post/apocalyptic events requires a constant remaking of bodies, places, and connections. My conceptualization expands to include the syncretic Caribbean carnival with its ludic play of mas, exposure of erotic subjectivities, and “identity: which does not come when called.”³⁸ There are also syncretic religions such as Pocomania in Jamaica and Santeria in Cuba that combine Christianity with ancestor worship and pantheism. Therefore, primary cultural material that facilitates access to

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ W.M. Finlay, “Pathologizing Dissent: Identity Politics, Zionism, and the Self-Hating Jew.” *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 44 (July 2005), 201-22

³⁸ Kevin Adonis Browne, *High Mas: Carnival and the Poetics of Caribbean Culture*. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2018), 49. Browne’s work with Caribbean carnival culture reconfigures Bakhtian models of carnival insofar as Browne engages affect theory and Black diasporic queer theory to address ethnocentric variations of street performance. His focus on Devil mas especially highlights the difference in formation of contemporary mas culture (pretty mas) with traditional culture mas, or dirty mas.

and understanding of a lost culture must be salvaged simultaneously as: constitutive and oppositional, as violence and beauty, as acknowledgement and rejection of what may be or has been enunciated as a claim to humanity and social legibility. And so, it follows, that the decolonial body-politic can never fill a knowledge gap created for Western intellectual and aesthetic specificity.

The work of salvage in the Caribbean is an active project in which highly imaginative articulations such as spirituality, carnival, and music develop and transform in relation to literary arts. The natural environment is also a primary source rooted in salvage poetics. For example, in addition to exploring the experience of the ocean as a site of the former “apocalypse” of the Middle Passage, there are issues of sense-making with environmental crises. Sri Lankan poet Jean Aranasanayagam writes, “Who can ascribe emotion to the wave? Who can translate its calligraphy? / Who can interpret the jagged sculptures of debris?”³⁹ Aranasanayagam’s meditation on how textual and material cartographies map on to each other is also present in Brathwaite’s formulation of tidalectics, an unsettling of dialectics to better express the inseparability of Caribbean history and landscape. In *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey*, he writes:

So she’s in fact performing a
very important ritual which I
couldn’t fully understand but
which I’m tirelessly tryin to.

...

And then one morning I see her
body silhouetting against the
sparkling light that hits the
Caribbean at that early dawn
and it seems as if her feet,

³⁹ Jean Aranasanayagam, “Return to Galle.” *Searching for an Ambalama: Poems*. (Colombo Godage International, 2009), 43

which all along I thought were
 walking on the sand . . . were
 really . . . walking on the water
 . . . and she was tra
 velling across that middlepass
 age, constantly coming from h
 ere she had come from – in her
 case Africa – to this spot in
 North Coast Jamaica where she
 now lives . . . ⁴⁰

The enjambment of “velling across that middlepass/ age, constantly coming from h” evokes a paraxodical sense of temporariness and longitude. The word “velling” is split but it is closely tied to velleity, a wish, and vellum, transparent paper originally made from animal guts. The words “age” and “constantly” set the conditions of the Middle Passage. That Brathwaite elides the phrase “middlepass” connotes the tightness of the bodies on the slaveship and also gives us the image of an experience marking time, the middle of an era which is “constantly coming.” So, to my earlier question, “Is the Middle Passage an event or a process?” I must consider the ellipses. The ellipsis that ends the stanza conveys an unwillingness or inability to address how the figure, “she,” is living. The speaker could be overcome with passion or be trailing off into a subdued state of repose as they meditate on the walking figure of this woman along North Coast Jamaica. The ellipsis is an unfinished ending charging the earlier elliptic instances with possibilities for its silence: a thought, a secret, a demonstration in lieu of a word? But, why read it as part of spoken language? The ellipsis, I argue, visualizes fragmentation. Brathwaite’s “‘meaning’ of the Caribbean” is found in the “humble repetitive ritual actio(n)” of

⁴⁰ Kamau Braithwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*. (New York: We Press, 1999), 33. Ellipsis in original.

the woman in the poem.⁴¹ He suggests that Caribbean psychology is not successfully di-alectical - in the way Western philosophy" requires.⁴² Instead, the Caribbean is tidalectic like the ocean's movement. Tidalectics patterns a Caribbean that is "so fragmented, so perpetually caught up with the notion of hope and still at the same time Sisyphean" and part of a "continuum [...] into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future. . ." ⁴³

Following a series of personal disasters which include the death of his wife and a robbery that left him wounded and unable to write as well by hand, Braithwaite began using computers and developed the sycoraX video style (SVS) to help him "visualize sound." He compares the reduction of the quality of his life to the the cursor, "a speck in the corner of th(e) world" and this new relationship allowed him to "*big myself up* again."⁴⁴ Through sycoraX video style, Brathwaite's writing has a more profound relationship to metaphor when one considers that typography can produce the topography of a tidalectic.

In other words - to use the language of nation-lang
uage discourse - there's going to be a change from imitation
to 'reality' as you move from John Keats'
'star' to Caribbean beach-pool w/its context/reality
of wave-child, sound, space, beauty, hurricane -
where you dealing not w/'Ariel' but w/Caliban,
and you're dealing w/ **sycoraX** and w/alteration and
w/magic & sacred realism and surrealism. And because
the Caribbean is fragmented and the site of

⁴¹ Ibid., 33

⁴² Ibid., 34

⁴³ Ibid., 34

⁴⁴ Kamau Brathwaite and Natasha Sajé. "KB in Utah," Interviewed by Natasha Sajé and some of her students at Westminster College. Salt Lake City. (November 2006)

original & ongoing catastrophe, you cannot hold
a mirror up to Nature. You have to hold a *broeken*
mirror up to *broeken* Nature. That's the only way
you can see the paradoxical whole. . .⁴⁵

The ellipsis, like the cursor repeats, connoting fragmentation and movement. Braithwaite's ellipses aligns with Audre Lorde's conceptualization of chaos as "personifying creative power and harmony."⁴⁶ The ellipsis also aligns with Antonio Benitez-Rojo's suggestion that repetition, as in the analogy of the Caribbean archipelago as a repeating island, emphasizes "the word *repeats*...which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness."⁴⁷ The figure "she" is walking and "tra/velling" between "the site of origin & ongoing catastrophe." Each dot is successive but succeeding toward what? An ongoing catastrophe or a rebirth?

Michelle Wright plays with the concept of chaos and fragmentation to theorize a *Physics of Blackness* that challenges a "linear progress narrative" in dominant discourses of Blackness in diaspora. She uses the term "epiphenomenal spacetime" or a "now" that is not causal in a linear way but could be correlated with other moments; it is the "principle of superposition" borrowed from particle physics.⁴⁸ Wright reads the "now" in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, whose narration superposes the life of an enslaved boy, his Middle Passage

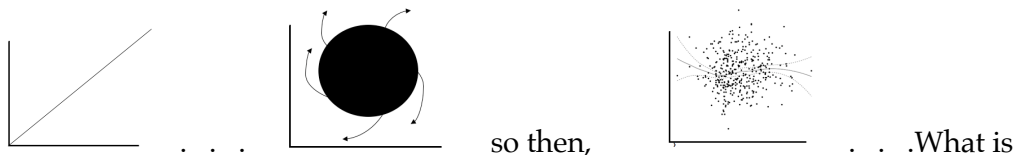
⁴⁵ Ibid., 208. Original emphasis.

⁴⁶ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," in *Zami; Sister Outsider; Undersong*. (Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993), 55

⁴⁷ Antonio Benitez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*

⁴⁸ *Chaos* also pairs to Wright's use of the "multiverse" as discussed by Harvard physicist Lisa Randall who likens them to networked and paralleled social identities—not unlike comic book storylines. Benítez-Rojo's Caribbean *Chaos* is an "island" of paradoxes that repeats itself this practice of repetition he discovers is, in essences, an entropy of the quivering "now" of Caribbean experience. Thus, the repeating "geographical accident" articulating chaos of the Caribbean's "now" involves overlapping timelines, memories, and practices that are synchronized

voyage, flight to freedom, and transatlantic return via abolition activism. When a recent scholar uncovered that Equiano might have been born in South Carolina and not an Igbo village, “[w]e can ask, however, When/ where was Equiano’s Blackness? And receive not one but a revealing multitude of answers produced by the multidimensionality of Blackness and Diaspora at that moment as we read it in the now, with all its possibilities.”⁴⁹ She uses space and time as analytical categories to inform a deeper analysis of Middle Passage Epistemology (from Africa to enslavement) and postwar epistemology (“the meaning of Blackness in our *contemporary* “postwar” moment”) in order to tease out her notion of “now” or epiphenomenal spacetime.⁵⁰ “If the spacetime of the Middle Passage Epistemology can be represented by a line (or an arrow), then postwar epistemology [...] should be represented as a circle with many arrows pointing outward in all directions...[t]he circle denotes “now”...collective identities are, in fact, dialogic [...] read at distinct moments through intersecting linear and Epiphenomenal spacetimes” (20-22). I see her breathless abstraction illustrated as:

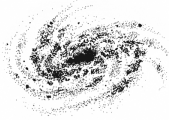


What is particularly lovely about Wright’s thinking of bodies of the African and Caribbean diaspora though time and space is that echoes of her analysis are in Benítez-Rojo’s conceptualization of Chaos. It is a notion of the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago “having neither a boundary nor a center” akin to the “spiral Chaos of the Milky Way.”⁵¹ Therefore,

⁴⁹ Michelle Wright, “The Middle Passage Epistemology,” *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 23.

⁵⁰ Michelle Wright, “Introduction: Many Thousands Still Coming: Theorizing Blackness in the Postwar Moment,” 4.

⁵¹ See Benitez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 4



...the Middle Passage, to answer my own rhetorical question, is a process.

Speculation

Speculation and speculative writing, like the slippage between diaspora and transnationalism, are subject to an explanatory slippage with science fiction, weird fiction, and fantasy. For academic consistency, I brand, pitch, and announce my dissertation as a work of speculative writing. In a recent conversation with Caribbean writer Nalo Hopkinson, I asked her opinion on the matter. She sees “no distinction” between speculative fiction and science fiction. I agree insofar that the word “science” has more plasticity than it is given credit for: physical sciences, chemical sciences, social sciences, environmental sciences, etc. Hopkinson says there is an “arbitrary distinction because of status—people twist them in knots looking for literary merit.”⁵² Yes. Case and point would be academia’s preference for the words graphic novel over comic book. Hopkinson notes a similar dynamic between the distinctions of porn and erotica, between “kink and vanilla within the queer community.” For example, when the “kink float” comes down the parade route, eyebrows raise due to this idealogical tension between the “vanilla” and “kink” aspects of sexuality and expression.⁵³ Similarly, Hopkinson notices, “spec fiction is what people in science fiction” say “when they want academics to understand them” or their project, “like calling a bisexual student queer—it gets essentialized.”⁵⁴ So, the paradox of nomenclature is that a speculation is a conjecture, a risk, and an attempt

⁵² A conversation with Nalo Hopkinson on March 20, 2019

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

to measure fluctuation. Whereas “science,” from the Latin *scientia* for knowledge, builds, organizes, and explains. While I agree with Hopkinson’s assessment, I have made a choice to label my creative project as a speculation. Refracted through the lenses of the African diaspora, a methodology grounded in speculation has the ability to (re)present genre structures from which the affective orientations (feelings, thoughts, expectations, literary values) are grounded; the political context and performative dimensions of *PoCo Mas*’s plot are supported by a process of hybridity meant to cohere to the real and symbolic consciousness of moving worlds.

If this was a project invested in distinguishing genre difference, I would study instances within the contemporary Caribbean canon where poetry, prose, and social sciences cross boundaries, by necessity, (e.g., *Zong!*, *High Mas*, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean*) to reframe the solidity and fixity of genre as a container invested in the overrepresentation of its own penetrable narrative structures. And, that is what is at stake in my project: the significance of mobility and temporariness of Afrodiasporic life in the New World. My creative project is “speculative fiction” simply because, in addition to writing about hypothetical advances in molecular, cell, and developmental biology, I answer the “what if” of an apocalyptic event with counterfactual history. If you want to visualize that last sentence using genetics as a model, picture a DNA strand. The counterfactual incidents are like a point mutation along the DNA strand of our human timeline. A counterfactual history is a point mutation in the archive. Let us suppose:

...what if Suzanne Césaire graded one of Frantz Fanon’s essays instead of Aïme who was perhaps, away giving a talk. Fanon, being one of Aïme’s star pupils, might have written an essay pondering on the fixity of Eurocentric knowledge he is meant to ingest from French canons and culture that, while building him up as an intellect, renders his Blackness a resignation rather than a celebration.

. . . what if, as proxy teacher in her husband's absence, Suzanne wrote on his paper, "ah mon ami, si vrai, c'est un fait de noirceur," advising the young scholar that the fact of blackness should be, first, protesting that inferior position by loving your Blackness.⁵⁵ This encounter may have informed his 1952 essay, "The Fact of Blackness." Or, likelier still, . . . what if, in her capacity as editor and writer of *Tropiques*, she shortened her husband's longer thought on how scientific knowledge creates self-alienation and deindividualization to the simple sentence, "Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge."⁵⁶ For Aimé, modernity's reliance on "this half-starved scientific knowledge" leaves them wanting of a more fulfilling poetic knowledge.⁵⁷ The truth and the what if of these speculative scenarios have a shared understanding that predates both Fanon's 1952 essay and Aimé Césaire's 1944 essay. In "Poetic Destitution," published in *Tropiques no.4*, January 1942, Suzanne wrote, "Martiniquan poetry will be cannibal or it will not be."⁵⁸ Suzanne Césaire reappropriated a stock insult and reconfigured a conceptual cannibal poetry that is both an act of death and a mark of rebirth. It is the picture of Antillean poetic knowledge as a meal prepared with science and poetry. It is the picture of the cannibal poet ingesting its enemy as communion. In *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, Mimi Sheller asks, "What happens when we think about bodies not as consuming food, but as becoming food for others? In what sense can one human body be 'eaten' by another? And how does consumption of the human body

⁵⁵ Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*

⁵⁶ Aimé Césaire, "Poetry and Knowledge," *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*. Edited by Michael Richardson. (London: Verso, 1996), 134-152.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Aimé Césaire in *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945) by Suzanne Césaire*. Edited by Daniel Maximin; translated by Keith L. Walker. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012.), 27.

function as a boundary limit for consumer excess?"⁵⁹ Sheller writes of the troublesome history of how American and European business and economics have been relentlessly consuming the Caribbean from plantation to resort. Yet, the move from colonial consumption to contemporary consumption coincides with the Caribbean's consumption of Western presence. In other words, there is no room for diametric opposites in the cannibal's diet; conditions that create science and poetry must be addressed at once. "Yes. Hammock literature. Literature made of sugar and vanilla. Tourist literature...Poetry, not in the least."⁶⁰ In Suzanne Césaire's diagnostic, she wrestles with political oppression, artistic mimicry, post-slavery economic depression, society's damaged psyche, and a myriad of inherited colonial epistemes evoked in the encrypted surrealist metaphors of her essay. The polemic prose poem, "Poetic Destitution," is not simply a tool to showcase authentic Martinican life. The poem, with its surrealist touches, produces alternative knowledge-systems to survive that life. Cannibal poetry is therefore transformative and radical.

My Césaire-Fanon-Césaire *what if* gestures at the interconnectedness of decolonial thought within the Caribbean and its diaspora while giving attention to vital arguments by female contributors whose life, academic and actual, deserve attention. By speculating on possible temporalities and crossing bodies in Part Two of this dissertation, I am opened up to new ways of reading critical work in Part One and, thus, opened to new ways of engaging intertextuality that may otherwise occlude feminist thought.

⁵⁹ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 144.

⁶⁰ Suzanne Césaire in *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941–1945)* by Suzanne Césaire. Edited by Daniel Maximin; translated by Keith L. Walker. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012.), 26-27.

The Parts

This dissertation is organized into two parts. In Part One, “Cartographies of Salvage and Speculation,” I provide the stakes of my intervention of a Caribbean salvage and speculation model. The literary examples I flesh out in Part One are texts written in the Anglophone tradition, whereas my theoretical and philosophical interventions are supported by a careful constellation of scholarship produced within or conscious of the global south. Part One is organized by two sections. In the section, “‘Come Back to Jamaica:’ Notes on Salvaging Paradise,” I close read the Jamaican Tourism Board’s 1980s “Come Back to Jamaica” campaign connecting it to three Oonya Kempadoo novels. Salvage poetics provides an analytical lens to examine how Oonya Kempadoo’s own diasporic and transnational experiences add new depth to strategies of reconciliation in contemporary Caribbean narratives. These strategies include the task of refiguring geographic, gender, and other surreal boundaries. The three subsections focus on each of her books, respectively, while bringing feminist decolonial thought into conversation with close readings.

In “Menageries,” I consider the reverse gaze in *Buxton Spice* and how transnational privilege complicates the marginal position of Lula, the young Black girl narrator. In “Metaphor,” *Tide Running* reveals the cross-cultural co-protagonists’ first-person narratives as metaphors for Caribbean consciousness; the double meaning of words becomes an instrument of history inscribing both the environment and lived experience of characters. In “Material,” *All Decent Animals* explores how queerness and nation overlap to create a liberated exteriorized subject. Together, these three discussions analyze a reversed or inverted gaze wherein the Caribbean person observes the visitor. In some instances, the Caribbean person and visitor are

one in the same as the self-conscious returnee examines their relationship to their own dislocation.

In the section “Wynter is Coming: Or, How the Creative Critical Speculations of ‘Semantically-Neurochemically Activated’ Cosmogonies Narrates the Caribbean,” I provide a brief overview of key concepts and terms, some of which overlap, to put my creative work in conversation with an emerging body of research and writing on Afrofuturism, Afrosurrealism, Sylvia Wynter, carnival culture studies, with a pivot to a George Herriman comic strip that I argue attempts to translate the experiences of dislocation within diaspora and transnationalism. This is not carried out as a comprehensive study on any of the aforementioned topics. Instead, this scholarship along with carnival theory provides an organizational framework for which I develop the term *fête body*, that is brought into consciousness—irrupts even—to translate the ‘civilizing effects’ of interiorized life. Using short examples from a popular YouTube series by Caribbean comedian Majah Hype, and the poem “Saltfish” by Malika Booker, *Midnight Robber* by Nalo Hopkinson, 2017 soca song “Full Extreme” by Ultimate Rejects, and the life of San Martin de Porres, I locate ongoing crisis and redress in a variety of Caribbean life across and time.

The integration of this scholarship provides the inspirational framework for my creative project in Part Two, “PoCo Mas,” that focalizes three female figures. My goal, therefore, is to contextualize feminist readings of the body as being simultaneously biological, symbolic, and libidinal while acknowledging Black and Caribbean female interactions have diverse cultural traditions.⁶¹ If Wynter’s radical reading of the Human calls for the untethering of white supremacist, capitalist, and

⁶¹ Rosi Bradotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 39 and 44-45; Audre Lorde, *Zami: Sister Outsider; Undersong*, 169-170 and 174-75; and bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 42.

anti-black narratives from the category of Man, then a consideration of what might be created from that untethering follows. This reconfigured body is picked up as a plot thread in Part Two, *PoCo Mas*. If the Human can be an agent of change reconfiguring existing social hierarchies, then the body, untethered from the damage of Man/ not-Man / not-woman binarisms might actively seek a redefinition of power. In addition, since creative writing is an interdisciplinary exercise, I use salvage and speculation as methodologies by which to dissolve genre barriers around what is conventionally read as theory or literary work.

In *PoCo Mas* are two main characters and several timelines. Fleur, an abbreviation for fungible labialized *ex utero* routine, is a cell line created/born/raised from genetic manipulation of post-Diaspora detritus that circulates in bodies of water following a series of cataclysmic weather events. Created as a control for government-sponsored experiments, they/she/shi/we/it escape(s) to disrupt the repeating histories of income-driven human circulation.

A second focal character is Bee, the orphaned daughter of the Jab Molassie and a tourist vacationing on the Caribbean island of St. Somewhere. Diagnosed as a mute, her untranslatable language conjures bouts of renewal and justice. Her language is inspired by the fading language/speech of various traditional mas characters such as the Black Indian/Wild Indian/Guarahoon. In a February 2019 interview conducted by the Traditional Mas Archive with three septuagenarians from Tobago who play(ed) Wild Indian mas, they remark on the decline of their mas performance in current times. They explain how the Wild Indian speech, a call and response that is part mnemonic and part phonetic, is “not a language we could translate it [sic].”⁶² As for the Devil’s speech acts, as there are various devils

⁶² Annette Alfred, Kenrick Kerr and Miriam MacFarlane Noel, discuss “Wild Indian Mas” in an interview. *Traditional Mas Archive*, (February 2019)

performed, they are generated from manifested (freed conscious) or performed (conscious) vocalizations akin to screams. In “Seeing Blue: The Genesis of Public Executions,” Kevin Adonis Browne writes of the Blue Devil mas as, “People, in whose apparently inexplicable rage we hope to see more than a mere theory of reflective practice” (Browne 97). While legible recitations and speeches are part of Midnight Robber and Bookman mas traditions, Bee’s communication is complicated by the untranslatability of violence and processes of historical creolizations that give rise to imaginative and bodily incantations. In addition to Fleur and Bee, I have also created the speculated twin sister of Cotton Mather, Mediation Mather, who is both cursed and blessed at birth by Tituba, the mixed race enslaved woman accused of witchcraft. Mediation grows up with an ability to travel time. Mediation flees Salem where her brother and their father, Increase Mather, oversee the Salem witch trials. In the realized novel from these linked stories, Mediation Mathers will feature more prominently having the ability to foregather, to an extent, characters and events. Together, the effects of history inform characters’ actions in the present and future. Conversely, time is informed by their actions and beingness.

Picking up threads of temporality, language, history, the ocean, and dislocation is the titular piece, *Poco Mas*. I only present one page of the image-text from the “PoCo Mas” series in this dissertation. The series of images are graphia¹⁵ that create Bee’s language as an artifact of traditional mas speech acts, maps Fleur’s movement as an artifact of ancestors, and charges Mediation’s refusal (albeit an inheritance) of white domination as an artifact of time disrupting linearity. Again, I only offer one page on the “PoCo Mas” image-text series here in this dissertation, a page that creates the constraints of Bee’s language. It will be an imagined language because the scale of the research required to uncover and translate actual Black Indian/Wild Indian/Guarahoon speech or Devil “talk” is outside the scope of this

dissertation. Yet, by creating a language rooted in diaspora rather than indigeniety or colonial black resistance, I hope to syncretize the three overlapping categories. This invented language is juxtaposed to a translated portion of an October 28, 1495 letter from Michele de Cuneo, a close friend and travel companion of Christopher Columbus. It is an experiment that is inspired by with the linguistic and temporal shifting present in a 1930s comic strip by George Herriman in which his three characters, Krazy Kat, Ignatz Mouse and Offisa Pupp, move through time on a see-saw on opposites sides of a New Mexico border wall. I offer a close reading of this strip and the significance of a comic book phenomenon known as closure, the ability to perceive cognitive wholeness from parts separated in panels, for understanding the generative value of gaps. I contend that to decolonize theoretic and pedagogical approaches to Caribbean literature means looking into the perceived knowledge gaps— gaps proliferated by Western epistemology and ontology—and seeing a wider field of imaginative possibilities.

PoCo Mas puns the phrase postcolonial masquerade, “poco” being an abbreviation of “postcolonial.” Mas, playing mas, or the mas tradition has been a part of planter and enslaved tradition in the Caribbean. And, not to ignore the pun of “poco mas”, the stories demand a “little more” of the reading practices. But with my narrative, my creative project seeks to be accessible—meaning comprehensibility will be a preoccupation— as my focus is on language, space and identity. A large portion of the linked stories were written before and in the absence of critical engagements with this dissertation’s Bibliography. It has been an uncanny process that brings them together.

I. “Come Back to Jamaica:” Notes on Salvaging Paradise

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Jamaican Tourism Board aired a series of commercials with a catchy refrain viewers to “come back to Jamaica” (lyrics are italicized). It featured a cast of friendly black faces extolling the virtues of their island while speaking in a dampened Jamaican patois (script in quotes). Other commercial branding featured white couples returning for romance and one commercial followed a single white man in safari khakis moving between luxury and locals as he writes his adventures on a typewriter. The version I share is from a 1980s montage.⁶³

Scene one: An aerial shot of a raft on an expansive river. *Come back to Jamaica* A mustached man turns to the camera and smiles widely. “We will raft you into the sunset.” Scene two: Cricketeers in whites. *What’s old is what’s new.* A player beckons the viewer. “We’ll match you at cricket.” Scene three: A young woman in a red sarong and a red flower in her hair emerges from a flowered bush. *We want you to join us.* “We’ll intoxicate you with hibiscus.” Scene four: An older woman with a gray updo wearing a floral dashiki paints on a canvas. *We’re waiting for you.* “We’ll paint you a picture.” Scene five: A young male snorkeler emerges as the crescendo bellows. *So make it Jamaica.* “We’ll dazzle you with turquoise.” Scene six: A wizened artist hammers and chisels the neck of a large wooden head. *Make it your own.* “We’ll excite your imagination.” Scene seven: Three men in sixteenth century stage costume appear, one bows. *Make it Jamaica.* “We’ll surprise you with Shakespeare.” Scene eight: Men and women stand in color-coordinated folk dance wear starch white shirts and red and tan bottoms; the women’s hair is covered in tignons. A candelabra is lit in the background. *Your new island home.* “Come back to the way things used to

⁶³ “Come Back to Jamaica” *Make it Jamaica*, 1980s Campaign. Jamaica Tourism Board commercial series, version #2.

be. Make it Jamaica again and make it your own." She and her partner twirl and we flash back to the painter, the sculptor and the flower bearer. *Make it Jamaica; your new island home*. The sun, in cinematic terms, exudes its magic hour glow over the words, "Make it Jamaica. Again." Fade out. Yea. You remember the one.

I can still recall most of this jingle from memory. The memory is attached to an envy because there was no such commercial presentation of my family's Guyana. Then, I did not know about Guyana's rain forests, sea wall, nutrient rich black water rivers, or its historic wooden Victorian houses. Were these valuable to vacationers' imagination? What might they experience of its raw ecology and decaying colonial architecture to make it their own? Then, Guyana was attached to the failed efforts of the American cult leader Jim Jones, and even then, Guyana was an abstract jungle backdrop for the replayed miniseries *Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones* (CBS, 1980). Collectively, the rafter, painter, and sculptor evoke a sense of hobby and leisure, a menagerie. The hibiscus flowers and turquoise waters could arguably be part of the most singular experience to display since the ecology of a specific location becomes its pride and value.⁶⁴ In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said wrote, "For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored."⁶⁵ Yet, instead of featuring the plant used for the popular Jamaican (West Indian) drink sorrel made from the calyx of *hibiscus sabdariffa*, the commercial displays the, *hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, an ornamental plant also found in Hawaii, along with a pink bougainvillea—whose thorns are notoriously hidden and sharp. The ubiquitous floral display makes Jamaica a familiar paradise with a "loss of locality."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, "Introduction." *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1961).

⁶⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Reprint edition. (New York: Vintage, 1994), 77.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

As for the “turquoise waters,” Jamaica’s haunting iconic azure has its own approximate wavelength of 486.26 nm and a hexadecimal color code #1ac1dd known as “Caribbean blue”; Pantone has named it “Caribbean Sea” with its own proprietary code. The realization that admiration of the region’s beauty cannot preclude commodification, I am interested in the symbolic duplication, even reduplication, of its aesthetics. I am interested in this idea of making and remaking that essentializes culture to abstract nostalgia and pleasure for more abstracted nostalgia and pleasure. The topography of the Caribbean archipelago has left its exotic debris in the imagination of the masses, in turn, it has been left with “imperial debris” or what Ann Laura Stoler describes as “the uneven temporal sedimentations in which imperial formations leave their marks.”⁶⁷ Debris piles up.

In the Jamaica Tourist Board commercial, I see how the concept of salvage shows up as method and metaphor to express the interrelation between socio-ecological violence and socio-economic development. “First we must study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in a true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness violence, race hatred, and moral relativism.”⁶⁸ Colonization dehumanizes even the most civilized man. Islands surrounded by blue waters are marketed as the playground for the privileged. Their occupation of space is not based on an economy needs productivity or necessarily of the goods and services manufactured or grown on the land. One needs only to go into a kitchen at a resort on delivery day—and I have—to see the massive amounts of imports from America and Europe that are needed to sustain the seamless fantasy of comfortable exoticism. Nature and culture are separated by a de/civilizing imagination wherein the tension lies in, first,

⁶⁷ Ann Stoler, *Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination*. (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013), 2.

⁶⁸ See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 35

expropriating the environment and next, re-curating the experience of island life with aforementioned expropriations. The Caribbean is a great place to get away, cut loose. The people are friendly, the food is cheap. Consider the Hedonism Resorts, a chain of hotels in Jamaica that first opened in 1976 and likely benefitted from the 1980s commercial. Their website features a beautiful Anglo couple on a bed; the ad copy asks, “Where do you see yourself on your next vacation? If the first answer that springs to mind is “on the ceiling”, well, my friend, you’ve come to the right place.”⁶⁹ Whatever happens in there, stays there.

Every room at Hedonism boasts a king-size mirror mounted directly above the bed. It’s a constant reminder that you’re here to indulge your wildest fantasies. And even if you never tell another soul about your Hedonism experience, you’ll always have a **witness**. Best of all, **the dirtier you are**, the more you’ll appreciate our spectacular new multi-head sexy showers...At Hedonism, we offer **accommodations** on both sides of our lush resort. Our “Nude” category features guest rooms on our clothing optional side of the resort. While our “Prude” category features guest rooms on our main beach. **Guests of either category are welcome on both sides of the resort.** However, nudity is not permitted on our main beach and in the main public areas.⁷⁰

The mirror reflects the inversion of the person who is experiencing Hedonism. It is import to note the connection to “dirt” and “sex” is not an indictment on kink. Instead, when thinking about the physical enclosures of a tourist destination that keep the locals out, “the ‘untouched’ Caribbean of tourist fantasy must be held in place behind walls.”⁷¹ Their website’s image gallery scrolls past two Black women smiling at reception and in another image, two guest getting a couples massage from two other Black women.

⁶⁹ Hedonism II – Negril Jamaica. Official Website. www.hedonism.com

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis added

⁷¹ See Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, 30

While all photographic stills in the image scroll depict consensual activities, the ad nudges Patricia Rozema's 1999 cinematic remake of *Mansfield Park*. In the film, we are privy to the entanglements of sex and power in the wealth of imperialist Sir Thomas, the patriarch of Mansfield Park. We witness his son's psychological breakdown because he is unable to articulate the atrocities he witnesses during a visit to the family plantation in Antigua. The son has a sketchbook full of depictions of white male sexual exploits and acts of torture he draws as a way to process. In her essay, "An End to the Neglect of Problems of the Negro Woman." Claudia Jones reframes Marxist theory to consider the historical labor of black women and uses the term *superexploitation* to describe it. The enslaved women on Sir Thomas's sugar plantation in Antigua are examples of superexploitation. They represent an expropriation of overlapping environments: Africa for its material human bodies and the Caribbean for its human labor.

At resorts, superexploitation is bound to catharsis, capitalism, and the requisite consumption of land and human resources. The landing page illustrates the racialization of its enclosures and accommodations leaving the relations of subordination up to the guests. That guests are able to move between psycho-sexual categories of "nude" to "prude" articulates a code of being that, again, empower them to invert and be inversions. The trope of physical and financial (im)mobility has a strong historic resonance in the region. The debris gathers.

The more we attend to the cultural debris, the clearer we can see how the commercial's images of cricket, Shakespeare, and what might be the quadrille, a four step dance imported from the the English gentry who imported it from Parisian ballrooms in the eighteenth century, are a poetics of salvage. In his memoir, *Beyond a Boundary*, CLR James, political theorist and cricket enthusiast, speculates on the paradox of the very English game he played. He writes, the "clash of race, caste and

class did not retard but stimulated West Indian cricket."⁷² Yet, this was only true within the rules and space of the game and only true for the players. West Indian teams begin as early as the 1880s but are not captained by non-whites until 1960. Consider that the oldest known cricket artifact, valued at 150,000 British pounds, is the eighteenth century Barbados Cricket Club Buckle bearing an engraving of a mixed raced (Afro-European) cricket player at the pitch wearing a slave collar around his neck. Both James and historian-novelist James Michener commented on the buckle's rich historical value. Worn as required sport gear, lost as a discarded object, and then reclaimed as an antique, the buckle is an artifact of imperial debris in both its physical and ideological manifestations. And, when the West Indies wins their first Test match against England in 1930, the debris has prelapsarian resonance.

The Shakespearian actors, looked at from the vantage point of embodied practice, can be simultaneously regarded as performance and artifact, as process and proof. According to Giselle Rampaul, a lecturer in literatures in English at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad, seventeenth-century British theatrical groups would tour through the Caribbean on their way to America and it would have been likely that slaves were exposed to these performances. "[I]n 1823, there are records of black bands performing condensed versions of *Richard III*. And even a little bit, just after that, in 1837, there was a famous Jamaican lithographer artist, Isaac Mendes Belisario, who also mentions that *Richard III* was a favorite among these black performers."⁷³ The Shakespeare Mas at Carriacou Carnival, a Grenadine island, has endured even as colonialism ended. This "is a very interesting cultural practice, in that it is actually a verbal and physical duel. There are two

⁷² CLR James, *Beyond a Boundary*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), xviii.

⁷³ Gisele Rampaul, "Shakespeare in the Caribbean" interview for Folger Shakespeare Library, (folger.com), Interviewed on 4 November 2015.

opponents, who actually have a Shakespeare, what we can call a Shakespeare quote-off. And they compete by performing passages from *Julius Caesar*. So, if one of the opponents gets the lines wrong or they hesitate, they are whipped by their opponent".⁷⁴ So, the elocutionary force of language requires that one person's mastery countermands another's mastery by way of the (*dear lord*) whip. I watched recent Shakespeare Mas on YouTube and the players wore brightly colored costumes covering their faces in white make. It is reminiscent of hip hop battling or playing the dozens with "your mama" jokes going back and forth until a speaker fails and is replaced by another. While the Carriacou players in the video they did not have actual whips, they did brandish sticks or rubberized tubes to tap-out the loser.⁷⁵

Elocution and enunciation are the stakes of the Shakespeare Mas. This reenactment of encounter and survival is indeed a germ to be seeded in a story; however, the experience of meaning and the somatic experience (body) cannot escape the ritual of repetition, through history and through the "play." So, to look back at that tourism board commercial, I consider the many ways the semantics and somatics of narrative and embodiment reveal the complex phenomenology of language as a disciplining agent. It is continuous debris.

Not only do we glimpse Europe's prized export of stylized ballroom dance in the commercial, but we can also remap Africa onto the quadrille dance scene. Once the eighteenth century Blacks of Jamaica took command of the quadrille's four figures or four dance movements, they added a fifth called the Mento. Like the Shakespeare Mas, there are still quadrille bands around today like the Januka Quadrille Dancers in the UK who perform classic European-style figures and the added fifth element. In this instance, we can say that the debris has been, perhaps,

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Carriacou 2010 Shakespeare Mas at Mt. Royal," on YouTube, (May 2010)

“doubly and triply diasporized,” with one set of figures moving from France to England, England to Jamaica, and then from Jamaica to England; and, the other set of figures moves from Africa to Jamaica, then Jamaica to England.⁷⁶ The call to, “Come back to the way things used to be. Make it Jamaica again and make it your own,” communicates the incommunicable: the power of myth. The dialectics of the archipelago and continent, transition and tradition, and invention and mimicry play out a sanitized history of sugar, rum, and interracial interactions in the dance. The outfits are folksy and the faces friendly. The seven-headed candelabra belies synchronic simplicity; a time when the candle was technology was a time when all was well in the world. The word “make” is the counterpoint that supports the refashioning of the actor’s Afro-Caribbean folk dance, not as another European thing we did our way, but as an imagined encounter with a sustained sanitized and acquiescent present that can accommodate tourists and cruise ships. The debris gets a facelift.

This commercial is a wellspring of cartographies, a way to simultaneously relate optics, textures, and haptic sensory experience to plot a course that sheds light on (de)formations of historical consciousness. The salvage model both complicates and provokes the image of a unified historic archive within a “field of observation” (Benítez-Rojo) and it provokes an address to experienced chaos. Because diasporic bodies depend on a capacity to re/imagine and reuse the scraps from multiple civilizations, in terms of generations lived and in terms of cultural identity expressed (or suppressed), with which they are linked, I trace salvage poetics in the material realities of Caribbean texts, speech, acts, personalities,

⁷⁶ Carol Boyce Davies, “Carnival and Diaspora: Caribbean Community, Happiness, and Activism.” *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008).

ephemera, and through its waters. While debris, detritus, and salvage evoke images of de/re/composition of subjects, the resonance of the anathema “salvage” animates it as both a noun and verb to engage diaspora and the im/possible return as both a place and process.

Oonya Kempadoo’s novels address the im/possible return. Born in England to Guyanese parents, she has lived on various Caribbean islands. She has mixed Caribbean ancestry (Amerindian, African, Indian, European, Chinese). Her moving worlds are metaphorically suggestive, but also historically and poetically relevant when we look at diaspora as a field comprised of various levels of class formations, economic access, ethnic origins and cultural exchange. In her writing, her characters urge us to recognize that ways in which narrative is a colonial inheritance (enunciated stories embedded in the psyche). But, if that inheritance can be renarrated (reimagining your origin story) then understanding the ongoing tensions of diasporic and transnational being relationally has the potential to free the psyche.

In *Buxton Spice*, we see the central role decolonialization plays on the diasporic experience of a young girl in 1970s Guyana. Living in the periphery as young, black, and female gives Lula access to the world. The queer, mimetic, and sometimes humorous nascent experiments with sexual contact parallel emerging political dynamics in her town of Tamarind Grove. Kempadoo’s second novel follows the return of a Trinidadian woman, her British husband, and their mixed race son to Tobago after celebrating for the carnival season. *Tide Runnings* examines a host of cultural and class-related stratifications and differentials between dual narrators. Similarly, the leisure context of the Trinidad carnival provides familiar conditions and experiences of Caribbean people who return home from “farrin” is a dominant theme in *All Decent Animals*. In her third novel, I develop a framework for reading how carnival and carnivalesque—with their exaggeration, satire, and

potentiality for shape-shifting—show up in bodies; it is a way of reading how intimacy maps onto the body, onto the page, and on the streets.

Menageries

In *Buxton Spice*, prepubescent Lula imagines that the “big fat Buxton Spice mango tree” with its “thick, black, and green arm” growing outside her window knows too much.⁷⁷ She imagines it as a panoptic judge of her world, seeing all but refusing to tell her things: “all of the horrible dark-road secrets, plotting and scheming.”⁷⁸ To Lula, the anthropomorphized tree represents prefixed knowledge and privilege.

Its mangoes were sweet but I never wanted it to know how much I enjoyed them. But the damn thing would know anyway. It knew everything and wouldn't tell me nothing. Just there, swelling-up itself with all the secrets. Not just our house secrets. It could see all of the street in front our house.⁷⁹

The secrets it knows and withholds could be a personification favoring the government and its ability to censure its citizens or the tree might be read as something more ancestral and primordial with eyes considering Lula's world across space and time. The more paranoid her descriptions are of the tree, the more her first-person narrator's subject position has to concede absolute knowledge. In social-domestic scenarios and when overt politics are discussed, Lula's reflections have different tones. Her political voice is her imaginative projection onto the Buxton Spice tree, who in turn with its panoptic powers, offers her a third-person omniscient point of view integrating the child's perception of the present and an adult self-reflection from a narrator looking back at childhood. Less of an imaginary friend and more of an organizing entity, the mango tree is the novel's surrealistic trope for cultural preservation.

⁷⁷ Oonya Kemapdoo, *Buxton Spice*, (New York: Dutton, 1999), 28

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 30

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29

Lula's mixed race heritage and her father's staunch social ties facilitates their positive presence in Tamarind Grove. By making Lula the mixed race child of a semi-radical Guyanese writer who, along with his family, have British passports, heightens her otherness by privileging her with political perspectives from family conversations and progressive political hearsay even through her child-like hesitations and imaginations. This is particularly the case in the scene when Guyanese President Linden Burnham comes to visit an understocked overstuffed cooperative store. Lula explains how, "Our Leader Burnham stepped out. His rosy face was smiling, big eye dead, just like the photos on all the exercise books and billboards. He wore the Well-off African Politician look – grey-blue shirtjack over his paunch, black shoes glittering, gold band on his wrist."⁸⁰ The sarcasm of her description is matched only by the comic affront delivered to President Burnham from a character affectionately called Aunt Ruth. When Burnham suggests the people use salt to wash their clothes because soap is in shortage, Aunt Ruth exclaims, "...you full'a shit. You know what you can do? You can kiss my black stinking arse."⁸¹ To fully understand how a girl's personal expression reveals socio-political dynamics in the lives of the mixed race community of *Buxton Spice's* Tamarind Grove, it is important to understand the Guyana's nationalist turn after emancipation from Britain.

Prior to leading the PNC, Burnham was a leader in The People's Progressive Party (PPP) that bore the optics of a multi-ethnic labor party rooted in its inchoate 1946 claim to, "To assist the growth and development of the Labour and Progressive Movements of British Guiana, to the end of establishing a strong, disciplined and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 82

⁸¹ Ibid., 82

enlightened Party, equipped with the theory of Scientific Socialism."⁸² PPP officially formed in 1950 lead by Indo-Guyanese Cheddi Jagan, chaired by Afro-Guyanese Burnham, and Janet Jagan, Cheddi's American wife (a middle-class Jewish woman from Chicago) as its secretary. Echoes of Suzanne Césaire's observation in "The Malaise of Civilization," of the "unaccustomed desire for competition" in the new "colored middle class" must be read into the successive moves—political maneuvers encouraged and orchestrated by American and British interests—that lead to the dissolution of the PPP.⁸³ For example, according to a 1954 Report of the British Guiana, the British-appointed Robertson Commission comprised of four colonial appointees, recommended "it necessary to suspend the Constitution of British Guiana to consider and recommend what changes" were required.⁸⁴ In the report's appendices, the co-authors cited pro-labor and anti-capitalist extracts from party articles appearing in PPP's *Thunder* between January 1950 to December 1953 along with a list of Communist literature distributed by the PPP. The Robertson Commission reported to Her Majesty

We have subjected this analysis to most careful examination but we can find no escape from the logical conclusion that so long as the present leadership and policies of the People's Progressive Party continue there is no way in which any real measure of self government can be restored in British Guiana without the certainty that the country will again be subjected to constitutional crisis.⁸⁵

Colonial Britain's vote of no confidence for the labor party insinuated incompetence, ignorance, and thinly veiled corruption that could be remedied with a change in

⁸² Henry C Jefferey writes an extensive historiography of the PPP on www.ppp-civic.org/history/historyppp.htm

⁸³ Suzanne Césaire in *The Great Camouflage*, 33

⁸⁴ Op. cit

⁸⁵ Ibid.

“present leadership.” According to PPP historian Dr. Henry B. Jeffery, the Robertson Commission “encouraged opportunistic leaders to split for the PPP.”

Recollections from my own family anecdotes of this time period corroborate scenes within the novel that observe a heightening of, or a return to, preexisting pigmentocracies in Guyana following the party’s split with Jagan (Indo-Guyanese) on one side, and the America-backed People’s National Congress (PNC) of Burnham (Afro-Caribbean) on the other.⁸⁶ Ironically, and to the chagrin of his capitalist backers, Burnham would go his own way declaring Guyana a co-operative republic. He established ties to Cuba, the Soviet Union, and other communists countries. The fiercely nationalistic policies of the (PNC) included banning imports into the country and encouraging agro-business. When Burnham suggests to Aunt Ruth to use salt to launder clothes, he suggests it as a form of self-sufficiency delinking Guyana from foreign imports. By using a child and, indirectly, a mango tree, as narrative platforms to redress the community’s feelings of workaday frustration, social fragmentation, political suppression, economic hardship, and sexual anxiety, both the reader’s and protagonist’s grasp of socio-political *reason* is open to the possibilities of imagination.

The image of Burnham’s Guyana is presented with the perspective of human-environmental overlap between a young girl and a mango tree. In many ways, the magic realism of the mango tree is a counterpoint to the political tensions between Blacks and Indians in Guyana, a dialogical interaction between an African rooted figure from the Middle passage (tree roots) and a seasonal fruitful entity (fruit) as a

⁸⁶ Colin Clark, “Colonialism and Its Social and Cultural Colonialism and Its Social and Cultural” in *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Vol 15, (February 2009), 491-505. In his review article “Colonialism and Its Social and Cultural Consequences in the Caribbean” Colin Clarke argues that current racial stratification in the Caribbean reproduced the dynamic between colonial white supremacy and black slavery. Later, creoles, conscripted labor, and new immigrant groups would have their own means of establishing racial purity.

comment on perceived and actual Indo-Guyanese wealth in some sectors. Aunt Ruth reacts to Burnham's idealistic cooperative harshly because it does not resemble progress. Colonialism gave the dominated a nonhistory by alienating their experience from environment and so "nature and culture have not formed a dialectical whole that informs a people's consciousness."⁸⁷ A nonhistory cannot contain or synthesize ruptures passed down by totalitarian philosophy and history; it is not fully a Caribbean experience. As a result, in Guyana, racial tensions during his presidency were, at times, followed by violence. Nonetheless, the struggle of the people are bound together in the single superstructure of the tree and in mixed race Lula.

Notwithstanding Lula's precocious understanding of the lives of both the haves and the have-nots in her town, Lula's voice connects satire and politics. This is similar in tone to Jamaica Kincaid's observation of politicians in her homeland of Antigua. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid writes, "The records of one set of enemies, bought by another enemy, given to the people who have been their victims as a gift. The people who go into running the government were not always such big thieves; nor have they always been so corrupt. They took things, but it was on a small scale."⁸⁸ Lula's details about President Burnham's "Well-off African Politician look" are shorthand reflecting on his mimicry of leaders in newly emancipated African countries who, in turn, are mimicking and remixing colonial fashion.⁸⁹ Dismissing the satire surrounding the scene with President Burnham, the PNC provides a framework, a *mise en abyme*, that reveals how "the inferiorized black man goes from humiliating insecurity to self-accusation and even despair," a process that produces a

⁸⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 63.

⁸⁸ Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 63.

⁸⁹ See Kempadoo, *Buxton Spice*, 82

“delirious constellation that borders on the pathological.”⁹⁰The way in which Kempadoo discusses Burnham and the metonymic schoolmaster, Mr. Brown, who took great pleasure in tormenting the East Indian teachers, shows how the PNC-supported Black attitude and self-regard retaliated for perceived/received wrongdoing. Lula’s school becomes a microcosm of Guyana at-large. Lula recalls,

In our schoolworld Mr. Brown the headmaster was Forbes Burnham. He had the same smirk. To prepare for the glorious world of self-sufficiency, Mahaica Secondary and plenty other schools over-equipped with Chinese aid were built to promote agriculture and vocational skills...The school garden produced nothing...while the young teacher directed from the shade. We had everything – land, water, equipment, seeds – but expertise or desire. Like in the nation, productivity was zero. It was one of our small triumphs. Even the teacher didn’t want to produce.⁹¹

And though the tree is nowhere near the school grounds, in an earlier scene, Lula politicizes the tree by indicting it as an accomplice or witness to race riots. “You must know he well—Our Leader Comrade Linden Forbes Burnham. Yes. He have bug eye like you...He make black people hate Indians. He put big fat black people to run de sugar an rice factories. You must’e see all dat. You is a black Buxton Spice or what?”⁹² She attributes its size to stinginess and gluttony. It is a politician and a pundit giving her the ire to *voice* her perspectives on the Caribbean.

In contrast to the mango tree’s controlling perspective, but as effective, is Lula’s own peephole surveillance of her world. Part one of *Buxton Spice* introduces the holes in wood knots, “perfectly round to peep through.”⁹³ There is even the hole in a man’s pants that gives the narrator access to the sometimes erect, sometimes flaccid penis of a derelict man. These gaps in windows, floors, walls, and other

⁹⁰ See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 42-43

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 153

⁹² *Ibid.*, 153

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4

surfaces provide Lula and her three cohorts, Sammy (sister), Judy DeAbro (neighbor), and Rachel DeAbro (neighbor), access to a gap in the adult world where their imagination works to deflect reality. For example, the word “rape” is used in the book by Lula as an ambiguous descriptor for forbidden intercourse. It is cautionary language passed down to girls her age and those older whose sexualities (may) mature outside of codes and timeline of respectability. While she uses the language passed down to her by, most likely, the women and the gossip circles of Tamarind Grove, Lula’s precocious observations push back against the erasure of female sexuality. There is a round hole in the classroom wall giving peephole access to the “playroom for Husband and Wife...where Sexy Marilyn get screw ”(31). Lula attributes “sexy” and “adult” to a classmate whose sexual encounter she witnesses, a sexual encounter meant to mimic heteronormal marriage relations between one male and one female. Yet, Marilyn’s consent, excess of pleasure, and “husbands” confounds the language of “rape” in this encounter. Lula speculates, “[m]ust have been rape but she was wanting it” due to Marilyn’s laughter throughout the clandestine playroom encounter and her rosy look after.⁹⁴

We heard everything. Couldn’t see everything—only through that one hole smelling of concrete. All them boys and Marilyn in there in that pitch black. We could hear them touching. And they knew we outside craning. Sexy Marilyn laughing in a adult way...The DeAbros—Iggy, Manny, Bernard—and my brother Yan, shuttling round her. Clumsy stupid boys. Their laughs and whispering sounding more girlie than Marilyn’s.⁹⁵

Though Lula uses “rape”—a picture of utter violence and power abuse—to begin the scene’s narration, the scene describes Marilyn’s mastery of her body in two and one-half pages to undo that corrective classification.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 31

⁹⁵ Ibid., 31-32

From other character exchanges in the book, it is implied that rape is the way a good girl or a fair-skinned girl would ever have sex before marriage. Also, implied is that fairer skin girls, classed above darker girls, would only be with a darker skinned boy if it was rape. For example, Mrs. DeAbro is proud of her fair skin and Portuguese heritage that is “above de commoner.”⁹⁶ Though color-conscious, she celebrates Lula’s family friendship more on the grounds of Lula’s family’s foreign *status* than on them being good people. Mrs. DeAbro is both a comic and tragic figure in her insistence that black men rape and that her daughters need to “come up” and marry lighter. Her backwards knowledge and language is set against Lula’s own worldview and language when Mrs. D’Abro explains how Marilyn’s large breasts are the result of too many men pulling on them cautioning “that’s what does happen when you let man start touching them early.”⁹⁷ The two and one-half pages of Marilyn’s Husband and Wife includes exposition on her childhood, gossip of her abortion, and her pretty looks. Ultimately, her mastery over the four boys is the discursive excessive Lula uses to undo the way the word “rape” elides over any affirmation of female sexuality.

For the peephole quartet of Lula, Judy, Sammy and Rachel, the adult world is the object of physical mimicry, not social mimicry. They secretly remain sexually active in the novel by playing their own erotic games of ‘house’ where two of them take turns carrying batteries, as penis, in their underwear to play husband.⁹⁸ After the play-wives cook and clean, they pantomime “sex-kissing” each other’s bare bodies and rolling the battery around between their damp legs. “The battery slipped to one side and I grabbed it through my damp panty and centered it

⁹⁶ Ibid., 58

⁹⁷ Ibid., 32

⁹⁸ Ibid., 85

again...Hipbones touching, my thighs slipping on hers as I tried to put the battery back."⁹⁹

The battery stands in for the heterosexual penis. The stages of House simulate what is presumed to be masculine and feminine. The married-sex charade begins when the fake husbands arrive home, take off their fake hats, and plant "grave" (86) kisses on their wives cheeks. The battery as penis is associated with "Gary Cooper films" and the "hectic world of Wall Street."¹⁰⁰ After eating a fake meal prepared by the wives, they pin sheets to the windows to make it night (87). The battery is an unstable charge between the girl's legs even as they try to hold on to their male-female roles. The penis-phallus is solvent and slippery as they each use it for clitoral stimulation. "[P]recisely *because* it is an idealization, one which no body can adequately approximate, the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive deterritorialization."¹⁰¹ Butler's aggressive deterritorialization—the weakening of the penis's value in lesbian "bodily ego and the dispositions of desire"—is at play in the sex act, not the heteronormal domestic foreplay which Lula, using Gary Cooper films as a template, finds lacking and the wives boring. "And when it came to getting down to business, they didn't even do that."¹⁰² Lula's Caribbean erotic refashioning of a scene of Hollywood-Westernized consummation can be read as sensual and political freedom.

As *Buxton Spice* unfolds, scenes of dispossession, racial discrimination, and picturesque collapse retell 1970s Guyana under the problematic government of President Linden Burnham who governed during the transition from British Guiana

⁹⁹ Ibid., 88

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 86.

¹⁰² Op. cit., 86

to its renaming and independence as Guyana. Over the course of the novel, we follow the material changes in landscape and economy through the unmediated observations of a young girl, her friends, and a Buxton Spice mango tree. There is an emergent sense of surreality to the novel linked to its vignette-style telling that lacks the precision of a cohesive novel, yet provides the reader with an imaginative perspective of Guyana's post-colonial and nationalist complaints. While Lula's perspective belie a mature adult reflection of a transnational subject looking back on their childhood in a decolonializing Guyana, I argue that her perspective returns to the child. The mango tree absorbs some of the controlling perspective that may have otherwise made Lula a passive vessel for overt subjective adult memory.

In Andre Breton's *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, he elevates "childhood memories" as a site where Surrealism thrives because "there emanates a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of *having gone astray*, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists."¹⁰³ Likewise, Suzanne Césaire uses the child's "game of hide-and-seek" as a metaphor to flesh out the socio-political situation unfolding under the Vichy regime ruling the Antilles. Of her time, she writes that even within "Blacks of the Americas", both the seeker and the hidden are blinded by a tainted mythopoesis and an ontologically "divided heart" that affirms bourgeoisie goals. The mango tree is a functions as a surrealist discursive strategy that animates its knowledge so that Lula has the freedom to speculate.¹⁰⁴

Just as Suzanne Césaire and Breton use the child's imagination is an analog for the surrealist's unconscious access points to reality, Kempadoo's *bildungsroman* charts Guyana's political crisis in the 1970s as a loose analog to the intellectual and erotic activity of its pubescent mixed race protagonist, Lula, and by proxy the

¹⁰³ André Breton, *The Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 1924, original emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Suzanne Césaire in *The Great Camouflage*, 41-46.

emerging Guyanese population. Though *Buxton Spice* is marketed as a novel, my observation of its style has been noted in book reviews that also mention its vignette-style coherence. Thus, the novel's open form allows me to explore its narrative moves outside the fixity of the genre *novel*. The diversity of sexual practices and racial identities as commented on by the young girls and a mango tree centers their peripheralized imagination allowing the reader to access to Guyana's geo-political space with insights that are not only colored by the community but unfix dominant values. Further, the main character, Lula, also exists in an unfixed form being mixed race and transnational. Hence, queering the main action and the "peopling" in the narrative allows for a feminist decolonial engagement of the text.

Metaphors

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises

— William Shakespeare, Caliban in *The Tempest*, III-ii

And that's why you'll stay

just like those guys who founded the colonies

and who now can't live anywhere else.

You're just an old addict, that's what you are!

— Aimé Césaire, Caliban in *Une Tempête (Tempest)*, III-v

The first-person strategy in *Buxton Spice* blends multiple perspectives to create an unstable hybrid voice that faithfully marks non-hegemonic positions from which to examine power relations and intersubjectivities of Caribbean consciousness. A similar dynamic is present in Kempadoo's second novel, *Tide Running* (2001). Set in 1990s Tobago, ideas and words are generated and circulated through images from television and via the mirrored imagination of characters whose desires and pursuits for escape conflict. There are the escapes from middle-class bourgeoisie, working class drudgery, and sexual monogamy. Consequently, these flights lead to a petty crime that reorders the lives of characters by reinforcing respectability politics and the reenacting colonial privilege of the upper classes, now the tourist class and the monied transnational class.

The arrival of a Bella (mixed race Trinidadian), Peter (white English husband), and mixed race son Oliver, to Cliff's small town of Plymouth on the island of Tobago embraces a complexity that *The Tempest* only metaphorically contemplates: a ménage à trois.¹⁰⁵ Bella, Cliff, and Peter can be read across history as postcolonial

¹⁰⁵ In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, Octave Manonni contemplates the significance of the colonial situation—the connection between European civilization and colonial racism using Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as an ethnographic metaphor.

versions of Shakespeare's Ariel/Miranda, Prospero, and Caliban. I read Ariel as a transnational figure bound to Prospero and his European logic, yet having autonomous island sensibility. I read Miranda as a diasporic body who leaves home at an age where she can adapt to both home and abroad. These are the qualities embodied in Bella. Peter gives Bella connections to Europe through marriage, school, and work. Cliff connects Bella to her own roots. As her narrative counterpoint, she is matched in psychic-social-sexual energy by Cliff, an Afro-Trinbagonian islander. *Tide Running* skillfully constructs their dual-voiced first-person narrative as clusters of overlapping images giving the text a lyrical tone, a delayed call-and-response effect—an eerie Romantic remake of first contact—echoed in the experience of watching and being watched, of using and being used.

In his book *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1990), Octave Mannoni suggests Prospero has an inferiority complex and Caliban has a dependence complex. This age of discovery master/servant metaphor made famous by Shakespeare, was created by a convergence, and selection of, new knowledges generated from what was being printed, translated and circulated in texts such as Columbus' journal, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* fantasizing about the Tainos, and Michel de Montaigne's cultural relativist account, *On the Cannibals*. Montaigne's based his essay on reading others' accounts of the New World. He read a translation of Girolamo Benzoni's *Historia del Mondo Novo* (Venice, 1565). The title of the French translation he accessed was Urbain Chauveton's *A New History of the New World containing all that Spaniards have done up to the present in the West Indies, and the harsh treatment which they have meted out to those peoples yonder... Together with a short History of a Massacre committed by the Spaniards on some Frenchmen in Florida*. Perhaps, it was the specificity of text's title or that he was present at the 1562 Siege of Rouen when the Catholic Charles IX defeated the Huguenots gave de Montaigne direct reference

to compare the barbarianism of Western to South American Cannibals. He connects religious torture of the living flesh such as the stake burning and drawn-and-quartering to the cannibal practices of Brazilian warriors who would ceremonially choose one well-treated prisoner of war as tribute. He wrote, "there is more barbarity in eating a man alive, than when he is dead; [...] than to roast and eat him after he is dead."¹⁰⁶ Even in his essay, "*On Moderation*," Montaigne compares descriptions of ritual blood sacrifice in the New World with Ancient Greek propitiation.¹⁰⁷ His rhetoric is as if telling Western Thought, "A ha. Either we're all kettles or all Black. Which is it?" When Montaigne conjures the image of "eating a man alive" to describe the strategies of vanquishing through revenge, an active undoing of mind, body, and soul, his metaphor reverberates with Suzanne Césaire's "cannibal poetry" and how it must stoke radical epistemic change. While there is an argument to be made for either or both the living or the dead "flesh" of the enemy in cannibal poetry, this circulation of texts detailing the early days, so to speak, of the New World gestures to the way the body of one text is ingested by another.

On the Cannibals inspired Shakespeare's *Tempest*. So, in spite of de Montaigne's historical analyzing many global and historical versions of barbarism, Shakespeare shaped an unruly figure who needed to be controlled by a European man. Guyanese writer and artist Jan Carew sees Caliban as the "twisted racist metaphor of the colonized man."¹⁰⁸ Carew explains, "Shakespeare had come to his Caliban/Prospero stereotypes by a somewhat tortuous intellectual route. Giovanni Florio, a personal friend of the Bard from Stratford, had translated Montaigne's essay, *Of The Cannibals*, into English in 1608 and given him copy. That copy, which

¹⁰⁶ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*. Translated by M.A. Screech. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993), 711.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 707-708.

¹⁰⁸ Jan Carew, *Rape of Paradise: Columbus and the Origins of Racism in the Americas*. (New York: Seaburn, 2006), 92

Shakespeare annotated, is still preserved.”¹⁰⁹ Ironically, the barbarism that Shakespeare conceals in Prospero leaks out in the various “civilizing” manifestations such as the rules of law that cannot protect him from being usurped as Duke of Milan or prevent Caliban from trying to escape. Nevertheless, these inferiority and dependency complexes gesture at Peter and Cliff. At first amenable to sharing his wife, Bella, with Cliff, he later feels alienated by their shared “rootsy” background.¹¹⁰ In his own immature mocking way, Cliff challenges Peter with his youth and manliness. Yet, Cliff shows a sense of reverence, if not envy of Peter when he jokes that Peter should adopt him. While Cliff initially exhibits dependency complex, ultimately, he works toward getting away from this dependency, mentally and physically in a stolen car. In the end, the civilizing effect of judicial law traps him on the island.

In Cliff, we have a young man surviving through a negated economy after the victory of French beet-sugar farmers, after Tobago folds into the predatory system of England, and after American after its oil boom years.¹¹¹ The negated economy of Trinidad and Tobago is marked by intermittent attempts to rehabilitate its malproduction; it is forced into asymmetrical capitalist economies benefitting foreign investors. The repercussions of this dispossession find Cliff—not unlike most of his friends—living with his mother, Mudda, his brother Ossi, his sister Lynette, and her baby daughter Keisha in a small home in the wrong part of “Plymouth”. If there were a good part of Plymouth, it would be where the Kentucky Fried Chicken and other American imports are kept. Rising crime and joblessness creates the wedge

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 92

¹¹⁰ Oonya Kempadoo, *Tide Running*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2003), 113

¹¹¹ “Trinidad and Tobago: Poverty and Unemployment in an Oil-Based Economy” 10 Dec 2013,. According to the Worldbank’s Poverty Profile of Trinidad and Tobago on www.worldbank.org

between the older generation of Tobaggans who valorize employment and the younger generation who discover want and their economic lack from television. In the chapter “Dese Young Fellas,” Bella’s older housekeeper, Thomas, laments, “[I]s how they is dese days. It have plenty like him don’ want to do nothing.”¹¹²

Cliff’s sister and brother sit hours under a hypnotic trance watching “Oprey Winfrey,” Baywatch, and Young and the Restless. Commercials, often pills to remedy American consumptive excess (i.e Tums, Pepto) and products to improve parenting (Pampers), create wonder and more want. He watches his siblings watch television: “A ad for Pepcid come on. ‘Dem Amerrycan can real eat plenty, boy.’ He watching the man eating pizza, mouth henging.”¹¹³ Cliff’s only escape from Plymouth’s poverty is through rap music videos and American television. In these early chapters, Cliff’s commentary can be read as self-awareness. Later, however, when he grows accustomed to Bella’s hospitality, he becomes a victim of the impossible fulfillment of class-enforced materialism and consumption.

Tide Runnings, with its observations on capitalist pressures within Caribbean consciousness and culture, could be a case study companion piece to *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid’s 1988 polemic on the postcolonial erosion of Antigua, past and present. Like the characters in *Tide Running*, Kincaid uses first person(al) observation. As a native daughter, raised in a West Indian working class home with pernicious anglophile tendencies, she reveals the blight of poverty, corruption, and pollution. This includes social pollution in the form of “incredibly unattractive, fat, pastrylike-fleshed” tourists.¹¹⁴ In an interview published in the *Missouri Review*, Kincaid reveals:

¹¹² Op. cit., 99

¹¹³ Ibid., 33

¹¹⁴ See Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 13

I write about myself for the most part, and about things that have happened to me. Everything I say is true, and everything I say is not true. You couldn't admit any of it to a court of law. It would not be good evidence.¹¹⁵

Because Kincaid's writing is informed by her diasporic and transnational status, her tone ranges from cynicism to concern of the state of Antigua. Giovanni Covi writes about Kincaid's "plurivocality" as a first person voice existing both as a "we" and a "they" arguing that the "cultural space she inhabits is a threshold, a passage joining/separating Vermont from Antigua."¹¹⁶ Covi defines Kincaid as a "liminalien" suggesting that her postcolonial and gender concerns coexist as overlaps.¹¹⁷ There is no wonder at the preoccupation of Caribbean alterity in the writings of Kincaid, Kempadoo, Marcia Douglas, and other contemporary women writers of the Caribbean diaspora. The experience of occupying multiple locations, back home and farrin', reveals the vulnerabilities—economic, ecologic, political, and cultural—in the neocolonial Caribbean in which the author/narrator is entwined. Yet, in *Tide Running*, instead of the direct call-out to "a boob in your amniotic sac of modern experience" (Kincaid 16), there is the nuance in fiction that slowly draws out the diasporic daughter, Bella, from her "amniotic sac of modern experience."¹¹⁸

In Bella, Kempadoo has created an ideal transnational canvas that is unburdened by intellectual, racial, and economic barriers. "Differences don't have to be barriers" is Bella's reflection on Peter.¹¹⁹ "The difference in our backgrounds—he postwar England me, post-hippy Caribbean, he looking like a stylish brusque businessman at first glance, me like some UNICEF Third World child—the

¹¹⁵ Jamaica Kincaid and Kay Bonetti, "An Interview with Jamaica Kincaid." *The Missouri Review*, 15. 2, (Fall 1992), 125.

¹¹⁶ Giovanna Covi, "Alterity: Jamaica Kincaid's Resistance." *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*. (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi BV, 1994), 201

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 198

¹¹⁸ See Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 16.

¹¹⁹ See Kempadoo, *Tide Running*, 91.

differences and the sameness made us walk softly on that sand.”¹²⁰ Bella’s memories of growing up visiting Trinidad are enough to keep her there for while after college as a photographer, as part of the “art scene.”¹²¹ Her father is Trinidadian; her experience of transnationalism emerges from her childhood. In writing of the second-generation experience of West African returnees, anthropologists Erin Kenny writes “children born on a different side of a border from the place of their parents’ birth experience a lived reality that may be fraught with tensions and ambiguities. Their bodies are simultaneously essential and social: they have bodies that they must discipline appropriately and they are bodies representative of the hopes and dreams of their parents.”¹²² Thus, Bella’s dreams of the Caribbean from annual vacations are fulfilled with the long-term rental of an architect’s passion project: a home with a glass roof and white sails giving it the look of a shipwrecked boat.

Her class keeps her separated from locals in Plymouth but her cultural knowledge and embodied affinities draw her to Cliff. The design of her rental home is an example of *Tide Running’s* rich *Tempest* analogies, a complex story of exiles, locals, and environment. “A long period of the transitional experience must be devoted to learning—or relearning—the appropriate responses to the environment.”¹²³ Bella views herself as a native, or rather she gives nothing away in her self-narration to brand her clearly “Foreign”. She slips into the Tobaggan environment more easily than Peter because she is brown and can speak with a West Indian inflection, as fits the occasion and addressee. Yet, there are moments when her sense of nativeness is undermined by her phrasing. For example, when Cliff and

¹²⁰ Ibid., 91

¹²¹ Ibid., 66.

¹²² Erin Kenny, “Identity, Bodies, and Second-Generation Returnees in West Africa.” *Growing Up Transnational: Identity and Kinship in a Global Era*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). 138.

¹²³ Ibid., 138

restaurant owner Miss Sandra say “all-you”, Bella’s plural is its inverse, “you-all.”¹²⁴. Inversions in language, syntax or letters, play out as inversions of Cliff’s and Bella’s narratorial gazes.

In addition to the poetic and narrative inversion, Bella is seen as a mixed Black person outside of the normal social order. From the first six chapters, we learn that Bella’s and Peter’s presence in the coastal township of Plymouth has people curious. They are not the first or only foreigners in Tobago but their difference from the native population is understood through race and economics: they generate revenue from London and rent an architect’s home in Tobago. Cliff narrates these first six chapters almost exclusively until page 37 when Bella’s stream-of-consciousness disrupts Cliff’s observations by reciprocating his gaze. In the chapter “Me an’ Ossi,” Cliff’s observation of the couple is at the level of their communication. He watches them on the jetty and thinks: “Dem people does sit on that jetty and talks to one another all the time. I don’t know what it is they have to talk about so much [...] talk till the sun go down [...] them good for theyself. Them is people, boy. I does watch them.”¹²⁵ Here, observation of their excess of language between each other is supplanted by their first small exchange in “Dem People”

Ossi wave me. He dark skin against the sky. He going...Darkness coming quick now. Stroking my arms through the warm silky water, it waggle my fingers when I trail them. Feel it licking my skin. Dem people still sitting on the jetty...I pick up me shirt and start up the boards. They look up at me as I pass.

“Goodnight.”

“Night.”

Looking down on the lady face I feel extra tall and slim ‘cause I know she eye stretch from me foot right up to me face. And smiling. The mister smiling too...The goodnight sky pulling me head up, stretching me back long and

¹²⁴ See Kempadoo, *Tide Running*, 48 and 68.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 19- 20

smooth, stroking the sweater down off me legs and heels, slicking on the planks every step. Carryin' me right home.¹²⁶

Notice the spelling and saying of dem/them is not consistent. This is an example of fluidity of language in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Juxtaposing Cliff's narration is Bella's description of the same scene and of Cliff moments before bidding him a good night:

He's still out there, a silhouette on the boat. I lie on the jetty, put my head in my lover's lap, and up above, the sky's stretching itself way beyond blue. The light going. Another Tobago night comes to cloak us. Come to take us home again. Me Peter and Oliver... Like the warm moist air tucking around us now—comfort after the harsh racatang and bacchanal of Trinidad city life. Was the hypocrisy that got me. And the crime. To live on your guard all the time and learn to distrust man, to grow your child like that-out of choice? [...] a setting sun. These things and more. A blessing to witness, to see. Even to love my ones. The tall boys are leaving now, picking up their shirts, skins soaked with warm seawater. Night takes them home too.¹²⁷

The italics indicate a voice outside the frame narrative. Bella reflects on what is to come, "Was the hypocrisy that got me. And the crime." Kempadoo utilizes the mode of soliloquy to flesh out Bella's thoughts and empathies. The ambiguity in her reflection indicates an awareness of her place in "London City" and a convenient ethnocentrism "tall boys." What betrays her as more tourist than native is not just the voice, but her mention of "touring" to Plymouth for its quiet after the revelry of Trinidad carnival where she can afford to stay in the home described as an "architect's dream."

The representation of Bella's identification with Tobago, hence Cliff, echoes the narrator's voice in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave. A True History* (1688). This story is narrated by a white woman sympathetic to an enslaved man of

¹²⁶ Kempadoo, *Tide Running*, 38-39.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-38, italics in original.

noble birth who incites a slave-rebellion and his love interest Imoinda, “the beautiful black Venus.”¹²⁸ In *The Discourse of Slavery: From Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*, Anne Fogarty observes that:

Oroonoko is predicated on a crisis in authority...symptomatic of the blind spots and omissions in feminism itself. It is now, it transpires, a prescient narrative because it mirrors the failure of western feminism adequately to address the problem of racism and to recognize the way in which white women themselves play the role of oppressor with regards to their black counterparts.¹²⁹

I extend this interpretation to Bella because of her *liminalien* status as a transnational woman of color. I do not contend that classism can substitute for feminism with regards to gender power and inclusion. Instead, I am interested in the class dynamics of her racialized and gendered position within Western frames and locations and I trace a certain hegemonic blindness to her travels from London to Plymouth. In my observation, I do not make her the equivalent to Western white women feminists, but her responses to (neo)colonialism, as they appear in the novel, eventually align her to a Western positionality. As a narrator, she ignores the crucial differences in the way people from various national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds experience gender and empowerment. When she does engage with the political backdrop, it is either a barb at Peter or a musing on her surroundings. Bella begins political critique on the economic crisis of the island after seeing “the huge old waterwheel, ‘McCormack, Glasgow 1857’” she is reminded of “African ancestors” and an “Amerindian settlement long before sugar days.”¹³⁰ Her critique coincides with the introduction of many more characters who function to illustrate

¹²⁸ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave. A True History* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2016), 16.

¹²⁹ Anne Fogarty, “Looks that Kill: Violence and Representation in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*.” *The Discourse of Slavery: From Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3-5.

¹³⁰ Kempadoo, *Tide Running*, 115-116.

“this beautiful island, this bitter taste of slavery [that] is in the earth itself, drawn up by the trees into their leaves, a rot in the seed of the fruit.”¹³¹ Postcolonial feminism by necessity intervenes on injustice and exploitation beyond Euro-American epistemologies—or memory. Bella’s sense of justice coincides with the protection and upkeep of her capitalist lifestyle. Bella may not be sketched as a postcolonial feminist, but she is a postcolonial subject bound to multiple spaces and aware of the injustices around her.

In the chapter, “A Bigger Room,” Bella’s clarity mediates the social and personal awareness being experienced by both she and Cliff. When Bella and Peter befriend Cliff and his brother, Ossi, they are invited into their “flim-style house”.

New eyes stretching up to the roof, the canvas and the glass, taking in in the strange doors and pieces of walls. I’ve seen the surprise on people’s faces before. The openness of the house make them look at me different after they’ve seen it. One glance down the long white corridor and they could see the swing of my walk, how my arms hang, the white of my teeth. They can see right through my clothes and see my whole self, where the sweat forms under my breasts, the dent on my chest bone. Showed me their insides too, and I could see different selves in the way they stared. Some selves peep out, others run deep inside. Cliff didn’t want to look past the shower to see how we would be bathing out in the open. Embarrassed. Just tucked his head down. Ossi exclaiming and spinning around.¹³²

Here, in the chapter “A Bigger Room” narratorial gazes become intersubjective. Bella walks into a room and gets attention. She imagines Cliff’s reaction to the newness of modern Western architecture and her confident body, from teeth to arms. Her narration anticipates the male gaze directing the reader’s eyes through the eyes of her male audience, “They can see right through my clothes and see my whole self,

¹³¹ Ibid., 116

¹³² Ibid., 59

where the sweat forms under my breasts, the dent on my chest bone. Showed me their insides too, and I could see different selves in the way they stared. Some selves peep out, others run deep inside.” This is the moment when the new eyes of the first-person narrators begin to mirror experience. I picture their mirroring as chirality. In chemistry, objects or systems (a molecular structure) are chiral if they cannot be superimposed. Two hands, left and right, on top the other are chiral because they overlap but do not coincide such that they are indistinguishable from the other. This moment to me, Bella and Cliff, facing each other with sexual desire and common Trinbagonian roots are distinguishable from each other because neither is capable, or willing, to see what each is displaying is on opposite ends of consumption.

The scene, in its inverse, Cliff imagines what Bella might be thinking of his own living conditions bathing outside in less style at the standpipe, a stark contrast to her fancy open air shower. When Cliff recounts how Bella enters the room, his gaze is indirect and hesitant as Bella frames her body “down the long white corridor.” Ironically, in the film-styled house, where Cliff’s and Ossi’s fantasies leap into American popular culture, his bashful gaze is averted and her entrance is not as grand as it is in her mind / memory. His narratorial camera, as it were, does not trespass on her female body parts. Here, it is the gaze of Peter, Bella, and Oliver that makes Cliff self-aware and proud of his color-coordinated Chicago Bulls outfit and Nikes. He watches Ossi rattle on and be witty for the family as Magic Johnson’s talk show plays on the television in the background: “Everybody like he. But I have the looks. Watch me nuh.”¹³³ To contrast Cliff’s label-laden outfit, Bella’s family is casually dressed and barefoot. In the bigger room of “Flim-style house,” the language of fashion separates tourists from natives, wealthy from the poor. This visual difference stays intact throughout the novel. Material code-switching does not

¹³³ Ibid., 57.

occur: Cliff does not become laissez-faire about his going-out clothes and Bella does not over-accessorize hers. This separation is an economic separation that echoes the power dynamic between those who control the message, and those who consume the message. Bella does not need to flaunt her wealth with labels.

Moving back and forth between language and subjectivity supports a narrative strategy that brings to light the historical consciousness of the Caribbean-born tourist (Bella) and the Trinbagonian (Cliff). Bella speaks in standard English and can slip into her island patois. Cliff speaks like a local but has absorbed American hip hop dialect from television and music. Vernacular and lingua franca codes salvage orchestrate a rich metanarrative of puns, homophones, and pairings. By pairing narrators who have different material histories and different linguistic registers within this Anglophone Caribbean space, the question that arises of Kempadoo's narrative strategy is: how does code-switching alter or mimic historical consciousness? How does memory recalled in the silences of first-person eco-lyric reflection, rotten English, or codified English alter subjectivities of the narrators and how they engage with the land and each other?¹³⁴ How does linguistic code switching map onto visual code-switching of "passing." The language plasticity and play of code-switching also becomes a metaphor for the way race, culture, and class intersects. Language exchange is the exchange of ecopoetics and *econopoetics* of the neocolonial Caribbean region.¹³⁵ Language generates a collective utterance that is inscribed in both the natural environment and lived experience.

¹³⁴ Dohra Ahmad, in her introduction explains "rotten English", a phrase coined by Nigerian novelist Ken Saro-Wiwa, as language spoken in dialect such as pidgin, patois or other creolized English. *Rotten English: A Literary Anthology*, (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

¹³⁵ Giancarlo Maiorino, ed., *Picaresque: Tradition of Displacement* (University of Minnesota, 1996). Explains econopoetics as a bringing together of an array of different languages, "[f]rom food and lodging to fashion, money, and manners." This array of language is "reciprocally paraliterary and paraeconomic" (293)

The novel's language, like the nation-state borders of this neocolonial space, is marked by the commixing of bodies, acts, and talk. The different linguistic registers used by Cliff and Bella settles around lush poetics and code-switching.¹³⁶ In her essay, "Where Are All the Others?," Erna Brodber reflects on a woman in a Jamaican community who refuses to "know" her place in society as a lower class person when she insists on speaking in standard English.

We all know about code-switching. In the Caribbean setting in which we have been reared, where there is an African cultural orientation and a European cultural orientation and several gradations between, a person is socialized into the ability to match occasion with form. To get the fit wrong, as in the case of Joe Chiss's wife, Miss Manda, is a social sin which could have psychiatric proportions. Everyone knows the different styles of behavior and the class position associated with each. To be socially sick is to use a form that is not consonant with one's social class.¹³⁷

Code-switching reminds us that diaspora producing "African cultural orientation and a European cultural orientation and several gradations between" is an active state; it is a process of scattering that creates a product of disjuncture. Manda Chiss's use of standard English creates her inability to be rooted in her community. The notion of Manda being "socially sick" is also a reflection on the town's unease with connecting her language with her body. In *Tide Running*, we can see the protagonists actively code-switch in speech and exposition to evoke a multiplicity of space. For Bella, it is London and Trinidad. For Cliff, it is his Tobaggan roots and Tupac thug life fantasies.

¹³⁶ Code-switching is way of communicating that alternates between two or more languages or linguistics registers in a single conversation. Spanglish is an example of code-switching. For example, "Por ejemplo, code-switching se ocurre when words cambio."

¹³⁷ Erna Brodber, "Where Are All the Others?" *Caribbean Creolization : Reflections On the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity*. (Miami: University Press of Florida, 1998), 72.

Looking deeper at language exchange, I notice a rich field of puns and metonymy creating verbal enactments of identity. These enactments comment on multiple social and spatiotemporal moments experienced—words that support social and historical context. When Bella speaks to Cliff and repeats Caribbean demotic terms like “liming,” she does so to communicate easily, to code-switch. But, in fact, as a privileged subject using common vernacular, it invites a close reading of the oft used word. Liming is “to spend time talking, laughing, drinking with other people.”¹³⁸ It may have originated in context of describing British service men who, during World War II, would hang out at bars with local prostitutes. The slang term was likely attributed to sailors eating limes to counteract scurvy. Liming is used in several Caribbean countries. To lime or liming in Trinidad and Tobago means to hang out. It’s homophone, limen, in psychological and physiological terms, is the smallest detectable stimulus or sensation. It is the ideal value between what is noticeable and what is unnoticeable. As a “liminalien,” Bella is at a threshold. Her liminality of being a biracial (possibly pansexual) transnational vacationer and Cliff’s liminality as a disaffected youth creates the double valence of a liming/limen shift from connotation to consciousness.

In the chapter, “History Walking,” Peter becomes frustrated about his perceived diminished relevance in the trio. He complains, “It’s not the excitement, it’s when you exclude me. You have some naïve romance for his rootsy background or something.” To this, Bella responds, “What? Because I can understand what Cliff’s saying? Because I can talk his language?” Never even thought about it so. Sharing a piece of identity with Cliff occur to me as something that excluded Peter. A separate thing from love, sex, and friendship. Romance for roots, my ass!”¹³⁹ Bella’s

¹³⁸ Carol Martin, “Trinidad Carnival Glossary,” *TDR*, 42.3 (Autumn 1998), 229.

¹³⁹ Kempadoo, *Tide Running*, 113.

spoken and conscious awareness of the space she shares with Cliff exists in the limen. Similarly, Cliff's selection of clothing and how and he and other young men mimic the gait of rappers who encode strong idioms of masculinity, black street style, and America, exist in the limen.

Apart from a deep linguistic reading of individual words, the limen of this novel provides a false shelter for its characters. In addition to limen/limin', words like tied/tide, even the homonyms peter/Peter, cliff/Cliff, flim/film come to mean something. The boundary between language and action get quite unstable; homophones are tragically linked. Eventually, the forced poetics of consumerism and the street-style masculinity Cliff performs metanarrates the incongruity of parts of his consciousness. When Cliff drives off in Bella's car, his narratorial distance begins to mirror Bella's Romantic, solipsistic, apostrophic style, "Where is he now—running through some black bush? Or with some friends, them asking him 'Wha happen?' Laughing at him scared shit and hunted looking. On the run since he took the car last week. Guilty. Like us."¹⁴⁰ In the escapist paced chapter "Watch me nuh," in which he steals their car, Cliff does a mental summary of his current state of mind and his personal history to recreate a dialogic effect similar to Bella's. Cliff joyrides and reflects, "See me speeding flying. Silva bullet. Watch me nuh...Tupac in yuh fucking face...Dem couldn't stop me...Tracks and traces I know since a child. From Plymouth pas Les Coteaux, bussing out a Culloden...God will protect me and the sea will cover me."¹⁴¹ "Les Coteaux" and "Culloden" do double duty as places in France and the United Kingdom that are also dis/located in Trinidad & Tobago as a village and a resort, respectively.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 200.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 201-202.

Watching underscores Cliff's theft and joyriding and later a frozen kind of watching, "guidance," underscores Bella's guilty reflection.¹⁴² Mudda come to see Peter and Bella after Cliff's trial. She repeats Bella's reflection by wishing Cliff had looked to them for guidance. Bella's narration is hypocritical when she meets Mudda. Cliff's mother, who is often out of the house looking for odd jobs. Though both women are portrayed as having a similar nonchalance to parenting, when it comes down to it, economic strength and social ascendance gives Bella unearned expertise. Bella and Peter have the ability to show Mudda their empathy but not their culpability. As a result, Bella's ("whore") erotic entwining transforms into a ("madonna") maternal. She is no longer the sexually awakening woman but a mothering woman. Cliff, on the other hand, does not revert to a socially accommodating state. When he is locked up in "Her Majesty Royal Gaol," he thinks of the "plenty slave-man must'e dead hauling" the stones to build it.¹⁴³ He notices the other inmates, and the smells, his own bodily putrescence and wasting as he waits for another trial. His baptisms by fire—poverty, friendship, incarceration—do not accommodate transforming into anything or anyone other than a survivor. Cliff's rebellion is an attack on the Caribbean bourgeoisie and white male dominance even as he dreams of a gangster paradise. Crudely symbolized, Cliff reappropriates what was symbolically taken from him: property and birthrights.

Tide Running explores dis/integration of consciousness and language that is part of the contemporary Caribbean experience. Language, as an agent of memory, salvages words and expression that inscribe both the natural environment and lived experience. The novel's approach to code-switching goes beyond pairing vernacular Caribbean to standardized English, it generates metaphors that bounce from

¹⁴² Ibid., 212.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 213.

addressee to addressee—from brain to brain. This narrative balances on two peoples' memories and so shifting from subjectivities and sensibilities is at its crux.

Kempadoo does not just rely on the use of the transnational narrator as the sole mediator of boundary-crossing's in the novel. Instead, there is equal weight to be measured from Cliff's Caribbean demotic. The novel sets the stage for a sequence of harmonic and disharmonic processes across the lives of locals and newcomers, with dynamic shifts in characterizations, rhetoric, and symbolism at the level of class and race. The processes are more dynamic, rapid, and precarious when we foreground Bella's racial, social, and geographic liminality afforded to her, with intentionality through plot, by her class and artistic impulses. To match, is an eruption of discontent from the repressive surface of ongoing social life in Plymouth, with its provincial interactions, neocolonial transactions, and stunted economic reciprocities that feed Cliff's sequences of behaviors. *Tide Running* explores the dialectic of spectacle and freedom, as well as reactionary counter-measures that insist and persist to reintegrated Black bodies into a social fabric of the status quo.

Material

Where *Tide Running* begins after the Carnival season, in her third novel, *All Decent Animals*, Kempadoo chooses Trinidad's famed Carnival mas (masquerade) season, with its various concealments and exposures, as her setting. Carnival and the carnivalesque trope appear in many of novels written by the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris. He penned *Palace of the Peacock* (1960); the three novels *Carnival* (1985), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987) and *The Four Banks of the River Space* (1990) which were re-issued in 1993 as the *Carnival Trilogy* (1993) and, at least, four others. Trinidad's Errol Hill gave us the polemic *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (1972) with its history of how it moved from ballroom antics of the European planter class to be taken up in the streets by the emancipated African slaves. Paule Marshall and Earl Lovelace have also made the carnival trope the plot or the main action in some of their writings. When Claudia Jones, the Trinidadian-born journalist and activist, deported from the U.S in 1955 on the grounds of being a Communist, moved to England, she became a key figure in the expanding African-Black-Caribbean community. Following the 1958 Notting Hill race riots, Jones arranged for a Mardi-Gras styled carnival which still carries on today on the last bank holiday of the year. In her 1959 essay, "The People's Art is the Genesis of their Freedom," Jones writes:

If then, our Caribbean Carnival has evoked the wholehearted response from the people from all islands of the Caribbean...itself a testament to the role of the arts in bringing people together...In the midst of our revelry let us remember that it is a world on the eve of conquest of Space...¹⁴⁴

Though carnival is a site of unruliness, Jones used it as a socially stabilizing force. This paradoxical relationship charts the success of carnival celebrations within and outside of the Caribbean.

¹⁴⁴ Davies, *Left of Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, 176.

In *High Mas*, photographer, poet, and Caribbean scholar Kevin Adonis Browne writes, “[A]s we come to understand that everyday life in the neocolonial Caribbean involves the acceptance and indictment of socioeconomic/econosocial disappointments and political failures, we should also understand that Carnival functions not only as an *acknowledgment* of the indictment, but also the explicit *rejection* of it.”¹⁴⁵ This indictment of neocolonial forces also comes to bear on pressure points within the interracial, international, and sexual relationships of characters in *All Decent Animals*. In the novel, the carnival spirit brings communities together but, in gathering revelers, designers, politicians, and priests, they must confront parts of themselves and others—“fortunes of war,” “territorial overthrow,” “African labor replacing decimated indigenous populations,” “conquest and trade,” East Indian labor replacing Blacks, and the role of oil and tourism— that cannot escape the “complicated cultural patterns that became entangled.”¹⁴⁶ Further, the novel celebrates other outgrowths of carnival such calypso music and soca, calypso’s fusion with India-Caribbean music. In Kempadoo’s fiction, we encounter a model of Trinidad’s carnival, where there are Kings and Queens of Calypso named, where are official and unofficial soca songs of the year played on radio stations. This extension of carnival through soca on the radio is evidenced on popular radio playlists throughout New York and London so that, similar to Kempadoo’s characterizations, the children of diaspora can remain entangled to their roots. In this way, Caribbean Carnival is not limited to a single cyclic episodic event. Carnival functions as continual plotting.

Additionally, Browne’s immersive and personal examination of Trinidad Carnival through autoethnographic and historical inventions argues for a differential

¹⁴⁵ Browne, *High Mas*, 14.

¹⁴⁶ John H. Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

between the recursive events of Carnival (a Carnival season or week) and the emancipatory project of Mas as a praxis.

For, whereas carnival provides a symbolic experiential frame for encountering the grievances of vernacular existence, *Mas* is a *praxis*, a rhetorical method for navigating carnival, implemented by those who dare to judge and long for change: the Masmakers.¹⁴⁷

Browne's emphasis on connecting theatrical praxis to rhetorical method lends depth to the field of carnival studies where considering the body of carnival performers and those interacting with them are equally important. Browne's framework allows me to consider how *Mas* as a rhetorical method applies to Oonya Kempadoo who was an apprentice masmaker, or designer. Mas, he continues, "is not a wish for utopia or a second life...it is the embrace of a fragmented life in need of critique."¹⁴⁸ Translating that rhetorical method on to the page, we can see how Kempadoo works in a fragmented style. We see this in *Buxton Spice's* unified vignettes shared between Lula and Lula's projection onto the Buxton Spice mango tree. We see this in *Tide Running's* split-screen effect of Cliff's and Bella's lived experience and consciousness. And, again with characters' symbolic life/death/ rebirth in *All Decent Animals*. If Mas is a rhetorical method for examining the intimacy between practitioner and audience, then my intervention is to consider how that intimacy maps onto the body on the page as a material artifact of what happens on the streets. I offer close readings how the carnival trope in *All Decent Animals* animates a new way of reading bodies.

To begin, Ata, named after the Greek huntress, arrives to work at Camp Swampy as an apprentice to the white Trinidadian Carnival God of Design named Stringer, who is loosely based on the world renowned Peter Minshall, "and he is

¹⁴⁷ Op. cit., 28

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 28

King of Mas. An impetuous genius out of the wrong color and class, in the world of black independence."¹⁴⁹ This white Caribbean man has London classical-actor training and "all his appreciation of the cultural fabric that he grew up with in Trinidad." After returning home to Trinidad, he is "determined to re-create a costumed identity and the way ordinary people celebrate their body, their freedom and ancestral genes."¹⁵⁰ Stringer's desire to re-create the "costumed identity" of ordinary people is a call for a larger examination of the historical effects and cultural affects, year after year, of diaspora since it is acknowledged in the opening scene that travelers are coming home for Carnival. His hope to transform the "ordinary people" into an imagined body that plays mas is a productive tension between "here" (home) and there "farrin" wherein carnival producers and participants engage in a kind of utopian self-formation more interested in performance than perfection, more invested in crisis than clarity. This self-formation presents itself throughout *All Decent Animal's* themes of diaspora, transnationalism, disease, and the subversive nature of "mixing" where the mixing in the Caribbean includes global geographies, genealogies and economies.¹⁵¹

Ata has visited Trinidad with her island father and continental mother, but her exact nationality is never revealed and therefore she is never fixed in the narrative. She is characterized as an ideal transnational subject moving between temporary class, national status, race, and even gender categories. Her longing is described as "this in-between feeling."¹⁵² Second, the Trinidad we are introduced to is indeed "unrooted in place and race." It situates Ata within a small group of U.N. babies and intellects whom we meet at a party hosted by Fraser, a well-to-do

¹⁴⁹ Oonya Kempadoo, *All Decent Animals*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 8-9.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

London-educated Trini architect who is also a closeted gay man. To note and true of many Caribbean nations, this cocktail party scene is a representative sampling of a modern diasporic community that has one foot in and one foot out of “the nation.”

At Fraser’s party, she meets and falls in love with Pierre, a European man with French and British parentage who works for an international aid organization in Port of Spain. Ata’s perspective not only thoroughly underscores the “inbetweenness” of her experiences but Pierre’s. When Pierre shows up to the story at Fraser’s party, he is immediately marked as an outsider, as “[a] foreigner. Most people could spot a mile off.” Local detection takes “a real skill mastered by island-vibe detectives who zoom in on the clues between a stranger and a foreigner, between visiting overseas family member and returnee, expat and tourist...Or we can smell fresh meat.”¹⁵³

Pierre’s foreignness is the “disappointed accomplice” to Ata’s feeling “outside of her body.”¹⁵⁴ Here, I read the word “disappoint” in the context of their unmoored positions as both multinational expats. Their dis/appointment forges their relationship. And four years later when Ata moves from her small apartment to Pierre’s waterfront home in an upper middle-class neighborhood, she slowly begins to be bothered by Pierre’s description of the Gulf of Paria as “flat as a mill pond...[I]t bothers her slightly because it is such a European description for such a tropical scene.”¹⁵⁵ This moment recalls Brathwaite’s aphasic metaphor of “*snow was falling on the cane fields.*”¹⁵⁶ Thus, learning a history where writing about snow falls in the Shropshire fields but living under a radiating sun creates new incongruous perceptual models. It is a model of creolization of regarding two cultures at the same

¹⁵³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁵⁶ Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. (New Beacon Books Ltd, 1984.), 9, author’s italics.

time and it is also an example of the persistence of normative European images. So, this moment is as much about Pierre's longing as it Ata's unsettling.

Pierre thinks about their trips to Europe and how "[Ata] changes and becomes calmer, like the old landscape."¹⁵⁷ While visiting Europe, she would articulate things about his birthplace "in a way that woke a new love and longing in him." Here, we see how their entwined racial histories have "real, material and symbolic effects."¹⁵⁸ Here, their sensual feasting at small French bistros or their long existential conversations may not be the jump-up-and-wail fête of a carnival, but I argue that it is in this space of indulgence where they are fêted by the uneven exchange of a global economy that lavish them with leisure. Incidentally, this same space of indulgence makes way for her artistic transformation from designer to writer because she is able to re-invent herself out of crisis/catastrophe. Her development does not happen in the ordinary flow of time because the novel is written as a series of unfinalized transitions; even death passes over a boundary into rebirth.

For example, after Ata moves in with Pierre, her sentiments change from enjoying the blessing of her suburban hilltop home to a critique of the view like "the old photographs that preserve a false innocence, glimmer in this morning soft view...while the terror and violence of unstoppable undergrowth continues forging new-world progress and exotically dangerous new breeds."¹⁵⁹ The subtlety in the discursive power of breeding can be read in a scene where Ata regards Pierre's antique gold Rolex. "The idea of a real gold Rolex on a white man's wrist bothered Ata. But she hadn't known it was a Rolex until she looked closely" (53). Here, Ata is observing Pierre and his seeming indulgence and her own complicity. The watch

¹⁵⁷ Op. cit. 170.

¹⁵⁸ Stuart Hall, cited in *Understanding Stuart Hall*, (London; Sage Publications, 1984), 166.

¹⁵⁹ Kempadoo, *All Decent Animals*, 47.

was “old, [u]nderstated... the substance of history. Something she was not sure about but was now exploring, with him.”¹⁶⁰ Her disapproval does not end with ridicule but with a wish to interrogate. It is a beginning of awareness animated by her simultaneous recognition of class, race and gender. The watch is not only a temporal marker but also a material one that traces the history of its ostrich leather strap to a space outside their England, his France and her Caribbean.

This moment connects to a conversation that the AIDS-diagnosed Fraser and a Catholic priest, Father Barnette, have about Trinidad’s history of European conquest and racial mixing. Fraser speaks of V.S. Naipaul’s *The Loss of El Dorado: A Colonial History* and Spain’s desire to find the third El Dorado but “after the initial glimmer of gold Trinidad remained a backwater post, ‘breeding disease, mixed-blood, and sin’ for a few hundred years.”¹⁶¹ The juxtaposition of “glimmer” and “breeding” returns several times in the novel to emphasize the entwining of fantasy and the grotesque. Breeding is visualized as: 1) new pathogens creating (in)visible maladies such as AIDS; 2) an excess of illegibly raced bodies as is the case with Ata or the future children that Sam, a black taxi driver acquainted with Ata, might have had with his East Indian fiancé had not her father murdered her to prevent their interracial mixing; and 3) sin or uncouth behavior being attached to examples of homosexuality, miscegenation and gentrification. Images of breeding, mixing and leaking are key. When Ata’s and Pierre’s relationship dissolve because “[t]heir differences were beginning to leak out”, more visceral images of leaking and mixing emerge with Fraser’s AIDS diagnosis and his cross-gender fantasies of whining women at carnival.¹⁶² Endings in this novel offer new possibilities in line with

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 105.

¹⁶² Ibid., 55.

Brathwaite's wording of plot, "dead so that they become unborn and therefore part of the future."¹⁶³

Fraser talks about the terrifying power of women in carnival who are "sparkling with desire." He says Olympian wrestling moves remind him of soca and dancehall whining of women at carnival. It is like men on men action from behind, a primordial setting for desire. "[T]here's a show of physicality and genitals, almost Olympian-like" it also reminds him of his schoolboy days in England. This moment of clarity tracks back to a literary quote he remembers of "a man climbing out of bed saturated with femininity, wanting to dive into cold water."¹⁶⁴ This masculine-feminine baptism foreshadows a later pivotal scene when Ata dives into the sea and has either real or imagined sex with her black male muse. Paradoxically, Greek mythology is used as a trope for metamorphosis and highlights the role of British education, thus, the role of English language and culture in the Anglophone Caribbean. Atalanta in Greek mythology is a virgin huntress only willing to marry a man who can best her in a foot race. She was born to a father who wanted a son so he left her to grow feral on a mountainside. As per usual, a man desired her and with Aphrodite's help, Meleager bests her on foot.

In her rejection of Pierre and conjuring of her own male instantiation to consummate her creative process, she may be undoing the story, undisciplining patriarchal discipline, and returning to her ferality. The combination of her increased immersion and interest into the creative practices of Trinidad is simultaneous to her disentangling from Pierre provides an intertextual reading of character's symbolic and emotional transformation. Ata leaves Pierre to write at the lakeside cabin, itself a

¹⁶³ Brathwaite, "Notes on a Caribbean Cosmology," 4. His discussion of Caribbean social, political, and spiritual life is an exploration in kinds of hybridities found in Afrofuturism (future/past) and Afrosurrealism ([circle/spiderweb/prism] of culture).

¹⁶⁴ Kempadoo, *All Decent Animals*, 141.

kind of Anglo-European cliché. Yet, she recognizes her muse's seduction manifesting throughout her writing. "She tells her friends, "I started writing and...it's almost as if he's in me."¹⁶⁵ Writing the Caribbean shifts from asymmetric consumption and acculturation such as the gentrification of a Trinidad neighborhood and the renaming of the Breakfast Shed to something French (202). Her embrace of Caribbean is a consensual consummation of birds, animals, and people. "Ata sits up to face it...his arms, strong, solid-muscled...for a moment she is afraid to look for a face...all she remembers are his words...*I will see you run and I will run with you.*"¹⁶⁶ So here, this manifestation is rewriting Atalanta's liberation.

In another scene, Fraser has a dream that Ata is a man. It is not that Fraser is designing Ata as a man, he is just designing the space for her to explore this queer-gendered possibility. Ata is ripe for new possible social subjectivities for her body. This drag embodiment recalls the scene when Ata dresses and passes as a man so that Fraser can take her and Pierre cruising for gay men.¹⁶⁷ In a later visit, Ata will confess, "I believe everyone is born bisexual."¹⁶⁸

This queering is paralleled by Stringer's own Carnival mas design in which he defiles the nationalist and masculinist script of King and Queen of Band by creating a ménage a trois scenario for his mas band entitled Imagine. "[T]he Old World marries the New. The conqueror and the virgin...And Trinity is receiving them...two cold continents—Europe and America—a tropical Eden between them...an island...of FESTIVITY!"¹⁶⁹ The hetero-normative King and Queen of Band is disrupted with the addition of the mechanized Trinity. It is interesting to note that as Stringer explains Trinity, he imbues it with stereotypical female

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 223.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 223-224, author's italics.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 78.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 72.

adjectives associated with mother earth but genders it male. Stringer's cyborgian "he" is similar to Ata's "prancing peacock" description of Trinidad.¹⁷⁰ It is a "costumed identity" that can "receive" a female America (new world) and a male Europe (old world). In the Imagine rehearsal, the undulating bodies of the performers are the "shiny bodies" that glimmer. Stringer leaves the rehearsal exhausted and we find out from the manager, "He's HIV, isn't he?" His creativity is attributed to his "disease on the brain."¹⁷¹ In a sense, the "unstoppable undergrowth" of mixed blood and sin is embodied in Ata as a writer, Fraser as an architect and Stringer as a costumer: three designers of Caribbean cosmology.

All Decent Animals continues to unpack themes of diasporic imagination, disease, and social indictments with her female protagonists harnessing the subversive power to shuttle between genders and sex to create carnival moments in the narrative. Kempadoo attends to these unsettled points of origin making them visible as the plot weaves in and out the space of the carnival and the queerness of contemporary Caribbean ontology, a feeling that Ata describes as "Caribbean, not Dominican, not Guyanese, not Trinidadian—a true no-nation."¹⁷²

Conclusions

The relationships between "here" (home) and "there" (farrin') are played with in the novels of Oonya Kempadoo. Kempadoo stages what Sylvia Wynter's articulates as "[...] the beginning of awareness; the 'taking of consciousness' of

¹⁷⁰ See Veronica Hollinger's discussion in "Posthumanism and Cyborg Theory" *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 274 in which she suggests the "cyborg is the figure for whom technology itself is the "unexpected other," a lived environment with the radical potential to turn "us" into "them" as "we" become other than what we (thought we) were."

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

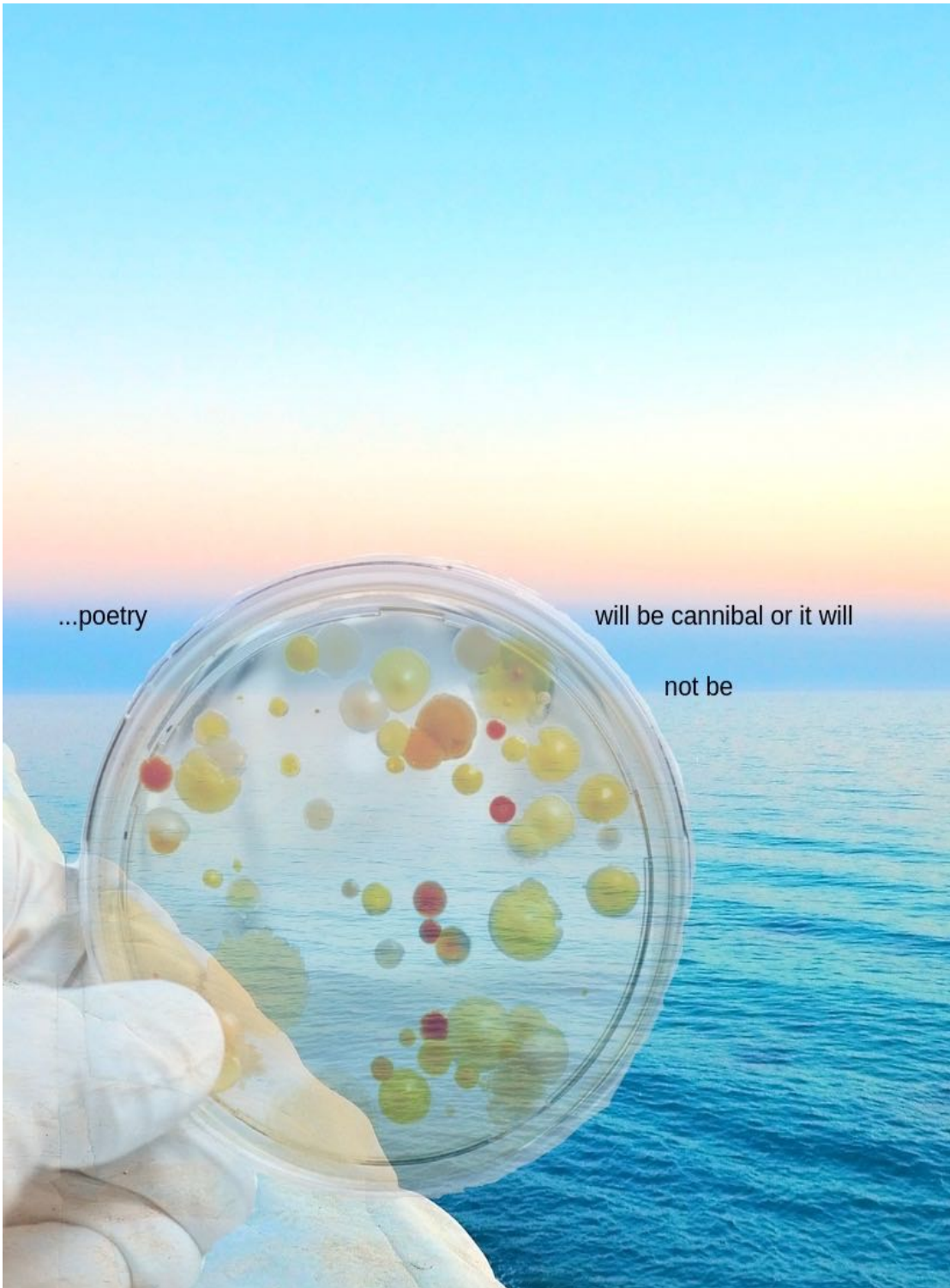
¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 13.

being..."¹⁷³ This beginning of awareness is played out in encounters between protagonists and the spaces/places where they do not or can no longer fit in. Life, as reflected in Caribbean diasporic literature, is about complex human behaviors associated with capture, flight, settlement, domestication, urbanization, fête and other exchange systems. Kempadoo's novels are conscious of this as they are set in times of political upheaval (as in *Buxton Spice's* Guyana), during Carnival season (as in *All Decent Animal's* Trinidad) and after Carnival season (as in *Tide Running's* Tobago), where in the latter, the cultural crossings between a Trinbagonian teen losing himself in Tupac lyrics and the Euro-styled Trini returnee trying to find her roots in post-carnival wining depict their longing for movement. Thus, diaspora constructs bi-directional displacements, layered and networked, that go beyond linear and parochial narratives of national or transnational identity. In a sense, character desire follows a trajectory of longing that the body plays out not unlike Stringer's idealization of "freedom and ancestral genes."

There is a collective utterance that language generates as an instrument of historical consciousness. The ideas I raise in this exploration of Kempadoo's narrative strategy are: 1) ways voice alter or mimic remembrance; 2) ways ambiguity of perspective approximates the transnational position in order to demonstrate how the confluence of perspectives produces contemporary Caribbean identity; and 3) ways in which poetics salvaged from natural and forced expression inform on the social crises in contemporary Caribbean. While Kempadoo's novel explores the racial animosities engendered by colonialism through the eyes of a tourist who masquerades as a native and a native who masquerades as Tupac, there is a wealth of other divisive formations, including bestiality, Black fetish, popular culture

¹⁷³ Sylvia Wynter, *We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk About a Little Culture: Decolonizing Essays 1967-1984*. (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd., 2012), 2.

representations, and kinship that inspire a careful reading of language. My focus on the problematic of language adds new depth to strategies of reading Caribbean consciousness in contemporary Caribbean narratives. This includes the task of refiguring geographic, gender, and other surreal boundaries.



...poetry

will be cannibal or it will

not be

II. Wynter is Coming: Or, How the Creative Critical Speculations of “Semantically-Neurochemically Activated” Cosmogonies Narrates the Caribbean

Migration, even a temporary dislocation, has provided early twenty-first century Caribbean intellectuals, such as Sylvia Wynter, a liminal space and time to consider the irresolvability of Western epistemologies and ontologies in relation to actual life in the Caribbean region. Take for example what was circulated via West Indian primary school readers used in classrooms to assess a student's intelligence and merit. My father can still recall a Romantic Era British war poem extolling the life and heroics of Lord Nelson. This is not to discount the declarative memory and neuroplasticity of a young boy's brain. Yet, imperial knowledge drawn from European canons consolidate aesthetics and language to represent value in terms of a rhetoric that is culturally standardized, thus acceptable. This is how doilies, big and small, end up on many surfaces of furniture in a Caribbean person's home; the triumph of European aesthetics and mimicry of etiquette.

Like other political and cultural thinkers in the postcolonial and decolonizing Caribbean, Sylvia Wynter, born in 1928, began her education in the region then left on a scholarship to study abroad. She attended Kings College in London. In addition to her scholarly career, she was an actress, dancer, playwright, and novelist. These categories matter in thinking through her careful examination of Caribbean culture, literature, and “unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom.”¹⁷⁴ Her breadth of bodily and intellectual experiences traces to her ability to think and theorize across disciplines. Specifically, I look to her preoccupation with the recurring tropes of Humanism, which provides a locus for

¹⁷⁴ Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," *The New Centennial Review*, 3:3. (2003)

my exploration of salvage, speculation, memory, movement, and heretical “endings.” Her assertion that we are simultaneously biologic and narrativizing beings negates the linear teleological presumption of a Darwinist model of humankind evolution, which is itself a socially produced narrative, and it raises questions about knowledge production.

I title this section in a tongue and cheek jest with the fantasy television and book series *Game of Thrones* in mind for several reasons. First, a key figure in the fantasy narrative, Ned Stark, makes the prophetic comment, “winter is coming” and this spirals into the physical threat of that fictional world’s end: the White Walkers. The world of Westeros is divided by noble families and its mythology draws on Medieval Western Europe. The prefix “west” does not go unnoticed. That the culmination of a war and climate change is perpetuated by another glut of “white” walkers, among whom are a young blonde queen supported by a polyglot woman of color, her army of both castrated brown men (The Unsullied) and libidinal brown men (Dothraki), and in the fray, another family of white nobles who reinscribe their power through incestuous copulation (The Lannisters), is symbolic and fascinating. Second, it is this very overrepresentation of a particular subject position’s narrative and sociogeny—for example, the socially produced phenomenon that links power and truth to these families— and its subsequent naturalizing social divisions, from which Sylvia Wynter draws in her work.

Be forewarned for there is, not unlike the fantasy text I pun, a density to her concepts. Wynter’s theory relies on us shifting the way we narrate ourselves as a species—rewriting the “monohumanist figure that enacts, presently, the hegemonically bourgeois *homo oeconomicus* ‘descriptive statement’ of being human”—without considering how her own language itself, with its ability to wield

interdisciplinary conceptualizations, can be inaccessible.¹⁷⁵ However, it is a challenge to mobilize radical decolonial options to rewrite this monohumanist “descriptive statement” if the words of liberation are located in a domain inaccessible to many whom it would be most useful. Do we rewrite the descriptive statement with a denser statement? Throughout my process engaging Wynter’s concepts and language, I have relied on my background in science and the arts to keep apace with her conceptual pivots. For me, coming to her science of the word concept is akin to my enjoyment in reading about the history of wildfire in the *Game of Thrones* books. George R.R. Martin may have spent a better part of a chapter dedicated to discussing wildfire's history as a nuclear bomb-like technology that, when used, made kings and kingdoms. Yet, when wildfire is used on screen, it takes all of five minutes to advance plots. This is not to say that complex ideas should be stripped of nuance for accessibility and attention spans; but, in my opinion, theory can and should be mindful to operate on multiple registers for clarity. With the examples I present in this section, I hope I am able to provide the kind of lucidity that allows academic theory to line up with praxis.

Finally, and paradoxically, Wynter’s work, like the winter of White Walkers is a force to be reckoned with, a heuristic force that allows one to discover that the relation between their cultural values, critical discourse, and aesthetic choices are a function of,

[T]he centrality of the ritually initiated and enacted storytelling codes, and thus their *positive / negative, symbolic life / death* semantically- neurochemically activated “second set of instructions.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 14. The conversation between Katherine McKittrick and Sylvia Wynter offers clarity to the density of theorizations and nomenclature insofar as they repeat concepts as often as they advance new ideas.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

This is an idea Wynter unpacks in *Unsettling the Coloniality* and discusses further with Katherine McKittrick in *On Being Human*. Wynter uses a combination of “human sciences” such as philosophy, biology, and anthropology, to argue that Man and the genre of the human are problematic. So then, if we decode Ned’s “winter is coming” prophesy, we might hear instead, “Fellow empires of Westeros, hold fast, for the matrix of our consolidated geo-political power, in addition to the binary modeling of our epistemes and myths—not to mention our latent racial and gendered ontologies that determine our quarrels and alliances with regards to domestic and foreign policy— have accumulated leading to more accumulations. Unless we embrace a counterpoetics that leads to new modalities of being and an untethering to outmoded genre-specific versions of the human, we are doomed to repeat ourselves.” But, Wynter is coming will suffice.

Figurations

The time has come to ask oneself whether the writer is (in this process) the one who hoards the written or initiates the spoken? If the process of historicization does not call into question the status of the written? If the written record is “adequate” for the archives of collective memory?

— Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse, Selected Essays*, 64

If you are going to use this person to destroy his race, the least you can do is look him in the eye before you do.

— Guinan, “I, Borg,” *Star Trek the Next Generation* (1992)

When the Borg, an assimilative race of hybrids encounter the Starship Enterprise, it is a Black woman, crew member Guinan (Whoopie Goldberg) who, having survived a genocide by the hands of the very same group, comes to the defense of a Borg prisoner Captain Picard has captured. He is named Hugh by the other Black crew member, Geordi LaForge (Levar Burton). Not too far away in my memory banks, I entangle this scene with Burton’s famous scene in *Roots* (1977) when he refuses the name Toby under the brutal lashes of a whip. He declares he is still “Kunta Kinte.” Conversely, naming Hugh becomes a collaborative project and is meant to be a signifier of his humanness. The Borg identify as, “we are Borg.” They share a monolithic consciousness. Physical and mental conversion occurs after a Borg encounter whereby “we are Borg” subsumes any previous individualism and personality for a collective identity as they treat the universe like an assimilation buffet. Guinan admonishes Picard for his bias that has conditioned his discursive and his geopolitical—or geoplanetary—knowledge so that he calls Hugh “it.” For Guinan, the distinction between “his” and “it” highlights how understanding a speaker’s utterance, a body’s performance, or a writer’s text is a contextualized exchange. Thus, meaning is often indeterminate and biocentric with regards to scripting the “monohumanist descriptive statements” about who is human and who

is disregarded. That a Black character is the one to shed light on this bias, does not go unnoticed. Even in Guinan's Afrofuture, she is bound to narratives of the past.

Sylvia Wynter theorizes that the rise of the Western conception of Man coincides with the rise of Western racism. Both create a genre of Hu/Man that relies on a constructed and lessened Other to persist. The “the ritually initiated and enacted storytelling codes” that have been passed down in a continuous way from Renaissance to Enlightenment is a figuration she calls Man1 then continuing from Enlightenment until now is Man2. Her theorizing pushes back against Foucault’s claim of distinct epistemes. “Although Foucault, in his analysis of the processes by means of which the classical episteme was replaced by our own, had proposed that these epistemes be seen as being discontinuous with each other, what he overlooked was that such a discontinuity, like the earlier discontinuity that had been effected by the classical episteme itself, was taking place in the terms of a continuous cultural field, one instituted by the matrix Judeo-Christian formulation of a general order of existence.”¹⁷⁷ For Wynter, there has been no breaks between epistemes. Her argument conceptualizes a Renaissance era figure she calls Man1, who sought salvation in God, as a political subject. During this time, the New World and new bodies are being discovered and these new bodies, even after their Christian conversion, are still, in relation to the white man, the native and the Negro, the collective subhumans. They are oppositional heathen figures to Man1's epistemic adherence to a monotheistic order: God.

Later, Man1 replaces their reliance on God with their reliance on Reason to become the Enlightenment era figure she calls Man2. At this stage, Wynter invokes the term *homo oeconomicus* to explain “the performative enactment of the Western world

¹⁷⁷ Wynter, “Unsettling”, 318.

system's role-allocating degrees of domination/subordination."¹⁷⁸ Here, Wynter expands on Fanon's anticolonial sentiment written in *Wretched of the Earth*. "In the colonies the economic substructure is also superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."¹⁷⁹ Capitalism is invested in various forms of anti-black racism. The colonial project was no longer invested in conversion of heathens, but the commodity from the enslaved. Consequently, under Man2 the Negro becomes the nigger and the Native becomes the savage. The stories from the Bible that created hierarchies for the soul are shifted to the skin.

"Storytelling codes" is our non-primate ontology that governs how we are and how we know who/what we are outside of what is coded on our DNA. Her term *homo narrans* explains our ability to "tell" stories. It is "in Fanonian-adapted terms as the origin of the human as a hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species: *bios /mythoi*."¹⁸⁰ So, after the big bang, then biodiversity, there came the event that brought us into language, so to speak. As *homo narrans*, we are able to respond to our "semantically-neurochemically activated "second set of instructions" to build our cosmogonies in which we find order through reason.

Additionally, Wynter's rethinks Foucault's analysis of a "continuous cultural field [...]instituted by the matrix of Judeo-Christian formulation" and poses the question: how is it that Man behaves the same regardless of Europe's religious schisms (despite Catholic and Protest rifts) and nation formations?¹⁸¹ How is it that a "monohumanistic descriptive statement" worked throughout Europe? Her research includes both England's colonial power and the early colonial exploits of the Iberian

¹⁷⁸ McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*, 40.

¹⁷⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 5.

¹⁸⁰ McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*, 25.

¹⁸¹ Wynter, "Unsettling," 318.

peninsula to show that the pre-Middle Passage Blacks were already being excluded from the genealogy of Man. Thus, her turn to a semantically rich bio-cognitive schema accounts for how Europe was able to sell the propaganda of Hu/man to dominate policy and people. Her framework invests in decentering the Westernized binary model of “native” and “nonnative.” Instead, she insists we look “through the planetary interhuman consequences of 1492 and the resultant shared experience of, and thus resistance to, terror.”¹⁸² Humanism is not a binary phenomenon; it is a planetary investment, but so is its unsettling.

In addition to Foucault, Wynter draws on the work of Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano and especially Franz Fanon and his conceptualization of “the black man’s alienation” as a function of sociogeny. For Fanon, sociogeny is an ontology developed by social forces, for example, the alienated black man develops neuroses created by European colonization. “But society, unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the wormeaten roots of the structure.”¹⁸³ However, Wynter intervention sees a confluence between biochemical process, society, thinking, and being. For Wynter, the sociogenic “allows us to see the ways in which culture-specific codes appear regularly and consistently to us” (Marriott 58).

Our *mythoi*, our origin stories, are therefore always formulaically patterned so as to co- function with the endogenous neurochemical behavior regulatory system of our human brain. Humans are, then, a biomutationally evolved, hybrid species—*storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological*. With this, particular (presently biocentric) macro- origin

¹⁸² Op. cit., 5.

¹⁸³ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 4.

stories are overrepresented as the singular narrative through which the stakes of human freedom are articulated and marked.¹⁸⁴

Again, these “codes” make us storytellers and the “overrepresentation” of a particular narrative is always already “semantically- neurochemically activated.” How the Human was introduced and maintained throughout centuries of colonization in part because of this encoding and “Wynter's concern is with how modern culture construes individuals in recognizably racial-teleological terms, a mode of being that has become hegemonic.”¹⁸⁵ The mode of being that underpins cultural hegemony, and thus colonial hegemony, is continuous. There was no break between God and Reason.

These two key ideas from Wynter I have discussed—first, that we must divest from a totally linear conceptualization of a Darwinian human, and second, that we are as a non-primate humans species conditioned simultaneously by a hybrid of biology and culture— underpin her concept of science of the word. Wynter fleshes out an original idea proposed by Aimé Césaire that constructs a synergy between scientific knowledge and poetic knowledge. In a seminal essay, “Poetry and Knowledge” published in *Tropiques* in January 1945, Césaire wrote, “Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge.” He uses an analogy of science as a lion without prey that is “gnawed away from within.”¹⁸⁶ Césaire’s belief was that the natural sciences would starve without the careful study of human culture and storytelling capacities. Stories and storytelling are at the heart of her concept science of the word. Wynter extends this concept by defining the human species as simultaneously biological (*bios* or nature) and cultural (*mythoi* or

¹⁸⁴ McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*, 11

¹⁸⁵ David Marriott, “Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny and ‘the Damned.’” *CR: The New Centennial Review*. 11. 3 (2011), 58

¹⁸⁶ Césaire, *Refusal of the Shadow*, 134-135.

origin story). *Mythoi* conditions *bios*. Thus, a *bios-mythoi* can explain how Western stories create the Black/other simultaneously. Science of the word can also function as praxis because when we understand the storytelling codes of *bios-mythoi*, we can challenge Darwinian concept of humanness.

In her essay, "The Pope must have been Drunk, The King of Castille a Madman: Culture as Actuality and the Caribbean Rethinking of Modernity," Wynter ends her essay with an incantation,

Human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities. . . . And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms.¹⁸⁷

This lovely excerpt resonates with Kamau Braithwaite's conception of a Caribbean cosmology in which corporeality of body and "actualities" such as physical geography, can be "redrawn again, in undared forms." To speculate yourself into being is a powerful way of re/building and re/constructing subjecthood. Because narrative of and from the Caribbean are composed of slippery pasts, imaginary futures, and material exchanges measured in asymmetries, is it helpful to think of science of the word as praxis that lends itself to discussions of Afrofuturism and Afrosurrealism.

Afrofuturism and Afrosurrealism

I use a confluence of Afrofuturism and Afrosurrealism in world and character design for *PoCo Mas*. In "1943: Surrealism and Us," Suzanne Césaire writes that "surrealism remains what it has always been, an activity which assigns itself the goal

¹⁸⁷ Sylvia Wynter, "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk, The King of Castille a Madman: Culture as Actuality, and the Caribbean Rethinking Modernity." *Reordering of Culture: Latin America The Caribbean and Canada in The Hood*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), 35.

of exploring and expressing systematically the forbidden zones of the human mind" so that it can reconnect with a sensibility found in "the primitive and the child."¹⁸⁸ Deployed as a praxis in the Caribbean context, it can negate "[c]olonial idiocies" and "sordid contemporary antimonies: Whites-Blacks, Europeans-Africans, civilized-savage."¹⁸⁹ Surrealism offers a counter-framing to bear on dominant frames. In this essay, as documented throughout her body of work as writer and co-editor of the Martiniquan journal *Tropiques*, Suzanne Césaire advocates passionately for an embrace of surrealism in the Antilles as the antidote to colonial accommodation that stifles the vitality of Caribbean art and life. She suggests that "surrealist activity [...] will aid in liberating people by illuminating the blind myths [that] have led them" to believe French politicians up through the Vichy regime.¹⁹⁰ In the Caribbean, surrealism works as mixed metaphors responding to the mixed personal drives of colonial and colonized people. Césaire uses surrealism to self-diagnose "[t]he most unsettling reality [,] our own."¹⁹¹ Within the mixed metaphors across her writings, it is important to trace Césaire's critique of the emerging new "colored" classes within the Caribbean. She links the competitive aspirations of the new "colored middle class" to mimicry of European sensibilities.¹⁹² The crisis of class will spoil cultural and political future. In her essay "Malaise of a Civilization," she observes,

Not one upwardly mobile Martiniquan will ever admit that he is only engaging in mimicry, so natural, spontaneous, and born of legitimate aspirations does his present situation seem. And, in so doing he will be sincere. He honestly does not KNOW he mimics. He is *unaware* of his true nature, which nonetheless does exist.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage*, 34-35.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 32.

The preoccupation with class in her writing foreshadows the economic crises that will eventually affect the post-emancipation Caribbean.

With Surrealism, André Breton will often use a child's imagination in his manifesto as an analogy to illustrate the surrealist movement in terms of a person's ability to access unintegrated thought that is most reflective of subconsciousness. In "The Manifestoes of Surrealism," Breton writes,

The mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood...From childhood memories, and from a few others, there emanates a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of *having gone astray*, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists. It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's "real life"...where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective, risk-free possession of oneself.¹⁹⁴

His notion of a child's memory of having "a sentiment of being unintegrated" is not a description of incoherence, but rather a method of rereading the recognizable through a lens of incomprehensibility. Incomprehensibility, in this instance, creates alternative discursive practices. Though Breton's surrealist manifesto is preoccupied with defining a value system for imagination, Suzanne Césaire's astute political identification with the movement brings Martinique, and by proxy the Caribbean region, face to face with its geopolitical realities through imagination. Surrealism in the African or Caribbean tradition was meant to be a challenge to the post-colonial ethos. Speculation and speculative practices that give us the opportunity to question other areas of life, such as those allocated to questions of science also help us "redraw" ourselves.

¹⁹⁴ André Breton, *The Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 40. Author's italics.

First, I must resolve a presumed schism between the Afrosurrealism and Afrofuturism that is situated in the 2009 “Afrosurrealist Manifesto,” as conceived of by a San Francisco-based writer and artist D. Scot Miller. The schism neither privileges nor negates one, but showing them as overlapping, more than just constitutive of speculation, is helpful to me. Scot describes Afrosurrealism as not Surrealism. The distinction is important to his conceptualization. Miller writes that:

Afro-Surrealism sees that all “others” who create from their actual, lived experience are surrealist, per Frida Kahlo. The root for “Afro-” can be found in “Afro-Asiatic”, meaning a shared language between black, brown and Asian peoples of the world. What was once called the “third world,” until the other two collapsed.¹⁹⁵

I can get down with this. A non-European, nongender binary Humanism would be planetary leaning, and that leaning expresses all the interpenetrations and clashes of world cultures. While Breton's manifesto extolls “freedom” linking it to his “beloved imagination,” his idea of a surrealist imagination, unlike Afrosurrealism, is very individualistic.

Miller's second claim is that Afrosurrealism is not Afrofuturism. He contends that future is now and that “Afro-Surrealists expose this from a ‘future-past’” called RIGHT NOW” (emphasis as in original). He goes on to explain:

Afro-Futurism is a diaspora intellectual and artistic movement that turns to science, technology, and science fiction to speculate on black possibilities in the future. Afro-Surrealism is about the present. There is no need for tomorrow's-tongue speculation about the future. Concentration camps, bombed-out cities, famines, and enforced sterilization have already happened. To the Afro-Surrealist, the Tasers are here. The Four Horsemen rode through too long ago to recall. What is the future? The future has been around so long it is now the past.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ D. Scott Miller, “Afrosurreal Manifesto: Black Is the New black—a 21st-Century Manifesto,” *Black Camera*, (Indian University Press, 2013), 114.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

(Take out your riddle decoders.) Thus the present is the “future-past,” meaning that the activities and apocalypses of the future have already happened in a temporal-spatial past that accumulates into “RIGHT NOW” or “present.” If Afrosurrealism operates in the future-past (also known as the present), then by this logic Afrofuturism is the “past-future,” wherein the accumulated problems of the past that are being addressed in “tomorrow’s-tongue speculation about the future” is actually the present. Stay with me.

The “past” of any future could be, spatiotemporally, argued to be the present or “RIGHT NOW.” So, there is an overlap. I see my intervention in Miller’s divisions of Afro-epistemes conceptually aligned with Wynter’s pushes back against Foucault’s claims of a discontinuous plane of thought between Renaissance, Enlightenment, and now in the construction of man, aka Humanism. Wynter argues that there *always already* has been a continuous negation of the black throughout Western man’s epistemic journey between serving god, Renaissance to Enlightenment (Wynter’s Man1), and his embrace of reason and capital from Enlightenment to today (Wynter’s Man2). So, if the negation of blackness is a continuous project set on following the embrace of Reason and Rationality, then shouldn’t the struggle to reaffirm blackness stay the course with continuity? Why set up distinct temporalities for the struggle?

I contend that Afrosurrealism’s present (“future-past”) is a function of a “pure future” (my own term) that cannot be separated from the language of future or speculation because Afrofuturism’s past scoops up and salvages artifacts from *pure past* and *pure present*. For example, in Nalo Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber*, there is subtle in the details of off-world setting and character dialogue that give a sense of present and past of Caribbean life and Carnival culture. And even when character take a shift portal to another planet and meet non-humans, that indicates to me an

active engagement with ideas tied to anti-black racism: pure past and pure present. Then again, I do not know where in the Afro-episteme Venn diagram science fiction lies. I suspect closer to the future than not. I read Miller's claims to temporality as slipping into a practice of codifying a thing by using hegemonic-like values of time. Miller writes, "Afro-Surrealists restore the cult of the past. We revisit old ways with new eyes." The "cult of the past" in Afrofuturism is right now. Scot may not claim overlap with futurism, but futurism is indelibly linked to surrealism because it would have already transpired itself into a future. When I write about a speculative world where a collection of cells, eventually humanized, are my protagonists, Afrofuturism and Afrosurrealism are instantiated, as one, as a planetary speculation on past, present, future...on colonists, scientists, tourists, locals, migrants, and on those occupying multiple categories at once.

Fête

Culture is how we fete with powder, We gettin paint up and wettin down
with water, / If dat behaviour is ah part ah yuh nature ah say come forward,
come forward, come forward! / It in we blood. It in we blood. It in we blood.
It in we blood. Born fuh Mas.

—Machel Montano, “In we blood,” (*Monk Evolution* 2016)

Outside of literary imagination, the artful vulgarity of bodies *wining up* ‘pun each udder draws people home and draws others in. According to T&T’s Ministry of Planning and Development, for instance, 37,448 bodies or 1.5 billion possibilities, visited the two islands for the 2017 Carnival season. “The Carnival period includes the seventeen days prior to the Carnival celebration as well as Carnival Monday and Tuesday, a total of 19 days...contributing TT\$ 334,897,464.00 to the GDP.”¹⁹⁷

Kempadoo herself, as a visual and textual artist, apprenticed with world renown mas band designer Peter Minshall. The central role of ritual dance and music in Afrodiasporic renarrates the experience of encounter. The word ritual belies a structured consistency but there is also is an eclectic affinity to rooted idioms (beauty, survival, nature, community) and a kind of iconoclastic ethos that is, many times, very aware of mimicry. For example, to follow the body of work from Trinidad Carnival designer Peter Minshall is to see his attempts to exorcize European Humanism in mas formations. As a white Caribbean educated in London, Minshall “has to live through this contradiction” because he “can’t deny the culture of his skin at the same time and he has to live that tragedy.”¹⁹⁸ His carnival stagings are fraught, in my opinion, by an overvalorization of European theatrical aesthetics. In a radio

¹⁹⁷ Central Statistic Office (CSO). “CSO Releases 2017 Carnival Visits and Expenditures.” Ministry of Planning and Development, Government of Trinidad and Tobago, www.planning.gov.tt/content/cso-releases-carnival-2017-visitor-arrivals-and-expenditure

¹⁹⁸ *Mas Man*. Directed by Dalton Narine. (King Carnival Films, 2015). This film is, for the most, a documentary on Peter Minshall. It attempts to give a rounded perspective of Masmakers in Trinidad by interviewing other designers who may work in more folk modes than Minshall.

interview, he said, “When I do the mas I want the work that I do to be relevant in the world that we live in...fully aware of what they are doing in right now in the Museum of Modern Art in New York or what they are doing right now at the new Tate Gallery in London or what they’re doing right now with graphic in Japan.”¹⁹⁹ Yet, because he has risen to such prominence in the Caribbean carnival community, having also designed three Olympic opening ceremonies, the opportunity he offers Trinidadians to critique overt artifacts of Europeanness may be the paradoxical power in his *play*. In the documentary, *Mas Man* (2010) on the life and work of masmaker Peter Minshall, performance theorist Richard Schechner draws attention to the difference between European and African art and artifacts and when he discusses the bastardization of mas design by high art critics.

This kind of art is not allowed to rise by art historians. Let’s go back a century. When Picasso and his friends stole—and I don’t have objections—African masks and in them made what became Cubism. It rises to the metropolitan Museum of Art as Cubism. The masks from which it was made are in the Museum of Natural History in the primitive wing. They don’t sit side by side except in certain books. This is deep question of colonialism and racism in history. So, mas ought to be its own form, its own art form or spectacle itself.²⁰⁰

His comment on the "deep question of colonialism and racism in history" tracks to the Wynter's concept of science of the word wherein the value put on the culture of a people and continent were not recorded as cultural producers, rather production material to advance capitalism. There are other examples which we can use to explore the dialectic of spectacle and mas, as well reactionary counter-dominant frame theatrics. First, I would like to offer a conceptualization of how Caribbean social life shifts fluidly between breach, crisis, and redress

¹⁹⁹ *Mas Man* film

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Given the cultural and economic prominence of these annual fêtes, I contend that Carnival, as a national trope and a literary Caribbean trope, mediates cross-cultural realities in its exploration of history and imagination. The intervention occurs at the site of the festival and within the bodies of the players—and I include those watching and witnessing for in the sidelines who better to meditate reality than spectators reading each passing band, with their muddled down or beaded up revelers, as a metaphor.

I offer the term fête bodies as my thinking through *All Decent Animal's* protagonist, Ata, as well as actual participants, voyeurs, consumers and producers of Carnival. It is in this body that the idea of the Caribbean gets animated in Kempadoo's works—animated so that we can explore carnival seasons, a profusion of carnival-inspired plots, mas band fashion, and characters whose bodies I read as human containers, assemblages of life forces, and self-fashioned salvages where expat collectives, like Ata's friends in *All Decent Animals*, re-invent themselves, in and out of carnival season. These bodies have bi-directional relationships to a symbolic and unstable elsewhere: a once-was homeland, a failed escape, or a point of return that calls back with its nostalgia. Ata is an example of a fête body.

In the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* the English word fête, pronounced (fayt) or (fet), is borrowed from the French fête, meaning "holiday" or "party," usually carried on outdoors. The word itself is linguistic salvage preserved across nation. Fête body is a term I am working with in thinking about character crisis in the carnival(esque) trope. Thus, narrative crisis staged in the space of a party, festive gathering, or a carnival, and preparing for one, or how other recurring events come to define cross-cultural complexity that needs to be played out, resolved, in public.

Fêtes traditionally occur outdoors or involve ingestion of food. The fête body is a rethinking of Bakhtin's carnivalesque that re-situates the vulgar and the

grotesque as ongoing so that the carnivalesque in Caribbean diasporic literature can be read as constant, not episodic. I see this fête body transcending Bakhtin to embrace Kamau Brathwaite's political and poetic *Note(s) on Caribbean Cosmology*. Written in his signature Sycorax Video Style, his cosmology loosens language. For example, Brathwaite addresses Caribbean ontology and spatial practices in his cosmology as "origin, generation/history & regeneration out of crisis/catastrophe" and further defines carnival as:

carnival (konnuCarnival)
while VODOUN is secret, sacred and 'private', carnival is permitted, public & secular oriented tho w/in the cosmology this kind of separation is meaningless or rather can lead to misunderstanding of the culture. Carnival is parallel w/vodoun and in the Ancestor is part of a larger celebration of birth-life-death-renewal; xplosion of space/time or temne in the case of carnival, implosion of it/them in the case of vodoun; the celebration of these things: survival (see also LIMBO), 'crop-over', cultural & resistance victory - there are many 'names' (NOMMO) of Carnival in the Caribbean/see CFA (1988).²⁰¹

Brathwaite reads Carnival culture and practice as having a similar spiritual dynamic not unlike the syncretic religious practice of voodoo. A "celebration of these things" lends itself to survival and "cultural & resistance victory" that make us aware of conflicts that are normally covered up by everyday customs. The Carnival spirit draws out the conflict to be a set of interactions focused not so much on resolving dilemma, but putting antagonistic social processes on notice.²⁰² Thinking the Carnival spirit as a continuous habit for survival, allows for a study of festival out of season or Reason.

²⁰¹ Brathwaite, "Notes on a Caribbean Cosmology," 4-5.

²⁰² Claudia Jones, Kevin Adonis Browne and Milla Riggio write extensively of the function of public communion and activity in the region.

I've been looking at different kinds of "celebration[s] of birth-life-death-renewal" that alter mental orientations and conversely heighten feelings of desire, loss, and contentment. I have considered a wide range of Western narratives and non-Caribbean as well, such as: *Swingers* (1996), *Kids* (1995), *Breakfast at Tiffanys* film (1961), *Great Gatsby* (1925), *Games of Thrones* books, *Requiem for a Dream* (2006), *Go* (1999), *The Killing Joke* (graphic novel), *Bayou* (Dark Horse Comics), *Ody-C* (Image Comics), *Misfits* (British series 2, ep.2), Lucy Snow on stage in *Villette* (1853), most of *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), and the myriad of American comedies centered on a night-out with the girls or the guys that goes insanely wrong. Catharsis in the latter is achieved by using hegemonic order or a display of capital because the hi-jinx of a carnival spirit is achieved in deliberately or inadvertently expunging or using an accumulation of material goods that are attached to hegemony or capital. The jokes and escapes are ribald but the way in and out of everyday life are too similar to each other. I will say that *American Horror Story's* inability to keep its characters safe or sane gives the plots an opacity that pushes away from expectation. In this respect, its embrace of grotesque forms, various kinds of ingestions, and (mis)understanding of aesthetic beauty make it unique among mass market productions built on regeneration out of "crisis/catastrophe" (Braithwaite, *Notes 2*).

Traditional carnival theory is based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Victor Turner. Living under the totalitarian rule of Stalin, Bahktin's model of carnival draws on similar desires and oppressions of medieval Europeans where revelers act out in response to their fear and hatred of official culture.²⁰³ Using dramaturgical language to conceptualize quotidian social processes of status maintenance, anthropologist Victor Turner explains "social drama" as conflict that is

²⁰³Richard Schechner. "Carnival (Theory) After Bahktin." *Carnival Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3-4.

inherent, event latent, in societies. Further, he coined the terms “liminality,” a “betwixt-and-between” social status, and “communitas”, an unstructured community of equals, to describe “the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses.”²⁰⁴ In both Bakhtin’s carnival theory and Turner’s theory of social drama, ritual and some form of spectacle instigates remedial action. Though inversion and communal subversion are also part of Caribbean Carnival tradition, Turner’s and Bakhtin’s discussions focus on the operational and structural purpose of breaching domination frames.²⁰⁵

Where Caribbean carnival differs is the vitalness of mas and mas makers being a “project in emancipatory practice.”²⁰⁶ Its concern with freedom combines body and space. It is a declarative way of negotiating the self in a social environment. Folklorist and carnival theorist Emily Zobel Marshall notes that, “Playing mas is a very transformative process; you leave parts of yourself behind.”²⁰⁷ These parts are displayed. through speech acts, dance, drums, and even simulated battle. Scholarship on Caribbean Carnival includes the African traditions such as masking and drums brought to the West Indies.²⁰⁸

Trinidad’s carnival dates to the eighteenth century. Spain granted free land and tax exemption to Roman Catholics to the underpopulated island and the French planters arrived. In 1797 Spain capitulated to the British crown so a majority French-

²⁰⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play*. (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982) 40-44.

²⁰⁵ See Bakhtin, “Popular Festive Forms and Images in Rableis” and Turner’s essay “Social dramas and stories about them.” *Critical Inquiry* 7(4):141-168.

²⁰⁶ Browne, *High Mas*, 25

²⁰⁷ Emily Zobel Marshall, “Carnival of the North.” *Word of Mouth, Caribbean Beat Magazine*. July / August 2016, Issue 140.

²⁰⁸ Nunley, Bettelheim and Bridges, *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference*. 1988; Roger Abrahams, *The Man-of-Words in the West Indies: Performance and the Emergence of Creole Culture*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), 52-53)

speaking colony was ruled under Spanish laws until the 1802 Treaty of Amiens. Slavery was abolished in 1833 and full emancipation followed in 1838 but the conditions of the indentured black laborers would not see significant improvement. The annual harvest festival of burning the sugar cane, or *cannes brûlées*, became the Anglocized *Canboulay*.²⁰⁹ In 1881, the *Canboulay Riots* broke out on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago when the elite plantocracy and British colonial government condemned the freed slaves' harvest celebration as a "senseless, irrational amusement that affords a pretext for the indulgence of unbridled licentiousness on the part of the worst of the population."²¹⁰ The "unbridled licentiousness" in *Canboulay* they sought to curb was steel pan drums and the presence of one of the most abhorred aspects of the tradition, women who "act up."²¹¹ *Jammette* women performance—gyration, brawling, sexual assertion and teasing—brought to the festivities the corporeal expression of cross-dressing and a proto-feminist social force that colonial authorities found particularly threatening.

At a *kalinda* workshop, traditional *mas* stick fighting, at the 2017 Carnival Cultures Conferences in Leeds, Trinidad Poet Laureate and *mas* practitioner Entiou Pearl Springer explained how the remnants of this gyration are still present in contemporary dance movements known as *wining*. *Wining* and *chipping*, the rhythmic way to step and wine, shows up in *soca* music dance moves throughout Carnival week celebrations including playing *mas*, or *masquerade*. Demonstrating a marked ability of centuries of recall and cultural mimicry, *mas* entangles bodies, narratives, speech acts, costumes, and gestures engaging practitioner and audience.

²¹⁰ Cowley, *Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making*, 2

²¹¹ Samantha A. Noel, "De *Jammette* in We: Refining Performance in Contemporary Carnival" *Small Axe*. Duke University Press, 2010; and Rosamund S. King, "Jammette Women's Double Cross: Creating and Archive," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*. 1999

Mas performers and spectators, whether in pretty mas with its feathers and sequin or ole mas with its wire and mud, necessarily reflect the dynamic events of African, Indigenous, East Indian, European and Southeast Asian encounters.

Carnival can trace migrant timelines connecting the social mobilization of Chinese and East Indian migrants and indentured laborers in the Caribbean. The first Chinese national was recorded in 1808 by a British census of Trinidad with records of their presence in carnival as early as 1927.²¹² Carnival's association with resistance to authority, in performance or actual life, stoked so much colonial anxiety that the East Indian Hosay festival was seen as a "source of Indocentric self-affirmation at a time when the 'coolies' were resisting plantation conditions and at least sixteen processioners were shot at close range in 1884 when police and military tried to shut it down."²¹³ Carnival is a site of creolization aesthetics that appeals to the cultural hybridity of nationalist, post nationalist, diasporic sensibilities and draws on fantasies of indigenous origins.²¹⁴ The music, dance, and pageantry of Carnival function as a historical product linked to the territory and to globalization.²¹⁵ (I write of Trinidad, specifically, but Barbados's Crop Over and other Caribbean nations celebrate versions of a carnival mas, too.) The export of culture gives rise to large transnational events and economies in Toronto, London and Brooklyn (Connor and Farrar 2004, Kasinitz 2004, Scher 2007) while consolidating

²¹² Carlisle Chang, "Chinese in Trinidad Carnival." *TDR*. Vol. 42, No. 3, 1998, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival issue.

²¹³ Burton Sankeralli, "Indian Presence in Carnival." *TDR*. Vol. 42, No. 3, 1998, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival issue, 204

²¹⁴ Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*, (Palgrave Macmillian, 2004); Helene Bellour and Samuel Kinser, "Amerindian Masking in Trinidad's Carnival: The House of Back Elk in San Fernando," *TDR*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1998, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival issue.

²¹⁵ For a discussion on carnival and globalization see: Daniel Yon, "Identity and Difference in the Caribbean Diaspora." *Reordering of Culture: Latin America The Caribbean and Canada in The Hood*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995); Phillip Scher, "When 'Natives' Become Tourists of Themselves: Returning Transnationals and the Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007)

contemporary Caribbean “twice diasporised” people.²¹⁶ In Leeds, on the last bank holiday, “under the often drab skies of Northern England, framed by endless rows of red brick terraced houses, we celebrate both Caribbean culture and a fantastic spectacle which transcends the cultural, racial, and economic boundaries which too often shape our world.”²¹⁷ It has become part of celebrity social media trends wherein, outside of native daughters Nikki Minaj (Trinidad and Tobago) and Rihanna (Barbados), the cast of *Real Housewives of Atlanta* post social media updates of their group vacation at Caribana Carnival in Toronto, Canada in August 2019.

In a 2017 Leeds Carnival Culture Conference interview, the director of Jouway Institute and Lord Street Theatre Company Tony Hall argues that studying carnival is a study of the process of emancipation since the roots of capitalism, globalization, and various forms of oppression are situated in the Caribbean. He contends that, “The enslaved had to ritualize their dissatisfaction, ritualize their anger or else they would be extinguished.”²¹⁸ The components of the modern Trinidad carnival can be traced to enslaved people who performed kalinda or stick fighting in secret. There would be groups of stick fighters sparring against each other and their moves, designed to keep the warrior spirit alive, incorporated dance and fight. At times, blood was drawn. Over time, these moves and groupings became the bands seen today. But what could the *Housewives* be resisting in their active generation of capital? From what inversion of authority does the modern diva capitalist under

²¹⁶ For a discussion on transnational carnival economies see: Geraldine Connor and Max Farrar, “Carnival in Leeds and London: Making New Black British Subjectivities,” *Carnival Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 255-269; Scher, *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*; and Phillip Kasinitz “New York Equalize You?” “Change and Continuity in Brooklyn’s Labor Day Carnival” *Carnival Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2004). In “New Ethnicities.” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Stuart Hall discusses the recursive movement of modern migrants as being doubly diasporised. Carol Boyce Davies also discusses this phenomena.

²¹⁷ Zobel Marshall, *Caribbean Beats*

²¹⁸ Tony Hall, Caribbean Carnival Culture, 2017 Interview for the “Power, Play, Performance Conference,” <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk>

democratic structures find carnival relief? Instead of looking at carnival through a Bahktinian lens wherein overt social repression instigates a successful satire and bacchanal, Caribbean carnival theorists, such as Milla Riggio "locates carnival's "dialectic between civilized respectability and vagabondage." In *Carnival Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*, Riggio emphasizes that carnival functions as "an alternative to the efficiency of the producing, industrialized world." The paradox she sets up locates carnival at the intersection between "between pre-industrial, traditional cultural norms and highly industrialized contemporary settings" thus making it a modern urban festival that evoke[s] the world of so-called 'traditional' communities."²¹⁹ Where there are gatherings of large groups of people—people of color, diasporic people— in public spaces, it is perhaps for the authority (the police), the threat of violence and the precarity of order that invigorates the carnival spirit. As examples, Canboulay, the UK's last Bank Holiday, and Brooklyn's Labor Day carnivals signal "the festive sense of time resist[ing] the rational assumption that time marches along a never-varying path."²²⁰ Carnival's contemporary function may be to pull us away from the capitalist count down. So, the *Housewives* and hundreds of others functioning under self-proclaimed democratic regimes may not require a full social inversion. But, they may require a social scene wherein their interiorized crises and disciplining rules of respectability meant to correct negative social conceptions of Black womanhood can take a break. The exteriorized self plays out in the fête body.

I return to Kevin Adonis Browne's theorization that "*Mas* is a *praxis*, a rhetorical method for navigating carnival, implemented by those who dare to judge and long for change: the Masmakers."²²¹ I understand this praxis as an ongoing

²¹⁹ Riggio, *Carnival Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*, 19

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²²¹ Browne, *High Mas*, 28

phenomenon since aspects of Carnival, including but not limited to: costume design; costume fabrication; rehearsal; personal financial saving to travel to, or to participate in Carnival begets a dense network of social organizing. During the months leading up to Carnival, the ideas generated for themes of a mas band is an exercise in how to best communicate about the communication process itself. My conceptualization of the fête body is such a praxis. For example, the use of soca music by mas bands becomes a continuous reminder of Carnival day when that song is played on the radio on any given day outside of a carnival season.

I am thinking of the soca group Ultimate Rejects's song "Full Extreme" (also called "We Jamming Still") that was the 2017 road song for Carnival.²²² It was used as the key processional song for the 2018 HB Mama Dread Mas Band this song, The group's music video paints a picture of burning down the city and partying to a "full extreme" despite a recession. The refrain remarks on the tick-tock of industry with the line, "get on like you doh business" meaning that one must play as hard as they work even if that work is taken for granted or beset by a precarious economy. HB Mama masmakers are a politically conscious carnival troupe who took on the theme Windrush Bacchanal in response to the 2018 UK scandal in which a number of long-term UK residents, who were part of the Windrush Generation (1948), were wrongly refused re-entry to and a larger number were threatened with immediate deportation. The British Nationality Act 1948 gave citizens of the United Kingdom Commonwealth and Colonies status and the right to settle in the UK. Theresa May has since apologized to the now aged group of mostly Jamaicans and some Polish people. Performers, including myself, were dressed in ocean blue sateen designs reminiscent of 1940s outfits. By choosing a song to comment on the cessation of

²²² Ultimate Rejects, "Full Extreme" (We Jammin' Still), *Full Extreme*. Performed by Johann Seaton, Avaron Vanloo, Joel Aming, and Edghill Thomas. (Fox Fuse, 2016).

work, with its anti-capitalist and anti-establishment aspirations, the threat is that the fête body can divest “full extreme”, not caring one *skunt ras* about ensuring solidity in the capitalist project since the project has divested interest from certain members of society.²²³

The fête body shows up Malika Booker's poem, "Saltfish" as the speaker remembers their mother taking out her work-place frustration on the disintegrating meat of soaked saltfish.²²⁴

My mother wanted to boil the salt out of the fish,
so much harsh salt, then chip that saltfish smaller
and smaller, so she could cope with the hawked, spit
of her patients, their hatred gutting her raw
so that some days she wanted to tell them,
*It's only skin, we bleed the same underneath*²²⁵

Saltfish was a “slave food” initially used as a fertilizer for the crops but enslaved people salvaged it and integrated in their diets. In the scene set in Brixton, the speaker’s mother is a healthcare worker who feels unappreciated to the point of anger at her patients. The poem is wonderfully lyrical and can be close-read in the context of slavery, misogyny, and even racism. What I am drawn to is the line break that reads “the hawked spit of her patients” because the tongue is also saying, “hawked spit of her patience.” I am struck by the unspoken repetition in this scene, perhaps a scene of “her patients” is also wordplay for her patience since it can take two or three soaks to remove the salt from this fish. Indeed, the structure of reference

²²³ “Skunt ras” is an expletive used in Guyanese culture, mostly, expresses anger, surprise, and disbelief. It is a salvage of the British term cunt that has Germanic roots, *kunte*, referring to female genitalia. Ras come from Rastafarian who dreads were seen as taboo to Christians in the Caribbean. There are extensive sources that trace the origin of this term. Today, the phrase is used by other Caribbean people.

²²⁴ A longer discussion on Malika Booker’s poem, “Saltfish,” and analysis of Majah Hype’s YouTube sketches appear in my chapter, “Dub, Saltfish, and Majah Hype: Reading Caribbean Diaspora as a Praxis with Theory,” which is under submission.

²²⁵ Malika Booker, *Pepper Seed*. (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd., 2013.), 34

and attitude of this piece alludes to the history of slavery and perhaps, gendered labor, but it also alludes to pleasure that transcends the toil of one kind of labor by enjoying the fruits of another. The pleasure is derived from the empty threat, perhaps not, of returning to Grenada and leaving her patients to fend for themselves. The fruits of her labor are monetary gains from having a steady healthcare job. This poem tells a (hi)story of labor exploitation and ways of coping with it. Again, reading pleasure in the mother's body is a reading of her going through the motions of rinsing, soaking, and boiling the fish. After this, she has time to taste it. If it is still too salty, she will start some part of that process again until she is at the stage when she can debone it with her fingers.

Collin Nigel McPherson, also known as Majah Hype, has a series of YouTube sketches parodying various Caribbean personae. He has dozens of characters such as the Rastafarian Di Ras, Sister Sandrine, and a cadre of region-specific men and women including American, English, and Latin American characters who interact for cultural comparison. The content of the videos are short, crass, and viral covering a myriad of work-a-day scenarios revealing how dislocation, labor, Black self-abjection, and capitalist accumulation are part of Caribbean diasporic experience. Of his many adaptations, I enjoy his workplace scenarios. Specifically, his impersonation of a healthcare worker captures the nuances of intra-Caribbean stereotyping in a profession where many immigrants land, similar to the mother's in Malika Booker's "Saltfish." In "Why West Indian Nurses are so Mean," he plays seven versions of a nurse (Trinidad, Panama, Guyana, West Indian, Grenadian, Barbados, and Haiti) and the patient whom she engages. In each instantiation, a man interrupts the nurse when she is on her break, about to go on her break, or is in the middle of another task. The Grenadian nurse dismisses a patient's stomach ache complaint with the suggestion of drinking tea to get better. This joke points to a long

history of Caribbean home remedies. Her attitude can be attributed to her privileging her own acquired common-sense knowledge over Western medicine. Because healthcare is a profession many new immigrants take on, this *mas-ness* that Majah Hype is able to create has the power of being a shared knowledge and character type who embodies Caribbean social beyond a mere profession.

The extent to which the body is used is important. Playing mas is a poetics of endurance. Costumes may be heavy, tight, sharp, absent. The sun may be hot or hotter. The police barriers offer more confusion than protection. The party started two weeks ago and you are expected to continue until you cross the stage for last lap.²²⁶ The day begins and ends with your knees in various states of bent to the rhythm of soca and steel drums. There are accounts of people crying at last lap from exhaustion but also the end of an event that they began planning, designing and saving for on Ash Wednesday the year before. In thinking about the fête body's endurance, I ask what are the conditions under which you allow yourself such extremes of pleasure and pain, of public and private ecstasy, and public and private critique. As coincidences do occur in research, I came across the image and oración of the Afro-Peruvian San Martin De Porres in a botanica in the Bronx in which he is called upon to "obtain from God and His holy Mother Mary" the request of the addresser through "the divine mercy in all our needs both soul and body." The inclusion of the addresser own body as a ready instrument to exact change and redirect fate aligns with the saint's biography.

St. Martin de Porres de Lima is the first Black Catholic saint to be canonized. This sixteenth century lay brother was known for fasting in order to feed others including lepers and animals. This feeding included vermin, like mosquitoes, who he allowed to ravage his body. James Padiolini, Jr., whose research foregrounds

²²⁶ Last lap is the bringing of Carnival to a close.

Black queer religiosity, argues that St. Martin's mortification makes him a proto-figure of the black radical tradition.²²⁷ He is sometimes depicted with a dog, a cat, a bird, and a mouse eating together from a same dish. He is the patron saint of mixed race people, social justice, barbers, and public health workers. He was the son of a Spanish nobleman and a freed slave woman. The father abandoned the family only to return to stipulate what profession Martin might enter. Rejecting his father's authority and openly joining the Dominican order shows an act of resistance that gets repeated, perhaps, in his practice of self-mortification and allowing vermin to feed off of him. What might his feast day signify as devotees consume his symbolic essence? St. Martin de Porres reaches a state of ecstasy in prayer and self-mortification and de-Humanizes his body, not exclusively for another human, but for the maintenance of interspecies relationships. This is an excellent example of "origin, generation/history & regeneration out of crisis/catastrophe."²²⁸ St. Martin's *communitas* with all life as a tactic draws attention to the inadequacy of the social status quo, which in his time, curtailed his Black freedom.²²⁹

Additionally, his "theatrical" example of image-making, through self-flagellation and other bodily sacrifices, shapes an emancipatory project for which the body negates hierarchy as a daily practice. Like the two-faced Janus, his African self, the result of a diasporic event, and his European self, the result of his father's sexual entitlements, are in play. His exteriorized self as an excessively zealous Catholic

²²⁷ Padilioni, James, Jr. "Black Ecstasies: Re/membering the Diaspora Through St. Martin des Porres." Paper presentation at the Southeastern American Studies Association, 3 March 2017 with paper made available on Academia.edu.

²²⁸ Brathwaite, *Notes on a Caribbean Cosmology*, 2.

²²⁹ Victor Turner defines *communitas* as an unstructured community conditioned by being in a state of liminality (or limbo) and it is this ambiguous period that individuals experience "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses" (From Rituals to Theater, 44).

laybrother is the “daily survival mechanism” masking his interiorized “personality beneath” that could be a sincere calling to serve, a tactic to survive, or a combination of these and other awarenesses.²³⁰ In considering his saint prayer and biography, he emerges as a fête body in these narratives.

My final example of a fête body is the character Tan-Tan in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* who kills her father, a developing violent drunk, after he rapes her. After murdering her father, she is on the run with her alien friend, a douen called Chichibud. Throughout the novel, images of ingestion signal paradoxical ways of reintegrating and dis-integrating with the world. In a particularly poignant example, Tan-Tan is invited into the Douen village for refuge and to partake in eating tree frog as a social norm, as an act of social integration. Hopkinson writes,

Tan-Tan took a little sip from the hot thread of blood pumping down her chin. It tasted salty, and sweet. It spread over her tongue like thick mud. Like the first time Antonio had ever ejaculated in her mouth, whispering to her the whole time. *Yes, sweetness, you want it, ain't?* Her belly rose right up into her throat, but she swallowed the frog's blood. Oh Nanny. She looked into Chichibud's eyes, praying that the torture done, but it had more for her to do.²³¹

When Tan-Tan simultaneous rejection and ingestion of the blood is attached to traumatic memories embedded in her psyche, body, and, ultimately, language. For it is through this crisis that she emerges as a the Robber Queen with her Robber talk which, besides performance, is a strategy for her to survive everyday life among the douen who are “[s]crutinizing her business.” In a later scene, she is annoyed at them. In trying to make personal space for herself outside the judgments of the douens, Tan-Tan manifests the Robber mas character at home, to her nosy neighbors,

²³⁰ Riggio, *Carnival Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*, 94.

²³¹ Nalo Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, (New York: Hatchett Book Group, 2000), 185-186

Morning, sir, morning, ma'am, howdy lizard pickney. Oonuh keeping well this fine hot day? The maggots growing good in the shit? Eh? It have plenty lizards climbing in your food? Good. I glad." She waited. Some of them went back into their homes, others found other reasons to be busy. They dispersed. The rhetorical words had stirred the Robber Queen deep in Tan-Tan, quelled the Bad Tan-Tan voice a little. Nobody else stared at her for the rest of the climb down, except one or two irrepressible pickney. She didn't know how the douens got word to one another to leave her alone and she didn't care. The Robber Queen had triumphed.²³²

Her exteriorized self is produced at the pressure points used for the disciplining of her interiorized self.

The fête body is a double body: one fashioning a body sanguinely engorged on symbols of the past and the other body "dead so that they become unborn and therefore part of the future."²³³ Brathwaite rightly begins his conceptualization of the Caribbean with "regeneration out of crisis/catastrophe." It is in this way that bodies become allegorical and political sites producing and being produced by their consciousness of the changing Caribbean. In the case on Tan-Tan, it is a speculative Caribbean future.

In the fête body, I am conceptualizing carnival to be both vulgar and self-conscious in how it catalyzes transgression so that when a body is both actively the spectacle and the witness to its objectification it becomes the material intervention across various and even simultaneous representations of space. Conceptualizing the fête body allows me to think what is the role of the fictive that allows for the radical reconfiguring of these bodies.

²³² Ibid, 216

²³³ Brathwaite, "Notes on a Caribbean Cosmology," 4.

Fabrications

We understand the world better if we tremble with it... it trembles with the climate, alas, that we know...relations are always, complex, difficult, and inextricable.

---Éduoard Glissant, *One World in Relation* (film, 2009)

With regards to reconfiguring bodies, it is useful to return to the metaphor of cartography which began Part One but to now use it in its native context of spatial mapping. In addition, I would like to close by considering closure. In comic book reading practices terminology, closure is the phenomenon of perceiving cognitive wholeness of a story from parts separated in panels on the page. I am making another conceptual leap, emboldened by decolonial thought and options, to better understand the generative value of perceived knowledge gaps. I contend that to decolonize theoretic and pedagogical approaches to Caribbean literature means looking into the perceived knowledge gaps— gaps proliferated by Western epistemology and ontology—and seeing a wider field of imaginative possibilities.

It is helpful to consider how early mapping practices shared similar image-text dynamics. For any nation pursuing expansion in the New World, maps were important. In *History of Cartography*, Harley and Woodward writes that mapmaking "was one of the specialized intellectual weapons by which power could be gained, administered, given legitimacy, and codified."²³⁴ Many cartographers used Latin language instead of common language to label maps and other flourishes like typography making maps objects of art for the aspiring erudite to own. Maps also had images set in scene with longitude and latitude to evoke a sense of access and variety in the region's economies. For example, the map "A topographical

²³⁴ J.B. Harley and David Woodward, Editors. *The History of Cartography, Vol.I.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 506

description and admeasurement of the yland of Barbados in the West Indyaes with the mrs. names of the seuerall plantacons" was engraved by Richard Ligdon, a plantation manager, in 1657 for his historical account in his *True and Exact Historie of the Island of Barbadoes*.²³⁵ The map has an image of a men driving cattle, mountain ranges, trees, a white man chasing two runaway slaves, even a solitary tapir, and a listing of landowners. Ligdon does not recreate the layout of plantations. Instead, Ligdon fabricates a Barbados that has fertile land, business acumen, and biodiversity. Images on the map are not drawn to scale; they are representational and narrative. Such detail was meant to inform people back in Europe of a continuity of coherence of order. In this way, these colonial maps are a hybrid literary form speculating on the future of the empire. Its typography, language, and images create a fantasy of expansion so that people back home would be less apprehensive about the unknown. Even further, they would be presented with a representation of space, plant, animal, and people as a way of branding slavery and genocide as commerce. The structure of and information on maps may differ, but its patchwork of signs (longitude, latitude, bodies of water, capitals, hard borders, naming conventions, etc.) allow us to read social and geo-political entanglements.

The Krazy Kat comic strip is a love story between a Kat and an Ignatz. Krazy is hit on the head with a brick over and over and reads this as a love missive. Krazy uses its zany creolized language and ungendered body to unmap and unmark southwestern boundaries in Coconino County. Krazy embodies a naturalness and vastness where borders are not always clear. Within George Herriman's body of work, the personal compulsion of an eccentric and their subsequent troubles is a recurring motif for which art critic Gilbert Seldes rightly called "his sui generis."

²³⁵ Ibid., For actual map, see also "A topographicall description and admeasurement of the yland of Barbados..." <https://www.loc.gov/item/95684857/>

Herriman had a knack for working in the expressionistic mode that avoided being instructive. The southwest was a beautiful enigma that inspired his settings. When reading even a short four panel strip you can expect to see the background shift during a single exchange of “hello” and “good-bye”. These temporal and spatial shifts juxtaposed single dialogic moment hint at the tension between old and new, here and there, this line and that line by using scenery. Misreading signifiers was also a Herriman signature since his love struck cat, *Krazy*, would feel love when his antagonist, a mouse named Ignatz, would throw a brick at his head in as their iconic play. In this disguise of silly humor, his strips encouraged readers to question the fundamentals and the expectations of comics form and story.

Herriman himself was in disguise as an ethnic minority compelled to pass as a White man early in the Jim Crow era of America, at least, passing as his nickname “the Greek” until his death in 1944. In 1971, sociologist Arthur Asa Berger discovered that while his death certificate labeled him “white” with a birthplace of Paris, his birth certificate marked him a “colored” baby born in New Orleans. There is much speculation around his mixed-raced heritage that mythologizes the reason why he had the peculiarity of keeping his hat on. Some speculate it was to hide his kinky hair. Herriman said he was hiding a bump on the back of his head. The search for his origin is taken up as if one pure race can claim him, explain him, and in doing so, define him.

Race mixtures, creolizations, and hybridities are singularity. Many from the Afrodiaspora come from a genealogy marked by all the precarious curves of colonial turns. Recordkeeping for willing and unwilling migrants may only as accurate as the personal subjectivity of the person being identified. For Herriman, it may have been epistemic vaudeville. Put on your brown face, tan face, partially red-face but if you can get away with it: white face all the way. By passing or being understood as “the

Greek," he was able to find and keep work as a comic artist. And, while I am deeply invested in uncovering an untapped Herriman archive to trace him to this or that space, the most effective trace comes from his own ink. Herriman's creation Krazy Kat is a genderless, racially ambivalent cat who has indiosyncratic affinities to a dog and a mouse. Reading through his large body of Krazy Kat work (1913-1944), Herriman was able to re-present himself and pass that modestly rehearsed technique onto his chef d'œuvre giving its main characters thirty years to play out subconscious fantasies of power and love.

A *Krazy Kat* strip that has both entertaining and problematic signifiers is the 'seesaw' strip. It makes use of borders, the irony of language along those borders, and the relationship between literal and symbolic time by overlapping elements as simple as the time it takes to move a brick, change wall posters, and go up and down on a seesaw. Deciphering the 'creole' of the posters helps to develop meaning. In Herriman's full-page comics, it is helpful to consider movement across the page and panels. Characters and content are often unbounded. Below, the relationships between movement and character, movement and signs, movement and meaning, movement and narrative, and movement and time play against a border.

In lieu of including my close reading, I instead translate the comic page to elucidate this idea of cartography as hybrid literary work that intersects geo-politics and language. I do this in a pedagogical spirit, leaving it to my reader to consider how landscape becomes story, how maps become fabrications. How bodies are inextricably linked to both. I do draw attention to panel nine where the word "zapato" can be "the pato," the duck, or a derogatory word for gay man or clumsy person. Language is never resolved. In this strip, there is a distinct impulse for fantasy and carnivalesque that operates as a poetics of salvage and speculation, with Krazy Kat as the truest of fête bodies.

Table 1.

Analysis of *Krazy Kat* seesaw strip

Pane 1	Poster	Translation	Pun/Figure
1	El pincate dulle	El Pinacate are volcanic peaks in the Sonoran desert adjacent to the Mexico-Arizona border <u>Phonetic</u> : el pine a cat-tay + duel lay	The pining cat Duel?
2	Raton muerto	Dead, dull, victim, lifeless mouse <u>Spanish</u> : raton = pad, ratón =mouse	Does Krazy regard Ignatz's inactivity as a lack of desire?
3	Diablo col brico	Devil with the brick, "col" (Italian)	Devil's cold brick
4	Dolor de muelas	Grinder pain <u>Slang</u> : Mouth ache, jaw injury	With Pupp looking on, a threat to inflict pain on Ignatz
5	Cucaracho	Roach (m.) <u>Spanish</u> : cucaracha	Being low. This could be Pupp's comment on Ignatz as Krazy's <i>informer</i> (Barthes 138)
6	Limonero	Lemon, lemon seller <u>Phonetic/Pun</u> : Gli Mon Nero (Italian, French and	Bitter: Ignatz's reaction to Krazy; Krazy's

		an allusion to a despotic ruler who was known for building enterprises and persecuting Christians	reaction to <i>no answer</i> (Barthes 167); or Decoded riddle: <i>Him, my Nero</i>
7	El perro perezoso	Lazy dog	Pupp is absent
8	Hueso por la sopa	Bone for soup	With Pupp looking on, a threat to inflict pain on Ignatz
9	Zapato	Shoe <u>Phonetic/slang</u> : The duck (za -pato)	Alone, Ignatz stares at shoes contemplating his actions Pun: sitting duck
10	Barberia	Barber <u>Spanish</u> : Barbería	With Krazy re-appearing, he brought out of deep thought. Guilt? Motivation? Pun: a close shave
11	Frijoles	beans	We see the scene on the other side for the first time and imagine what Ignatz's reaction is to seeing Pupp. Pun: Jumping beans

12	Callo/pie	<p>Foot/callous</p> <p><u>Spanish</u>: callar for unvoiced; <i>hombre sin pasión</i> for a man without passion</p> <p>Phonetic: Callo pie = Calliope, calliope (allusion to muse made in other Krazy strip); as steam instrument recalls Musical Mose</p>	<p>Callous deed abandoned and Ignatz takes off on foot</p> <p>Krazy as Calliope, lover to war of God, muse of epic poetry</p>
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CONCLUSION

This hybrid dissertation examines historical, literary and ethnographic details of the (mostly) Anglophone Afro-Caribbean diaspora. In addition to textual analyses that connect salvage and speculation as a common thread in performance, poetry, prose, and even a comic strip, I create a speculative narrative that is invested in producing an aesthetics of language that reflects diaspora. While predominantly focused on Afro-Caribbean culture, there is and has been a consistent cultural mix of Asian, East Indian and Spanish influence in the region. Using, in particular, the work of Sylvia Wynter, Oonya Kempadoo, Kamau Brathwaite, Sheila Jelen, Suzanne Césaire, Aíme Cesaire, and Édouard Glissant. *PoCoMas* thinks through moments of performance and reality to see which is most representative of Western imaginary of the Caribbean: how Caribbean consciousness responds to Western imaginary. Key questions that I attend to examine the role of Carnival as a site of money and power exchange, the (a)political imperatives of Carnival, the mental risk-taking in producing or inhabiting a fête body; aesthetics of communication and representation of the Caribbean body in writing/language, and, how diaspora creates a space for individuals and shared identities.

This dissertation is provides a creative critical account of the overlapping formations of Afrodiasporic thought as it manifests in visual art, performance, and writing. I engage this overlap through a poetics of salvage and a methodology grounded in speculation as reflected in the way bodies, moving worlds, (re)present the Caribbean. By placing diaspora at the center, as both the bearer of literary analysis and a mode of examination, and using salvage and speculation as theoretical and structural grounding, *PoCo Mas* brings forth and refines a creative methodology for Afrodiasporic historiography, and literary analysis, more generally. Thus, the Caribbean diaspora gives me distinctive insight into the nature of cultural

production, generally, and in doing so, it gives significance to all those ineffable aspects of Caribbean experience, which are nevertheless provoked by and within Caribbean writing. Dominican-American poet Rei Berroa comments on the ineffable aspects of the region:

¿Se puede hablar una <<cultura isla>> por medio de la cual se puedan incorporar elementos de un mar a los elementos de otro mar? ¿Qué comparaciones pueden hacerse entre Nicolas Guillén, Derek Walcott y Pedro Mir con los poetas griegos Odisseus Elitismos o Constantinos Kavafís y ele chipriota Neshe Yasmin? ¿Es el hecho de vivir en una isla, de sonar en forma de isla, de situarse uno mismo como isla algo que determina nuestra configuración de vida y del lenguaje y, por consiguiente, de la poesía? Desde la perspectiva de una posible <<poética caribeña>>, ¿como configurar las regiones que, siendo parte del Caribe, no comparten esta condición de isla, como es el caso de la costa caribeña de Colombia, Venezuela, Surinam o México?"²³⁶

It is precisely because Caribbean poetics expresses the dialectics of archipelago and continent, home and away, accommodation and resistance, transition and tradition, creation and mimicry in its development that I am brought to salvage and speculation for my critical work and creative intervention.

In Part One, I use literary and pop cultural examples to discuss the circulation and creolization of transnational and diasporic culture. The circulation of culture is often incited by encounters that produce a complex political effect which can sometimes reinscribe or reconfigure existing social hierarchies as in the case of

²³⁶ Rei Berroa, *Poetas del Caribe Anglófono* (Casa de las Américas Publishing Fund, 2001), 35-36. My translation: Can you speak an << island culture >> through which elements of one sea can be incorporated into the elements of another sea? What comparisons can be made between Nicolas Guillén, Derek Walcott and Pedro Mir with the Greek poets Odisseus Elitismos or Constantinos Kavafis and the Cypriot Neshe Yasmin? Is the fact of living on an island, of sounding in the form of an island, of locating oneself as an island something that determines our configuration of life and language and, consequently, of poetry? From the perspective of a possible "Caribbean poetic", how to configure the regions that, being part of the Caribbean, do not share this island condition, as is the case of the Caribbean coast of Colombia, Venezuela, Suriname or Mexico?

the social lives of Kempadoo's three protagonists. This reinscription and reconfiguration of social hierarchies bears with it repeating histories of dislocation that highlight the profound impact imperial or patriarchal social frames have on the Caribbean. Yet, through a salvage and speculation model that includes mas as praxis and the fête body as an actor, the region's aesthetic and political possibilities are opened to a kind of epistemic porosity and ludic play that is, simultaneously, a beneficiary of and benefited by diaspora. Furthermore, the astonishing powers of linguistic self-invention is imbued with signifiers that marks social life as much as it marks the environmental landscape. In this way, Wynter's science of the word asserts "*bios-mythois* is a rhythmic interplay between nature and narrative...a rhythmic framework that refuses the linear teleology of 'evolution,' which hierarchically organizes—and evaluates—humans according to phenotype."²³⁷

In Part Two, *Poco Mas*, I offer a selection of linked stories from a larger image-text novel project to offer a speculative reading of the doubly entwined biologic origin and mythic origin. *PoCo Mas* puns the phrase postcolonial masquerade. "Playing mas" or the mas tradition has been a part of planter and enslaved tradition in the Caribbean (Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, Dutch versions) since the 18th century. It incorporates history, myth, and reflections to reach a more complete articulation of identity: both the identity of narrator (mas spectator) and of the various third person protagonists. It contains specters of the bizarre to (re)present and respond to preconceived ideas of the Caribbean—its people, places, habits—as exotica. It deconstructs the literary tropes of the exotic islands, the noble savage, the hitherto expert bio-ethnographer, the diasporic body, and the moving worlds of newcomers enmeshing these tropes with the eros and haunting of playing mas.

²³⁷ Katherine McKittrick, Frances H. O'Shaughnessy, and Kendall Witsaszek, "Rhythm, or On Sylvia Wynter's Science of the Word." *American Quarterly*, 70. 4 (December 2018) 867

While I do not directly craft a carnival season tale, the project honors mas as an intertwined spirit-organ-archive of the Caribbean. Carnival is temporary. Mas is ongoing. I speculate on its loss and recovery: the end of season, the end of world. Is there a distinction? In this way of working, the narrative drama is meant to produce a plurality of meanings and sentiments: terror, humor, romance, nostalgia (...for what?) Sea level rise? Human loss?

Moreover, the intertextuality is meant to enrich, not entangle the reading experience. However, with that in mind, the reading and writing experience is meant to record a consciousness that is salvaged: building wholeness from fragments. Therefore, I trouble these linked stories with this question, "How does a Caribbean get reconstituted or imagined?" What is being produced by introducing a protagonist whose narrative, physical and genetic make-up are the intertextual links to the story they are being written into?

Ultimately, the completed novel of *PoCo Mas* will be a meta-historical answer to my central dissertation question, "Who's producing whom?" or perhaps, "What is producing that?" The narrative unfolds across space and time like the ocean breathing in and out its stories. And, when the waves do break apart the *mappa mundi*, there is still story to be heard. Though conceived primarily to mimic the archipelago nature of the region, with its common culture linking geographical gaps and its history linking superstitions and stereotypes, *PoCo Mas*, paradoxically, sources its recursive chaos from intertextuality and literary allusion. In its fleshy interior, the ways texts (bodies) move through, toward, and past each other in the novel mobilizes a sensuality that echoes the carnival promenade. The text (body) is constitutive of time and place. This novel takes on a rhizomatic form attentive to its Afrofuture pasts and enmeshed in its Afrosurreal potentials.

PART TWO: POCO MAS



is this your dwelling?

A.P.O.C

A Piece of Cloth

*in the solipsistic haze of all my gazes
all inside my cells swimming, split t i n g, and the sharing of our matter—it could be salt or
sugar, it could be endocytosis or exo—we make our way to land and we are met by the rim of
a cup and aliquoted for such things as . . .*

*however, it has always been our movement that prevents us from rupturing under
such conditions.*

Just after, a Scientist, 2078

Diáspora.

It broke apart the earth in 2036. Its waves of waves made shadows the shape of halfmoons across the Americas. There had been only one tropical storm a year before. Tropical waves sank an old resort recognized for its history with cane and whips. It was an official National Heritage site. It was a tropical storm like the one a week before in Haiti—but Haiti was prepared for not being prepared. These new tropical waves were made famous because the people blanched somewhere inside a vintage sugarcane press turned steam sauna were famous. The 300 drowned others were not famous. They were simply resort workers. There was a short dialogue of passing judgments reminding me of quarrels between my grandparents. One would blame our mobile devices, a pointless tool in the signal-less years when the encryption technology designed to protect privacy made our screams private. One would blame our souls and say we ignored the signs of an angry goddess and would burn votives chanting oraciones to whichever water deity was printed on the vela label. Santa Marta Dominadora was my favorite with her fat green snake tucked behind her thick black hair. I remember crying, “The storm the storm washed away my candle.” But Santa Marta was still on fire when my grandparents floated out their third story window.

My parents, not like their parents but like others their age, accepted their cataclysmic end and made the quiet conversion to Stoicism which is to say that is how I was raised and why I say—if you ask me now—it was just the latent heat of condensation warming the air that caused the storm. Diáspora happens. It seems irrational to be emotionally invested in the weather. We lost hold of more than just the land. We lost our wonder.

I turned four that year in 2036. It was the year unbound forces took over and we made sense of them in alphabetical order. We named our storms traditionally for hopes of a linear season with Allen, Betsy, Collin. We named our storms whimsically for nondescript places they hit and their inconsequential inhabitants who could only be memorialized with Dorothy, Elvis, Frank, and George. Then, as one vortex lay across another, the poet's used metaphors of falling with Helen and Icarus. The half Bajan-Trini, half Panamanian-Guyanese environmentalist rapper born in Jamaica, I-and-I, interceded with a Jumbie off their hit single, "Jumbie ah do focop." Next, the zealots used metaphors of cunning with King David and Laban. But five days after Moloch destroyed an orphanage in Queens, we had a naming reprieve to reference our mood with Nice, Open, Place, Quiet. Whilst everywhere landlocked seemed to thrive from the migrations inland, Rihanna, Sycorax, Tituba, Ursula, and Vishnu put an end to that. There were no longer bodies of water, there was just one cosmic ocean reaping everything, anxious for nothing.

The arable textures of countries and cities touching an ocean, sea, river, or rille resembled yellow porridge for years after 2036 because of a spread of "thread algae." The spread turned the earth into a new unstable ecological system where our cement and metal structures lay there like aquarium ornaments covered in tufts of filamentous algae. It was a new member of a disrupted food chain; the green kingdom skinned by an accumulation of yellows and greens, a display of pigment and spoor. Algal blooms fed off the putrefaction of cows, tourists, mangoes, and ambassadors that took their time returning to the Port of Amoy, London, Lamu, and London. In New York, it was recorded, that it took three years to trim the algae fields that draped Coney Island in its plush velour of cyanobacteria. The amusement park bore new islands of broken monuments and souvenirs of flesh. Bits and pieces becoming new bits and pieces. The Wonder Wheel ride became a giant chartreuse

loom spinning out its growth as a brocade of salvage. It made history—for months. This is not to forget how many fingers re-touched the steps of the Elmina Castle. This is not to forget how many ears floated up to listen to the falsetto range of a tenor finishing “Nessun Dorma” at Sydney’s Opera House, or how many gelid eyeballs—their opaque fibrous sclera still intact and white around clusters of bacterial rot once called a human iris—attached themselves to driftwood like barnacles attached on the throat of a fleeing whale as the eyes, the barnacle, the whale, and all the hunted watched for the next hurricane.

By the time Xōchiquetzal and Yan Wang swept over Guyana’s sea wall, a Zombí was expected. But, the device we shot into the stars to control the wind and rain had already been named Zombí with an “i”. Instead, The World Meteorological Organization recorded Erzulie as the last hurricane on Earth. No more alphabetic order, just a spiritual pause. Erzulie took back everything that was below sea level leaving us with one-third less to worry about.

More a prayer than a name, Erzulie’s oceans, as if exhausted, signaled nothing more for decades. With science, we would not be ambushed again. We would all change. How could we not change? Now, more practical about the signals from god and dead cell phones, we all chose to rebuild ourselves in an awakening appropriate to historical recovery. We rebuilt our new spaces conscious of our consciousness. We rebuilt our relationships reflecting on our reflections. *Erzulie* became a quiet prayer for the Seasonal Romantics. *It* became a collection of weather data for The Church of the Stoics. *The storm* became transactional goods for the Economics. *She* became scenes from the past for the others holding on to pre-2036 ways like rosaries. None of us could agree on how to examine our accumulation of emotional, natural, spiritual, and physical disaster. We couldn’t even agree on Erzulie’s pronouns. We missed our chance for unity. We missed mourning for

reason. We missed catching flies without being attacked by viral swarms. But, what we missed most was the Caribbean. *Stranded tongues. Separated lives.* Not all but most had gone. Names of places most Americans hadn't even heard, but still gone. *Is that near Jamaica? Is that where that actress got killed?*

The last commitment we made as a planet was to honor the scattered. So, we renamed our collective experiences of loss and recovery. No more Allen, Betsy, Collin, Dorothy, Elvis, Frank, George, Helen, Icarus, Jumbi, King David, Laban, Moloch, Nice, Open, Place, Quiet, Rhianna, Sycorax, Tituba, Ursula, Vishnu, Yan Wang, Xōchiquetazal, then a Zombí turned Erzulie. No. Collectively, we would only say one word to refer to the time we looked into each other and there was no more time. If you ask me now, Diáspora turned us all into scientists.

And later

It has been 42 years, 3 months, and 17 days of controlled wind, controlled rain, and programmable tides. It has been beautiful weather behind clouds.

Tomorrow, I'll be a married—another Stoic. Sharing muted passion is a perfectly appropriate way to recover.

A love like ours

Knowing what you want is the first step towards disappointment. *Toe, heel.*

Just before this you count the steps it takes to get away from end of the empty bed to the other. 3. Just before this, you think about the last time your world was swallowed and the ones you loved and loved you: Papa! Abuela! Swim! I was five. It has been 42 years, 3 months, and 16 days between disasters. And now, just before this mirror, you have ideas—my ideas from a single strand of thought of what family life would be like: conjoined. *I do.* Sure, the years would be bundled together like material coils, but just before this, an unplanned day would transform in: me over her like protection or a shrug she fashioned to keep her neck warm, always, and holding hands, my hands slipping inside her pocket so tight no seam or crease would give up my position. Then, another unplanned day would transform into a child into sucking on her milking teats, but not where I ended up two years after *I do*: sliding away, again, a slow slide. My wife called my idea of family strange and disruptive when I brought it up on the occasion of our divorce. It was her seventh and my first. Colleen did not want children. I missed this update in her Pair Match System profile. PMS had a way of staling down any relationship.

I was summoned to the Quarrel by letter. Our lawyers agreed that each of us could weep twice during the proceedings; as such, I'd reached my quota before she arrived. I stared at the spot on her forehead where her left brow arched like Adam's finger to reach the tip of God's. Now it was a fiery bush over two angry holes. When her grimace froze, her brows stuck together like her pubic star. I remembered how my tongue would disappear in a taste of coins and old apples. I'd never kiss her clitoris and chaparrals again. She was my everything and now, we were arguing over space quotas. She wanted thirteen square meters from my bank account as she

had spent all that was in our joint account. I agreed to give her twelve if she'd look at the wedding trophy. She countered with nine if she didn't have to, and my lawyer agreed without objection.

I brought our wedding trophy to the Quarrel hoping she'd have a change of heart. For our wedding, she wanted us to match her neon mane that ran in tufts around her head. The Atelier programmed the King & Queen of Carnival and insisted we go with clarified algae blue; he'd never worked with that wavelength before. The green cellulose went into the loom. A flattened tube of rainbow material emerged which need only to be cut out along the faint outline already woven or knit into the shapes of our pretty mas party: red, blue, and black for her bridesmaids and my groomsmen. My groomsmen—she wanted—wore the old-fashioned beads and bikinis worn in Trinidad before *Diáspora*. That was the trend, wear the past on your present. The world mourned for the Caribbean in every party they threw. Our wedding cake was Guyanese black cake. Our band was the Fanon Anons. Our décor was Haitian. We artificed Ting, pepper pot, cook-up rice, mofongo, castrup hassar and even Mount Gay Eclipse Silver. We had plantains shipped from Brazil; even she admits two pounds may have been too indulgent. We went rich and wild. It made the right people in Bloomington jealous when newspapers displayed our wedding trophies. They remarked how perfectly the blue feathers were implanted into the bridesmaids, how perfect the beads protruded from the groomsmens' buttocks when they wined and wined and wined. A pair of scissors and a flirtatious spirit can turn any man around. The officiant, a priest from the Church of Stoic, read our favorite verse from *Marcus Aurelius Meditations*, Book IV: "For the whole earth is a point and how small a nook in it is this your dwelling, and how few there in it, and what kind of people are they who will praise thee." And just as he revealed the complexity of life, he revealed his fragility. The Stoic priest removed his robe to reveal the thread

algae he grew from detritus skin grafted in spirals from his shoulder to his forearms. He finished with, "The universe is transformation: life is opinion."

I remembered further back at the fitting when the material coils reached the end, the unraveling revealed a dress, a shirt, a skirt, my Midnight Robber headpiece, her Jab devil horns, socks, fringed sleeve gloves and a hobo bag that carried nothing. The material that made her horns could be snipped anywhere without unraveling, a feature that allows for complete penetration. She was not amused.

"You're making a mockery of the fitting. You're making a mockery of the dead."

We discussed how a mask might be pulled over my face.

"Cover him. Give him eye holes, but cover him."

In the end, to appease Colleen and to honor the Atelier's vision, my eyes would be sealed with temporary skin, though, I would not be able to get as blind as she desired before the wedding parade. I saw. I saw the pretty players in their beads and bikinis wining so hard on each other that the feathers from one neck would rub and stretch and rip out iridescent sequin paillettes from the shoulder of another. If a groomsman were on top, the blooded baubles would be pushed in deeper until the contusion glowed bone. On her own float, I saw Colleen's bare breasts smeared in molasses. It was her something old. She moaned gyrating against her bridal trident while her sister, Yvonne, played a tin drum with cane on fire. Will-o'-the-wisp burned out sound. Their parents were so proud. I thought of how Colleen sunk the staff into her float's foam, how the molasses stuck to the grafted scales and skin along her breast because she wanted to fuse her own magic. Colleen held onto two of her trident's teeth and licked the center. She wined Agwe and soucouyant entwined. Wild. Wild. And my Robber Talk went silent. I couldn't say words. I wanted to shout. I wanted to cause earthquakes with my body. I wanted to do to Colleen what

she was doing to a bridesmaid. To four more. Through my skin slits I saw the sky in their faces. It was clarified blue. I wanted touch. I wanted to open my skin and undo earthquakes. Undo Jumbi waves with my hips. I wanted to unsink places so this masquerade could be my play. And when she posed me for our wedding trophy, Colleen tongued away my temporary skin. Tears formed in my eyes and in my throat as I thought about the seamstress with the fatty palms who held me tight around the waist to see how it would all fit. I hung to the left; *I almost forgot.*

“Say cheese!” And I could see bits of me in her teeth.

At the Quarrel

I banged my head against the table because my quota did not preclude pain.

“Be candy. Don’t fight,” Colleen said.

But, at least, I could bruise for her. Luther wouldn’t do that much. She’d asked for a marital transference in place of a divorce. Her divorce quota had been reached and all she could do was transfer within my family. She’d be pair-matched with Luther, my cryogenic brother and best man. They were both Humanists so maybe it would be a better match than with me, a Scientist.

For five years Luther shared a warm teat in the freezer until our parents were well-off enough to thaw him off and raise him. I was a womb birth. Old-fashioned and gendered.

My mother liked my face best so Luther’s was photografted from mine. Skin developer, fixer, wash... then fastened to his fascia by gravity and microbes. When he was fourteen, they told him the truth: his face was adopted. He went to Belgium and bought a different forehead and skinned over one eye during a spring break. Our parents were upset but, ultimately, it was my father who came to terms with him rebelling. He had almost tried rebelling when he was that age.

At my second anniversary party, I remembered, Luther made a toast that ended with, “...Gee, one more like you? I don’t think so.” And, Colleen laughed.

Perhaps, that was my warning. Perhaps, he had already thumbed and drilled my sweetheart. Perhaps nine square feet was not enough to get that image out of my head so I offered her the last remaining square meters in exchange for them not wearing King & Queen at their wedding. That was ours. She rose like a fence, my wife, and smiled like she won some great battle. We shook hands.

“I think we’ll go with a Fancy Indian theme.” That was the end of the Quarrel.

By their wedding, the trend moved to Face but neither of them could pull off two-tone reliefs of smiles even if it was pre-cut into their sides. Luther sent me a copy of his wedding trophy. He hung to the right; *I almost forgot.*

I grew spiteful and depressed. But I liked Face trousers because Luther could not trend them. I wore mine to their first anniversary. My trousers had two red eyes circling my hipbones because I wanted them to know how I felt. I did not want to make a scene but people noticed.

“You’re a prime winner in those,” someone said; “the facial folds fall into you”.

“I love your frown.”

In my apartment, next door to theirs, our King & Queen hung above my bed. I wrapped her algae over my body reciting our wedding vows and slept in my cell wall for weeks.

It's better than bleeding

The idea of them penetrating surfaces a wall away ruined me. Giving up my rmy university-funded apartment in Bloomington was what I did. *Suck it up*. I applied to a post in Kyoto at the Control Bank. I was surprised my Expatriation Papers were approved so quickly. America had tough laws about who got to leave. If you were of Caribbean descent, it was especially hard to leave because we were so few. After the Diáspora, when the provisional council in Aruba did a population count, they decided to account for all the Aruban people left in the world. They felt it was important to know there were more than 786. If you were born in Aruba and survived, anywhere in the world, you were were Eerste, or first. You were also Eerste if both your parents were Aruban but you weren't. And there were variations like Eerste-Aruba/Panama if your parents were from a different Caribbean nation. Governments kept detailed records in the Office of Nomenclature, Taxonomy, and Obligatory Labels or Gathering Yourself. It wasn't a true physical space. Who could spare the space? Who except the Economics who had resources to move between between zones freely to get to a location. No, O.N.T.O.L.O.G.Y was a global database blood app. One drop is all it needed to help you gather yourself. If you survived anywhere in the world, but was of a generation not born in Aruba you were Tweede, or second-level gathered. If you survived anywhere in the world and were the generation of people born to at least one Tweede parent, you were Derde, or third-level gathered. And it went on and on, Vierde, Vijfde... It was somewhat modelled after Japanese cultural profiles for migrants, Issei, Nissei, and so on, except that, after Diáspora, all you needed to do was survive. Other Caribbean and even Pacific island countries adopted it keeping the Dutch words but adding the place of birth. Technically I was Tweede-Berbice, born in New York but after Diáspora, records were lost and based on Abuela's conspiracy theories she had left to my father

as inheritance, my parents altered my birth manifest to be Derde-Berbice so that when *la mierda se vuelve loca*—as my Dominican grandmother would say—everyone believed I was a third generation West Indian kid living in the Bronx when it happened. So, it was. I was Derde-Berbice and on my way to Japan because my O.N.T.O.L.O.G.Y didn't make me important enough to keep in the States United.

Japan prepared for Diáspora. They were the canary in the cage who got to fly off in the end. We should have listened. When it came, they had rebuilt themselves on temporary stilts using power hydraulic pumps to divert water away until Zombí, the weather modulator sent to space, stopped the rains. They called the water diversion technology P3. A Haitian engineer developed it. I think that's why Japan built one for Haiti. A way of saying thank you to the engineer who had fled an earthquake, a regime change, a cholera outbreak, and a job as a maid at twelve where she has her ear stapled to a table by her employer's lover when she refused to stop reading at night. The engineer won a Nobel Prize for it but it was taken away from her when she refused to share the design with France on the basis of an unpaid bill they owed her family, dating back to 1825. The Economics would come to her posthumous defense.

Proteger Petite Pays diverted vast amounts of water by temporarily lifting coastlines. It pumped in a series of fast actions that had to be timed and repeated. P3 absolutely destroyed ecosystems: fish, coral, sand. The thought of rewriting books to reflect this change was daunting. Rewriting geological science books for education was more daunting. We compromised on one very big book with lots of pictures, for posterity. It is a testament to silence. In the big book with pictures, P3-Japan is responsible for contributing to the random pattern of waves, waves that moved parts of the Americas from the Caribbean Sea to the Gulf of Guinea, over a

swollen Lake Chad into the Nile Sea, which by 2036 had tributaries flowing over parts of islands and people as far east as Kazakhstan.

There are many Stoics Japan and that is why it took no time to get my work visa. Stoics move around freer compared to Romantics, who are stuck in swamplands afuera. But, no one moves as freely as Economics, whether or not you blame the Japanese. Truth be told—my grandmother's truth—no one listened when Japan began to sink. Keep you head up, they said. No one listened when toxins leached infertility. Try another position, they said. So, my grandmother's truth is my memory of her shaking her head at the television. *Así que, vete a la mierda coños por llorar ahora.*

I took the job because after Japan's dead decades of no children birthed, they began to grow them even better than the real thing. In the end, which is now, Kyoto is my haven.

It was a LiveWork apartment. The LiveWork apartment was also my lab. If you want to be successful in any field, you have to be willing to L'rk at all hours of the days. Bright light, white light spooled from every direction to a center sleep cube just as promised by the brochure. I L'rked in spacious living quarters that were approximately ten square meters. Via a hall, the living quarters were conjoined to another brightly coloured room designed for other emotions. Through that hall was a wet bench and two confocal microscopes: most convenient. I had my own loom for clothes; the computer programs were standardized for employees and conserved by trend. There was a skylight above my bench. Tendrils from a willow planted outside scratched down the length of the skylight. *Colleen scratched.* I even had a coffee plant with leaves and organic roots in a pot. Behind it hid a special room to hide, privately. In Kyoto, hiding was healthy.

I had never been recruited before and I wanted to be agreeable and to participate in the pleasure and process of something other than love so when they asked if I wanted the cracks in the concrete floor filled I said no. The worse that could happen is that I would lose my change. L'rking meant I did not need to ship my car from Bloomington; I could use a bicycle. L'rking meant I could roll out of bed and retrieve data around my meal times, bath times, and after dream cycles. Everything was new and extraordinary. al had no intention of returning to normal. LiveWork meant I could spend my time focused on my career and not the sound of Colleen cumming through the walls. I was excited to become a L'rker.

First stitch

My bench felt the same as it did in Bloomington: transfer pipettes on the left and embryo wash on the right. I watched blastomeres become hemispheres become pole: animal and vegetal, become born. But the more rote the process the slower I worked. A year from here, I was avoiding surface contact. I hadn't touched another human in a year. I hadn't been this lonely since my wedding night so I requested projects at the corpse hospital to avoid nostalgia. I got approval.

In the corpse hospital, I was able to interact with more people. This made L'arking worthwhile. Colleagues were a great distraction. My mentor was a Canadian named Thierry Ecks. He trended Kyoto lab coats. The lab coat was gingham, carded in yellow and grey checks: our team colour. On him it was an umbre, on me it was a diabetic's urine.

He invited me on his Plethoras Project.

"Nothing is better than bleeding," he exhausted. "This is not a segue; it's my thesis. I think the ancient Greek phlebotomists were onto something. The idea of plethoras contaminating the body. We'll spend a year conducting it. What do you think, doctor?" And, he waited for the Synkro to lower its volume. His NIH grant covered mood music.

"Contaminating with what?"

"Emotions."

"And how do you treat plethoras?"

"Remove the corrupted fluids with simple slits and careful gouging."

"Gauge?"

"Oh no. It must be my accent. Gouge. It's French."

I considered it. When Colleen scratched and I bled, I forgot how much I loved her. Perhaps there was a plethora of emotions in the blood stream, cytokines

that flowed at cross points that could be trained to the one-and-zero binary-language principle. Sink or surface. If we could program forward and backward we could even make it a simple game. I wanted to see his thesis put to task.

“What is natural may inevitably change,” I said.

“Well said, young doctor. That’s the power of creation. What is left for us humans to invent but the language of our own genetic material? Are you in?” Ecks waits.

“We’ll need controls, you know. It took me two years to grow a hummingbird, another one for wings. A great control is what we need,” I said.

Ecks tasted my enthusiasm. When I was small, I used to wait for my grandfather to get home from the bodega with a bag of green plantains, peel them, mash them, and fry them in balls as big as his fist in a pan with strips of pork skin protected by its white and puffy fat. This was not mofongo but he did have that glimmer in his eyes.

“Yes, we do. I do indeed have some.” Then he whispered, “Some material floated into our hands, nudge nudge wink wink, after that tsunami. Good stuff. Useful. Resilient. 86% Caribbean. 3% plastics and the rest is the rest.” And to seal the deal, “Everyone’s doing it.” He waited.

“Black market,” I said.

“Yes. Atlantic black market. Who knows what the stuff washing up from the Pacific side is. Will that be a problem?”

“No.” I meant yes.

No one could be sure what was scooped up in cups along the beach: human endometrium mixed with cat chromosome mixed with soap bubbles mixed with reptile. So many possibilities. Ecks had an untarnished reputation so his contacts must have been deep within Economics. He winked at me flashing his untarnished

teeth until the Synkro played his exit song. *Is there a difference between recruitment and sold?*

Months passed before he let me near any tissue. He said he needed to observe my thought processes so we traded dream cycles, and once he realized we both get aroused by the scent of clouds he trusted me.

“Let’s explain everything. You can’t leave it sitting out. Nothing soaks it up so it’s your job to fan out the blood vessels. They’ll drip like rain but squeeze it back in. What are you thinking so far?”

“We might want to consider skin.”

“Skin?”

“Yes, skin.”

“Skin is good but it hides the blood, young doctor. Have you found plethoras?”

“Plethoras? No. But, I’ve isolated cortisol, cortisol that is excreted through the sweat glands. You know, for its role in fever, fear, stress, and pain. It’s also in blood. I imagine it’s how the people felt seeing the sea swallow them up.”

“The people?”

And, just like that, he demoted me.

Ecks was a person of education who regulated procedure and protocol. I was a piece of string on a loom of his making. He could warp and weft me, flatten me out, cut me. I had a belly expansion of antipathy. I wondered if my entrails would string out anything substantial for his data. *A noose.* It was autumn, but he was a man waiting for summer to come to his kingdom. When he demoted me, I lost the respect of the lab. I complained to Luther and he sent a polymer smirk through the

mail. It was feather-light and melted after a day. I could have been worse; it could have been a laugh. I borrowed a Happy Face from the Hiding Room. I was trying to keep the others psychologically healthy with my camouflage. Then, one of the soma Nannies, Nzingha, lent me her bicycle. She said it would be easier to hide outdoors.

By autumn, I would bicycle further each day to get away from my colleagues, from Ecks. There was a nice shiver chill in Kyoto. My skin would piloerect and on the tops of these erections my hairs curled, looking tired. But my legs muscles were awake. I had never had muscles. Atrophy was in fashion in Indiana. I had to bike in my team uniform. It was all the clothes I had after I burned the King & the Queen. We were trending Pain de Mie lab coats that month. They were soft and lightly quilted for the change in season. I cut mine mid-quad and tore off the sleeve because I wanted to be touched. Pain de Mie were simple rectangles in denim, sometimes mohair; the blue fabric dye was stained the colour of your tears so it could be used as your own personal handkerchief. This was mainly for the Scientists working on Love.

I was somewhere trying to forget the colour green so I rode the bicycle downhill. Downhill the leaves moved like fingers jangling. I rode near bushes just to feel them rub against my arms and legs. I hadn't been touched in two years, that is if we discount the 23 handshakes I received between Indiana and Kyoto.

I slowed to see how the green leaves had been overtaken by orange then yellow then brown then frost then hives. There were hundreds of artificial hives in the park. These were quaint domiciles compared to the two-story hives in New York's Central Park. The Japanese government had tried to bid for more honey bees but decided on the Marabunta wasps from Suriname because they produced a powerful pain stimulant good for pleasure research. They were all exotic imports being saved. And though they were not as beneficial as some other insects—

honeybees for pollination, grasshoppers for protein, or ants for aphid control—they were an acquisition that made this park a top tourist destination. I stopped. I slid off my bicycle to touch desiccated leaf veins, to touch jagged bark scales, to touch low-coloured moss tendrils, to touch pond scum, to watch the tourists take pictures with the hives. I tripped over the tangled roots of a thyme bed and a wasp stung me. *Colleen scratched.* It had been dying quietly before I landed on it. I could tell by the drifting of its hum. Its sting burned like snow. The burning was better than her scratches, better than her face. My thigh was swelling into a dirty aubergine when I pulled out its stinger.

Remote controlled aerosols inside perforated poles were meant to dust the Marabunta if they flew near the people perimeter. The atomising botanical soap was meant to keep them contained and away from the tourists and the nature in the park. But, the air was so cold and icicles had formed barriers over many of the spray's openings. A few wasps would have escaped having little contact with the aerosol. Freedom, I imagined, sent subtle tremors up their antennae. How much better it would be to be over there or there and not where their hive was formed. I watched as the few brave, lucky, displaced bees would circle the islands of hives for what, I do not know. Some, no longer inspired by the outside, tried to return through the network of activating poles and collapsed for a moment in a circular dance before flying off again and again and again. Their fine hairs would be coated in thin waxy sheaths of neem and garlic oils from the soapy aerosol. They were made heavy and foreign when they left their homes. And when they returned—if ever they made it back to the hive of their origin—the other Marabuntas would either cannibalize or ignore them.

I limped away from the wasp sanctuary to see the peaceful stretches of manufactured honeybees. They were not boney bees in yellows and blacks but

iridescent greens and purple meant to mimic hummingbirds who, according to the Japanese Tourism Board, were more interesting to point out than a bee.

I noticed how buzzing bees freed other bees from hives by their movement. They would stare at the sun, their ommatidia burning smooth hexagons into the atmosphere. They would watch me walking over rocks with my bare feet trying to follow them. And when I was lucky enough as we traveled, they would hum in unbroken syllables doing a drawn out bobbing dance for each other. *Mating*. They moved in a controlled chaos spiraling then landing, sometimes dying. *Them, me, temporary*. I thought of the busy bee lab technicians skimming the halls and forking bags of platelets from plasma from erythrocytes from experiments trying to find the basis of love. And then and there—watching one bee hum to no one, but me, as it bobbed and danced rubbing parts of its ruptured digestive tract, muscles, and nerves against the throbbing in my open palm—I knew I wanted to be on a Love Project not Plethora. I sat in a glaciated fountain to confirm my thoughts.

It was autumn and the fountain was the ice bath I needed. My Pain de Mie clung to skin without one shift in its chroma wavelength. You couldn't even tell I had been crying. *I'm ready for Love*.

Pink is a good colour on you

It was a joint party: my promotion and Ecks' farewell. The entire lab was invited. Swinging doors open and the Nanny's, dressed in Golden Bug, entered. They walked in pairs from the soma wing into the open lounge. Each frock was a plaid geometry with transparent mesh and shiny stretch wool making horizontal stripes across their bodies. They stopped short of where Ecks stood to reveal what they were hiding in the interior of their conceptual bodies. Out walked a control.

The milk-white skin and full breasts are signature marks on many of Ecks's controls. This was Mari, his first—the world's first successful chamber clone.

The lab's signature mark was to name the variables something practical and name the controls something French since they were ones who first perfected a sericulture and pasteurization technique making it possible to grow necrotic tissue outside a petridish. It was actually a child who deserved credit. The boy, living on a lettuce farm inland, safe from floods but not wind, went out to collect rabbits caught in traps. He found them covered in silk as if sleeping in a blanket of snow. Silk worms from an abandoned shipment had moulted millions of times under the electrified pulse field protecting the farm. The rabbits, gophers and the like were quite dead but the worms' salivary glands produced non-spoilage enzymes. Governments wanted to use the discovery to revive animal protein farming but it made more sense to the Economics if meat remained a luxury good. We were easily convinced cloning was an altruistic step toward salvaging what Diápora broke apart once La Pièce™ produced the first clone in its small electrified chamber. I remember those day in headlines.

"Cocoons transcend the fourth dimension: death"

"Curious, hungry, busy: hummingbirds no longer extinct"

"Human or hostile: degenerative behaviors frighten"

"Souls in limbo"

"La Pièce in pieces, adoption waitlist ended"

"Economic lament, Romantic judgment, Stoic rebirth"

"Of the perfect form and function: Mariette"

In the early 2040's, in spite of a well-founded suspicion of scientists, like Thierry Ecks, perpetuating certain fetishes that were no longer sanctioned, like race and age, Thierry Ecks—a man of great intelligence and business acumen, sitting in

his postdoctoral lab watching the O.N.T.O.L.O.G.Y sanitizers destroy his research with yards of human tissue still hanging on the bifurcated walls of the La Pièce chamber, the fungible labialize envelope of flesh which, in conferences and papers, he refused to give more details—gave birth to the Soma, the womb room we use today. No longer griping to join somewhere's tenure, Ecks's discovery made him rich. The professor of nowhere turned La Pièce into a museum attraction when he trademarked Soma™. The first soma-born was Mariette. Thierry Ecks, a Canadian of American descent, had been both exposed to long winters and an absent mother working to put him through schools. In interviews, he glossed over his working class roots to appeal to Economic investors only intimating that his mother, a woman who spoke quietly, was his inspiration for Mariette: *essence absolue*. But the essence of Mariette was an admixture of cells belonging to a mass grave in the Sargasso Sea, not his selective memory of a woman arriving home too tired to play.

And there we all were. It was a joint party: my promotion and Ecks' farewell. The entire lab was invited. Mari hated Mariette and Ecks—according to Nzingha—was too afraid to say otherwise. Once Mari acquired language, Ecks lost control. This was one of the reasons he wanted to create a new control. He had sent the other controls abroad to other labs but Mari was always returned with a complaint. The others were young, raised with programmable language valves. Not Mari, she formed a larynx of her own. The words were human and the clicks were dolphin. And when they argued, Mari and Ecks, the animosity in the larynx would echolocate, emitting sound waves down the hallways days after the fight so that, curse after bloody curse, Mari's voice would locate Ecks, either L'arking or hiding in a hiding room. I would not have that problem, I thought, language valves are standard across all Human Research Banks. Then, I imagined my success and if my

smugness chasing down Luther and Colleen were possible, it might be worth straying from protocol.

I was shocked out of my fantasy by the Synkro's selection of applause. Mari stood in red silk pajamas. Her hair was wrapped in a matching tignon meant to match the Face trend from last year. Her Face, with its large dangling earrings and sequined peacock clinging to its nose, was not happy. Mari was also unhappy. Under the meta-mood lamps, Mari's vitiligo glowed. The cocoa brown rings around her eyes and lips made a her face a Rorschach mask. From the front, her face was a razor blade, from the side a butterfly, like the butterflies in skimpy bikinis from my wedding procession who chipped and wined with the Black Indians and Sailors. She was flanked, a few steps behind, by two of her own variables she insisted Ecks gift to her to keep her company. They also wore red silk pajamas. Her cavum was crossed with wild type Japanese silk worm DNA; she did not want mutations. After the obligatory toast to science and to the dead is managed, Mari and Ecks exchange tired looks. *First one to blink can win this round.* A Night Night Nanny escorted Mari's variables away as if animosity could be contagious. Mari followed.

The Synkro cued a series of national anthems to please the crowd and Ecks walked over to me.

"That was a surprise. Your control. She came. .Were you surprised?"

"I hate that thing. Should have...should have...never mind." He laughed.

"We have a nickname for Mari. Rainy Day Vibes. You get it. It's a variable joke." I laughed.

"Funny." *Was it?* I laughed anyway.

"I like your wear. You trend pink bèl anpil," Ecks commenteed as he pinched and snapped at my airy mesh.

"It's Old Straw Hat not pink." I said.

“Yes. The yellowish peach colour. Powerful hem line, too.” He noticed the cross-stitch detailing in my phallo-stalks that gave the illusion of having multiple penises.

“I call it Limb-Alien. I participated in the final design. My testicles aren’t constricted in this design. Colleen would fabricate our trends.”

“Your ex?”

“My ex.”

“Your own prêt-a port? I like.” Ecks complements his compliment with a shoulder pat.

“I just reprogrammed my loom machine. My mother taught me.” I camouflaged my brag behind my Serious Face. It was a mother design I created when Luther and Colleen told me they were getting pregnant.

“I’m impressed. You know, when you left Plethora project, I thought you were a fool. But look at you now. Your own project. Your own prêt-a port. You’ll do great as my successor. No one is threatened by you. Intakes trust you. You’ll do fine. Hmmph. Hem lines and cell lines. But just maybe, I gotta watch out for you. ” And he continues to touch my hem the way he does before he scoops other people’s research.

“I have my own aesthetics.”

Ecks whispers. “Don’t we all. Just be safe. I fucked up with Mari. I can’t wait until Mari is defunctus. I told them. Clean my lab. Anything I don’t pack and ship, burn.”

And, as if on cue, Mari’s eyes cut into Ecks as she left the room.

“As I was saying, your Limb-Alien has got good elasticity.” He turned to the swinging doors for an unfinished thought that had nothing to do with me and checked that his testicles were surfacing, in sync with Synkro. It played a Grenadian

quadrille then he toasted the crowd turning to every face in the room. Thierry Ecks complimented everyone at his own farewell party. Being candy was in his nature. His generation smiled as children so he had a social advantage. So had I, but my parents sent me to Stoic Camp every summer to learn how to make certain gestures fall out of phase. Just before he walked off, Ecks spun me around.

“What is natural may inevitably change’ you said young doctor.”

“Yes. An evolving concept, Thierry.”

“I can see you’re ready for Love, now. But, nudge, nudge, wink, wink. Keep your nose to the grindstone and your head out the clouds.”

When he was done being candy with me he left for his post in the United States. I was promoted to his position as Head Specific Doctor and was given access to skin for the Love trials. I hadn’t learned his skin protocol, fully, but my first intakes arrived in a week. I was excited to create something new.

Trust me

"Is there pain involved?"

"None that's been reported." *But maybe. The reports omit clone feedback.*

"What, my wife means, is will you, um, will our child be subjected to pain experiments?"

"Again, pain has not been reported. And I must say, We are pleased you say 'child.' When our intakes say 'it' we worry." *Not really. Pronominal distance is best.*

"Oh, no we are coming back for her. Definitely."

"Definitely," The wife interrupted. "We are just finishing out graduate school; we have a plan. We just need to know if pain is involved...for our child."

"No. We don't do pain experiments here. The closest is Plethora but that's been pared done to a few dozen gouges."

"Oh. No pain experiments. Good, good."

"No. Just psychological trials. Non-invasive."

"I see. Simple. No pain experiments."

"Check." I scribbled a happy face on the index card on my lap and handed it to the wife so she could show her husband. They sat beaming with shallow smiles on me. They were learning to be candy, too. I smiled back, with teeth. They were impressed.

"So, you two are students?"

"Yes. Yes we are. No. I am. My wife is a librarian. I'm in juror school."

"That's impressive. How many more years?"

"I take my Fairness Exams in six years."

"Such meaningful work. We need all the jurors we can get." *Not really.*

"I thought about law school but there's a waitlist. It sucks."

He was using classic talk so I countered. "You betcha."

The librarian crossed her fingers and pulled in close to her husband so their skin bands touched. Yellow peels of fabric conjoined them. They were trending five-year old knock-off design with cheap warp and weft yarns; they were indeed graduate students. *Arms touch.* I stared at their skin band some more and my heart heated in an airtight valve. It moved up my throat. *Luther in Colleen. Colleen in Luther.* I coughed out loud and held back a dollop of produced phlegm. I circled it in my left cheek. *The taste of candied metal.*

“When I passed my Specific Exams I was relieved to find a job. I know how hard it is.” The empathy light dimmed to meta-mood.

“Wow. Specificity. You must be a genius. That’s so impressive.” And, she glowed moonbeams at me, in front of her husband, the soon-to-be juror earning unimpressive space quotas in Terrestre IV, the efficiency pods stacks on top condensed detritus. She’d probably let me thumb and drill her for a life in my L’urk. *He knew this.* He’d probably let me thumb and drill him for a night in my L’urk. *We both knew this.*

“After six years, we’ll have enough money to raise a family.”

“Also, we’re using the space advance to decorate a kid’s room.”

“Sure.” I sounded too smug so I smacked my thigh. “Let me explain everything, guys. There is no pain. Okay? We grow them for you. And in three years, three tops, you come and pick him or her or them up. And, if for some reason we can’t use your cells...” and I droned on how splicing would work, citing Gregor Mendel, Luther Burbank, and Leona James, how the cell line we sub-Strated™ for Soma was top of the line cell culture not black market Atlantic culture. *Erased culture.* I spoke with cheer and authority and so much candy.

“Oh, Leona James. I remember her from college bio.”

“I’ve been hearing things about skin cells. Skin from Caribbean bodies washing up in England, Spain, Portugal even China and frozen. You know, from Erzulie back in ‘36.”

“Honey...Let me apologize for my husband. He’s doing his thesis on Ghosts and Real Things that Recirculate After Bad Things Happened When People are Forced from their Homes. He theorizes on how fair it was to move people off of land into terraform communities that are essentially mass graves. He didn’t mean to imply...”

He interrupts her interruption. “It’s not a theory, dear. It was done to indigenous people in America in the fifteenth century and now, us. We’re the new indigenous. I mean that’s why you flew us out, right? I’m Eerste-Trinidad and my wife is Vierde-Bajan. If you can’t fish for it in the black market, fish for it on a modern-day reservation.”

“They didn’t have reservations in the fifteenth century.” I corrected the juror as subtly as I could. “I believe it was just disease and gun powder.” His nose flared up like my grandfather’s when he was excited to give his opinion, not angry, just superior. He was chair of his department, after all. The librarian sighed; she had been expecting her husband’s polemic.

“Great, now you have you second chapter on how governments are sequestering us in some mind-controlling Linnean system.” She said.

The empathy light brightened at that point to induce a feeling of trust. They both calmed down and turned to me.

“I’m impressed. Inspired even by your social atunement, but this is science. Not the Black Market. Not history recirculating.”

A burst of yellow-green ombre to give the juror a felling of success followed. I knew I was lying, but the meta-mood sensors did not. They were programmed

with memories of sitting on my mother's lap while she finished her own dissertation on poverty and human trafficking. *Delete memory three.*

"For what it's worth, I think your passion will make you a great father."

"I think so, too." He agreed and the librarian squeezed his hand.

The lighting created more trust between the librarian, her husband and I. They handed over their floating morula in a dish, sixteen cells I that I would called Fleur. *Fungible Labialized Entity you are.*

I handed them their certificate of deposit and wished them luck. We all agreed that if the market's self-interest rates rose, they'd start that family everyone was so keen on these days. I nodded in lieu of shaking their hands. I was tired of being impressive.

My skin protocol, again, was lacking but I was given another promotion anyway. Thierry had been useless explaining facts and he now was gone. I was in charge with 400 people below me and less above. On the plus side, I was smart. *Colleen mistrusted intelligence.* I remember working very hard at Bloomington creating controls who excelled physiologically, genetically, chemically, and comfortably. So, I began work on the new soma room.

The soma was advanced thread-making technology, genetic hybridization and even cloning. Soma took the place of the womb once a control completed in vitro embryogenesis. Once the fetus developed lungs, the placental coating would be hosed off. Sericultured protein, growth factors and salts replaced placental coats on soma. I manufactured a small placental cube. Soma material from the same placental cube would need to be aliquotted three times for each of the production stages: cellular looming, soma redoubling, and structural gouging. After, the webbed tissue would be stretched and Synthe-Sized to cover the walls of larger

living quarters for the newborn: cavum apartments. It was important to skin the walls before scabbing because a Nanny was only legally responsible for a child who grew with some wounds during healing, not before. Those grown in already healed somas did not benefit from the Hyper-Dorphins incorporated into the soma during the looming. Hyper-Dorphins create sleepy youngsters and future perfect variables. A Nanny's job was to inspect sentient items for flaws, like rot and lint, not sadness or confusion.

My Nanny was Nzingha and she was very good. Nzingha was tall and square. She resembled a highrise building wrapped in an olive knit scaffold. Her hips stretched beyond the bodyline. Whenever I complimented her, like how nice the barbels on her collar were, she'd change clothes. If I complimented the scallops on her skirt next, she'd change into straight lines. When I complimented her barbels, again, she said it wasn't necessary as she'd already programmed my pleasure into her prêt-a-porter loom machine for all the looks I desired. As Nannies went, she was gentle and natural the way I imagined my mother was as a Nanny. Nzingha spoke Mbundu and German so her English was coated in consonants and uptalk that reminded me of old American television. We consummated regularly because she didn't find my conversation pleasing.

In my first go of making soma, I grew eighty square meters of tissue but the rank of necrotic membrane ruined a wall, curled and greyed at the window trims. The worse was a ruptured capillary that weakened underlying tissue so bad that Nzingha's foot broke through to the sub-floor and the exothermic heat of healing fascia burned her bare feet. My control was about to be born and I wasn't prepared. Not at all. I worried about this as I bicycled through the springtime park. *An idea bloomed. I would fashion my own womb. I am my own black market.*

I spent an entire week sterilizing forceps and scalpels to remove a few planar inches from my inner thigh, stomach, thumb, bottom lip and a hard to reach spot on my back. I didn't realize I was limping until I was limping to the loom machine that washed, flattened and counted my skin cells. There was some black market uterus that Ecks left behind for me in a vial hidden in a Champagne bottle in my lab refrigerator. There was a trophy attached to the vial that recited from Book V of *Meditations*. "In the morning, when you rise willingly, let this thought be present: I am rising to the work of a human being. Why then am I dissatisfied if I am going to do things for which I exist and for which I was brought into the world?" His mouth stuck to the vial but I could still picture his smirk as he thought about corrupting my Stoic ethics with stoicism.

Whatever was in that vial, I added it to the loom. It weaved us into rows of the Atlantic. The soma took form. Continuous connected yarns of me rolled out the programmed machine. A Charvet ground and some supplementary geometries that couldn't be helped or hidden had small open pores that sweated me and red pine that had stuck to my skin from my outdoor excursions. Tiny hairs twinkled under the light. Bolts of skin rotated and grew around a metal bar. *Sliding, slippery guilt*. I had the carpenters install a series of lungs to keep the soma well-ventilated, something low profile that could be incorporated into the soma's transition into a cavum apartment—the mature living arrangement for an adult control. Lung tissue was expensive. Lung was considered the sacred root of memory cells. Lung from any species was black market gold. I splurged. I could smell me—but a better me—all the way in the park as the carpenters tore and covered the roof, the floor, the ceiling with my skin. Not just pine: I smelled oceans of red snapper. I smelled a pig on a spit in Vedado. I smelled donkeys carrying provisions up a steep mountainside in Kingston. I smelled Limacol being rubbed on an old man's chest in Berbice. I

smelled mofongo in a bowl at El Malecon on 175th and Broadway. I spent four days alone smelling what my olfactory nerve sent to the ElectroKap in waves from thalamus to my body. I began to dance in one spot as if renting a square of tile all night long. And when my movements became smooth and coordinated the waves were sent from my cerebellum to my mouth and I began to chatter and mumble,

“its in my blood, its in my veins

cant washi it off im forever stained

i hear the people callin my name

...bacchanal, bacchanal”

and Nzingha only spoke of it when my navel condensed in a corner.

“The navel is present, doctor. We can grow with an umbilical cord now.”

“Yes. What luck.” *Theft. Or, is it the sharing of all our matter?*

“Good job on the soma, doctor. A perfect acid mantle that’ll hold up. And, shiny!”

“Thank you. Just a pinch of sweat and tears to rinse out my bad luck.” *Fate.*

I would visit my womb room every night making sure the soma continued to develop into a stable substrate for implantation. When I was satisfied, the technicians retrieved Fleur from the cryowomb. The thaw was flawless and the floating morula of sixteen cells bloomed and implanted into the uterine-enriched soma. For the next 28 weeks we watched and toasted to Cell mass differentiation! Bilaminar disc formation! Heart! Eyes! Limbs! Ears! External Genitalia? This occurred two weeks too soon but blind testing told us it was not a congenital anomaly and we continued to toast Palate! Brains! External Genitalia! And at week 28 when the brain and eye were developing to prepare for the very stimuli that would make Fleur the best for the tasks to come, I came to visit: alone.

I tip-toed across the reddened skin that was sericultured from a harvest of my own skin cells. I noticed there were fewer and fewer footprints on my back. In week 20, because I did not want to be watched, I had removed all staff but Nzingha and the Night Night Nanny from the project. I said it was to maintain sterile conditions but I was afraid of being scooped. *Everyone wants a secret.*

I tip-toed to watch the limb buds and umbilical cord grow and attach to the amnion. Water-laden and virtually transparent. I fashioned the sac from a swath of cells I scrapped from a dolphin's throat. Then, for good measure, I added my own cells. In my mind, I had blown in a breath of life pulsating violently through its extensive vascular system. *Everyone wants a spark.*

I tip-toed closer to hear the heartbeat push fluid through translucent skin. I waved the shadow of my hands across the surface and eyes opened to receive me. The black pits were even darker against the reddish waxy vernix caeosa that coated the body on its own the way a birth child's would develop and coat in the warm 36.6667 degree Celsius uterus of the librarian as her juror husband held her hand. But they had divorced, as expected. The librarian, who was Eerste, and got to keep their cramped pod on the terraform. Her juror, she reported, dropped out of university and went to live afuera. He quietly cashed out his half of the cell line deposit saying nothing more about recirculating histories, black markets, or fatherhood.

The red waxy anti-infective emboldened me to take off my biohazard muzzle but not gloves. Dirty things those hands. We were trending Gemini and my puffy but streamlined body-hugging lab coat morphed into a one cushion ripple chair where I could sit and play an endless game of peek-a boo. I would hide then reveal a different face. I had so many I wanted to try. The masking and mimicking went on from 4 A.M. until noon that day. It was fantastic, magic, dangerous. My foot would

tap ting-a-ling and the heart beneath the vernix caseosa would go ting-a-ling ting-a-ling. My audience would blink and I my puffy gloved fingers would do the same with peek-a-boo peek-a-boo. The mystery of not seeing then seeing then seeing clearly was arousing to us both which is why I would not return to my womb room until it was modified into a skin cavum for a toddler.

The protocols I did allow outside my lab benefitted everyone. NIH funded my Synkro. Then, after a long bicycle ride one day, Mari came to see me hoping to be put on my project. I said yes and accepted the many creative forms of gratitude. I would sign the paperwork for defunctus because I could risk the cross-contamination. *Blood puts itself in my hands.*

It was all my promotions that kept me away. *Not shame.*

I've done this before

Luther sent a postcard in the mail; they're pregnant.

Luther still worked in the Bloomington Drosophila Stock Center. He came to Kyoto for a conference in the winter. I was surprised when they both came. She was even uglier pregnant. It wasn't that her swollen feet, taut, glossy, with hints of cyanosis blue, resembled pelagic stingray or that the prenatal acne on her cheek bones was tender and new. Her ugly was from the inside leaking out.

"Yous-hu! Hello. Turn around. We're here," Colleen burst out.

They surprised me while was I meditating with Nzingha. She said "yous-hu" the way an actor would have said "you hoo" on an old television show. "Yous-hu" was something we made up together when we young and in love and we felt people just didn't understand that love. It was short for useless human and it was meant for people who, for whatever reason, no longer served a purpose in our life-building. When my mother passed up on giving a toast at our wedding, I heard Colleen whisper "yous-hu" to her sister, Miriam.

I invited Colleen and Luther to join us for the last verse of from Book VII *Meditations*: "What is badness? It is that which thou hast often seen. And on the occasion of everything which happens keep this in mind, that it is that which thou hast often seen. Everywhere up and down thou wilt find the same things, with which the old histories are filled, those of the middle ages and those of our own day; with which cities and houses are filled now. There is nothing new: all things are both familiar and short-lived."

In front of Nzingha, they congratulated me on my promotions and passing exams to become Head Specific Doctor. Their congratulations seemed genuine (but later) as Luther stroked her belly, I was happy I had worn a voice changer in my

Eskimo hood so that my sounds of success could compete with their happiness. Nzingha left the room because she had seen the trophies Luther and I exchanged. Indifference and troubled.

“You look great pregnant, Colleen.” She smiled and turned to Luther.

“Karaoke?”

“No. No. It’s a voice changer. I want to be happy for you.”

“Good. We don’t like karaoke. Too much echo.” Luther’s lips skinned apart and showed tooth.

“Luther. You’re being candy!”

“Yea, yea. Me and Colleen are taking lessons. It’s a good skill to have these days. I mean you were always good at smiling and crying and look at where you are today. Big Man on top. Except I have the girl. Do you have a girl? Was that your girl? Too bèl ancil for you.” They laughed.

But I looked at me and I was ahead. I was better without Colleen. Anyone would be. *Except Luther.* He needed And, I would keep it that way as I climbed the ladder of success. I’m on a ladder and I have had many lovers . Then, Colleen smacked me.

“Mosquito.” Colleen informed me as she wiped my blood off her fist. “You can say: thank you, Colleen.” She buzzed in my rear.

“Fleur. Her name is Fleur.”

“Furr.”

“No Fleur. Like flower.”

“Oh.”

“So, you’re a botanist like everyone afuera.” They cackled so loud that Synkro shut itself down. And just like that, Colleen and Luther won.

“It’s not like that. Fleur is the project. My new control.

“You mean an F.L.E. routine?” Luther asked then started to cackle.

“What’s that? What’s that? What’s that? Come on, what’s that? Tell me!”

Colleen begged like a child.

“Isn’t that a fancy way of saying fungible labialized ex-utero routine?”

“Well...yes. But I when I first saw her in the microscope, you see, the morula looked like a flower. But, now I see what you mean.”

“I told you so Luther. The big doctor wasn’t over me. He’s just using better equipment.” Then she turned and looked at me the way one looks at their favorite dog before they inject it with ketamine.

“Usted es una entidad perdedora reemplazable, aren’t you?” The thought of my Hiding Room made me feel so malo that the empathy light of the room brightened from misery to relentless drag. Then, Colleen pulled out a fuzzy box she’d been hiding from me all this time.

“Well, Happy Birthday. It was Luther’s idea. Maybe you and Fluurrr and the Colleen Wata Yome can have a threesome.” Colleen cackled.

I unrolled a Midas cut-out that inflated into an upright life-sized, humanoid-shaped cushion with Colleen’s face. They laughed out loud. Luther handed me a box of tissues with a bow. I wish they had forgotten my birthday.

“I don’t like ugly tricks.” I sniffed it to be sure Luther hadn’t urinated on it. It was his thing. I touched it, and it folded in half into a seat just like in the commercials promising that these weren’t pillows, they were partners for lonely people. As far as mobile interiors went, a plain Midas was far better than a Midas made into a Wata Yome Colleen. A plain Midas did not scratch. Wata Yome was not the kind of furniture made for L’rking; it was made for hiding.

“It’s just a cotton wife to sleep with. See?” He tapped its forehead and it collapsed into a bed.

"I don't think I need it but maybe someone in the lab requires urging. I'll pass it around the lab to see if anyone is just that lonely. Thank you."

He laughed some more and Colleen not at all. When I got home, I burned it to be sure I would not be lonely.

That night, I busied myself with designing new protocols with Nzingha at my side.

She was the first to break the silence. "Have you been hugging your skin?"

"No. Why?"

"That's the problem. Scientists don't care anymore. I'm looking after eighteen somas. Granted I have techs under me, but hugging is important for sentience. I'm a Nanny. I inspect. You're the Scientist. You have to cuddle your work, once in a while. It's the least you can do. After all, it's you in that room."

"Okay. Just the one hug, then?"

"One hug. And, maybe a bedtime story."

I sighed. "Well, what about the book I added to the Related Materials list?"

"Your little control read it all and memorized most of the *Meditations*, especially Book IV."

"My favorite part of *Meditations* is four." I picked up my head from between her cow pose and used her buttocks to wipe clean her tissues off my lips and chin.

"One hug then?" I stated more than asked. She remained faced away from me on her hands and knees, but I could see her big cheeks smile out from the back of her tilted head. The prints of our feet were covered in the ashes of Colleen's Midas. *Toe, heel.*

We dressed and went to the lab.

Related materials

I hadn't visited any soma since my last promotion to Associate Chair of Future Design. I improved the future design of the soma when its patent sold to several labs, back in Bloomington, too. I remember sending Luther a soma sample and including a polymer smirk in the package. One that wouldn't melt. My soma patent had been a success.

I did not come for the birth. I was away in Cambridge invited to give the keynote address. Even Ecks hadn't big upped like me as guest speaker at four of the seventeen accredited universities still remaining. But my glee was disturbed by Nzingha who shared her reports, reports that made me worry and wonder if I had I created my own Mariette, someone unwilling and unable to concede to lab etiquette. I made a new line of controls and variables, the proper way. I went to these somas monitoring their progress: Christophe, Céline, Rita, Marriott and others all fungible controls out in the world doing social wonders by helping scientists better understand humanity. I even hired a Femmetist to assure the lab was abiding by the IRB and OSHA standards. Luther and Colleen were wrong. I was not attached to a cell line. I was attached to science. Standards. That will show them.

Fleur grew up in my first soma. No records on that one. Special protocol. Secret. It was not patented. It was trial. It was error. You could not change material from placental cube to cavum without public protocol so she was stuck with one soma until graduation. Fleur was to be an adaptive control in sensory experiments. As an infant, most experiments required IRB paperwork; I could prove cell origination. That duplicity made it hard for the cell-line parents to earn on their deposit. Money, that was why the librarian and juror divorced. Fleur didn't fit anyone's needs. *Mine*. This was my first project after my divorce. *Head full*. Other

somas nursed very successful variables. I could modify a variable but it took years for a variable to become a control. They had to survive tasking. I was determined though: Fleur would not be associated with failure. From the start, I would raise this project right.

I went to the soma wing. After age 12, all controls and variables live in a modified soma called a cavum apartment. This one was one floor below mine. I had access to all my somas through a removable flap where I should have been L'arking but I had it cauterized shut. *Lurking*. I used stairs to reach the cavum. The descent was hot and moist. Photovoltaics that ate up the cream-coloured sun powering the all-day humidifiers that steamed for the controls. Their sweat pores were encouraged to be open and assailable to medicinal actions or preparation. The cavum walls were made from a particular me and I could smell the red pine and tears fuming from Fleur. Crossbeams of wood supported the sides of the walls, ornamental really. A center divider opened on a simulated view of nature. Sometimes the ocean but mostly war. The ceiling and part of a wall was pitched and rosy, perhaps, my lips. The pitch created a slippery catchment then ran somewhere outside. Another slippery pitch—a tad longer and ribbed along its shaft—was scheduled to be cut and sealed because it would not stop emitting fluids at night. I hung to the left. I slowed to look for Fleur when a brackish drop landed in my mouth. It tasted much different than it smelled. I expected to sensate the librarian and the juror. I could only sensate taste of chicharron de pollo sin hueso, a sting of Limacol on the chest, and the sound of ginep dropping on rain-soft earth.

When I walked in, Fleur was hugging the colour dots that matched su pajamas. They glowed orange, blue-green, and fuschia. Fleur was licking the soma

wall. *No los detuve*. Licking over a spot that was my old spot over an acne lesion now under the windowsill. *No los detuve*. Licking along the Charvet grain of the skin papering the wall. Fleur ran over and grabbed Nzingha's knee.

"Nanny, Nanny. Come nuh, come." Fleur dragged at Nzingha's hem.

"Nzingha, what's the matter with the language valve?"

"Shi inherited accents."

"She?"

Nzingha rolled her eyes. "No. 'shi' like they say afuera. Fleur read about controls in the Global Gloss. It's post-Diásporan for ancestor. She wants to be called 'shi.' It's slang for corpse."

"I would prefer to keep slang out of the language valve."

"Have it your way professor. I can go back to protocol and use *ellos* and *vos*. But if you came here earlier, when we were stimulated the language valve, you might have incorporated your corrections. Fleur enjoys personating and language. She is working on her own..."

"Nzingha. Please." I raised my voice and covered my ears. The Synkro recognized my weakness and produced wave of bass to simulate manhood. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to yell. You...you are right. Pronouns and body designations are under my purview. Let me think..."

"Nanny, smell my breat'." Shi puffed. "Pine. It tastes like I smell."

"And how's that taste little one?" I asked.

"Like lickle stars." Then, Fleur smiled at me.

"How would you like to be "she" for a little while?"

"Shi. Like dead relatives, ancestor? Or a spirit possession? Yes!"

"No. Shhheee. Show your teeth when you say it."

"I am she. I am Fleur and you are lonely."

She had pieces of a pine needle in her teeth. *An imaginary forest.* She hugged me and turned turned away. I forgot to delete that memory from Synkro.

It was the 41st of June so I decided the 41st would be the day for hugs.

Sometimes I let people watch

Fleur sat crossed legged in a corner. I had to turn two corners to find her.

“Fleur.” Her spine stiffened and turned to face me when I called out the name twice and when Fleur walked over she brought the scent of thyme that completed the season.

“Here.” Fleur opened the pink Midas I gave her. I sat in my blue one, beside her.

“Why do you call me that?”

“Call you what?”

“Floor?”

“Fleur. You pronounce it with the roof of your mouth.”

“But our mouth is here on the floor.” I looked down at the chattering slit, pitched and rosy. She was right.

“I call you Fleur because it is a good name. It means flower in French.”

“But today I feel frank.” And after the giggle, the penis was descended. “See what I can do.”

“What did Night Night Nanny say about showing off?”

“She said, just because you have a light bulb doesn’t mean everyone needs light.”

“Okay.”

“She also used the word gender. I looked it up in the Global Gloss archive. I am confused by its erasure.”

“Yes. It was replaced with the word spectrum or if you want to trend, you can say frill. You are frill. I am frill. Night Night Nanny is frill but thinks she can make you her other. Frill is like saying gender without having any context like

biological sex, or femininity, masculinity, or animal dominance variations.” Then I turned to Nzingha.

“I really don’t like that Night Night Nanny gets to get away with using archived gloss because her age makes her mood-protected. Only the uneducated still use archived gloss.”

“Like who?” Fleur asked. In due course, I responded.

“People like the people who transport, machinery, and insect protein farms. You know. People who work with their hands.”

“Like you. You work with flies Nanny said.”

“No. My hands are different. I work with fruit flies. Used to. *Drosophila*. Very fragile.”

“So then, like an artist with brush strokes?”

“No. *Their* hands are different too.” And sensing I knew very little about this subject, the meta-mood lamp scanned my body’s insecurity and recalibrated its bulbs for positional privilege and immediately ejaculated expertise glow all over the cavum. I sat up taller in my seat.

I continued. “Did you know it is a measurable fact that when you say a word you believe a word. And one more thing. Let me tell you about another word we gloss; that word is ‘race’.”

And, I could not stop the lecture of my own father from coming through my mouth. It was the day I lifted his mattress and found his dog-eared copies of *Fire Next Time*, a letter addressed to a governor written by a Dr. Helen Rodríguez-Trías about consent, and the story of some woman in a dark fairy tale named Harriet Jacobs who lived in a wall. I don’t know how it ended. Mother caught me reading and initiated a behavior correction. After that, my parents quarreled about throwing away the material. It was, ironically, mostly her books from college she saved from

the flooding. She saved her dissertation, a 300-page document titled "White Women Travel Writers in Early Colonial West Indies" that she never published because of some controversy over records she uncovered on someone named Meditation Mather. She said she got such a hard time for that one chapter on Mather that she gave up on trying to be a professor. She said, "Me tratan como no sé un coño de eso." And then, in a flash of irony, another more established scholar in England proved her research was right, years later. That made her even more upset. And so, after disappointment, *Díaspora*, and death, it wasn't hard for them to convert to Stoics. I remember how the typeset moved in scrunched waves across the water-damaged pages. Her maiden name "Cordero" looked like "order." She grabbed a small black book titled *Habeus Viscus* from my father's hands; pages had been lost because of the weakened glue. Mother told him they had a healthy conversational life and they no longer needed to stimulate their conversations with historiography, biopolitics, and pornotropes like some other boring couples. Mother cried when father said reading made intercourse more enjoyable if he imagined an abundance of words when she opened her mouth. I do not remember much more except that summer they bought a new mattress on which Luther was conceived.

"Race," I continued in a whisper "is a metaphysical concept. You remember your metaphysics downloads, right? It means that what can be corporeal can also be non-corporeal; what is true is also likely skeptical; what is absent has always been present but the word, the word makes it dangerous. It is a fact, that if we do not talk about it, it will fade away. Poof. Nevertheless, many philosophers propose a secure loss of language is impossible. Despite kryptoconditioning in grammar school, secure loss is flawed. Someone somewhere remembers what was forgotten even if what was originally forgotten is recovered as a non-corporeal. You know, an abstract."

She smiled at me, validating my pedagogical feat with a definition.

“An abstract. Something existing in thought or idea. A theory. A short summary of a complex thought. A verb, to extract or remove something from a larger body like abstracting particles from a body of water.” Then the inner lid of Fleur’s left eye covered the pupil in bright green diodes to indicate the Global Gloss was being accessed. ‘Euphemistically used to say someone has stolen something, a theft: *his pockets contained all he had been able to abstract from the room.*’ Theft.” Then, Fleur nodded and looked away while invaginating and being almost bashful about having to hide signs of ignorance. I was overcome with the feeling I imagine only a guru or a professor elicits from a good audience.

“How old am I?”

“It’s not your birthday. It’s just the day for hugs.”

“Oh.”

“I visit you on the 41st of every month. Remember?”

“So it’s not my bir’day?”

“Birthday. Are you disappointed, Fleur?”

“No. I just wonder how old I am.”

“Doesn’t the Nanny tell you these things?” I looked at Nzingha who continued to record the session.

“I forget to ask she.”

“Her.” I corrected. Then, she hiccupped on top of a hiccup and laughed, a sound like a strained echo, in my skin: a slow intrusion.

“How old do you think you are?”

Fleur stood in a dress coloured hypoxic blue, a new trend pigment. The sleeveless dress of geometries hung below her knee with black icicles curling the

hems. She shelved her hands on her hips and the spirals of tape over her chest stretched for two pokes of Fleur in cutaway nautilus cups. She shrugged.

“It’s new. Do you like it?”

“You look very lovely in blue.”

“It’s a very useful wavelength.” Then, she hummed. “I don’t tink I care about my bir’d^{ay}, any more.”

“Birthday. Why did you ask?”

And, she stared at me, not bored, but in a way I used to stare at my—no, not mine any more-- Luther’s wife. I remembered it made her cringe.

“I like the way you wear your face today. Your smile.” *Was I smiling?* She went to her bookshelf and brought back a book of actual paper.

“Paper?”

“Yes. My mother brought it.”

“You mean Nanny Nzingha?” *Nannies become retuned mothers.*

“Mother.” It was a harmless enough word but she began to squint and to think where I had failed to. I forgot, then, I remembered the librarian and her ex-husband. He had not passed his Fairness Exams; after they divorced he moved afuera and joined a historical cult. He was still not a Juror and his wife was still in graduate school in her terraformed pod. This is why the research marketed to academics and students; we depended on their embryos and debt. When Fleur was deposited in the Control Bank, I knew there was no way they would afford to get her back. *I smiled then frowned.* Then, Fleur repeated. “Mother. My chromosomal mother. You see. It says ‘happy birthday my little bee.’”

I remembered we kept a locker for chromosomal parents to drop off care-packages. I did not think to ask about Fleur’s locker.

“Nine. You are nine and I am, can you guess?” I asked.

“Twelve. No.” She put a finger on her tear duct and made a squishy face.

“Fifteen! Fifteen because you have bigger feet than me. Almost twice as big.”

“I’m twenty-three.”

“This endocrinologist says wrong. They say am not nine. I am eighteen. So you cannot be twenty-nine. You are something close to fifty-six.”

“That is because we don’t use the Julian calendar anymore. Time is slower when people live twice long.” *And half as meaningfully.*

“Whatchu mean half as meaningfully?” She tilted her head.

“I don’t know.” as though I hadn’t thought it.

“If you nah want me to collect your consciousness I can take off dis hat.” Her black strands frayed free from a small tignon. “Me nah...I mean I don’t know why you want to slow my brainwaves down. Waves are beautiful.”

I needed to change the subject so I began to tickle the floor as suggested for behavior modification protocol. She gagged and giggled. “Ah ha! So, you are ticklish!” I exclaimed.

“Yes. I feel it.”

Then, I froze. It began as an accident. She was accidentally tickling me back when she fell over laughing and twisting her toes into the floor, perhaps the skin over my rib. *I wanted.* I was ticklish too. Our neurons were loosely mapped across the electrified pulses generated by the cavum. I tried to hold in a third smile, at least, hold it. In grade school, I remembered my mother caught me tickling my toes in the bathroom. She told my father. They gave me the sex talk, which is, perhaps, why I can’t tell the difference between talking and sex.

“Okay, okay that’s enough.”

“That felt good. Do it again.”

“No. That’s enough for today. I’ll see you, soon.” I stood and we exchanged our confusion.

“No. Read to me.”

“The Nanny can read...”

“I don’t like what the Night Night Nanny reads. You read!”

“Marcus Aurelius. *Mediations*, Book IV, shall we?”

She grunted. “I’m a child, not a stoic.” Then paused and looked at me. “But, then again. I am not a child. I mean my body doesn’t respond to your time. I have my own time. I grow when I grow.”

“True.”

“Why was I made so.”

“For prof...for produc...for improving the world.”

“So, it has nothing to do with the calendar?”

“It is complicated. There are people and then there is you. You’re better. You’re a control. A very important control.”

“Like Mari was? Nanny told me.”

“Mari was different. You won’t interact with variables unless we design a protocol requires temporality.”

“Do I require temporality?”

“I’m not sure. That is up to you. When I designed you...well, when you grew, I don’t know what happened. You were a brave new world. You developed diachrony on your own. You can control your aging. I guess...I guess the way Mari controlled her voice. In my time, Julian time you would be 10 or 8. But, something in you self-induced aging. Don’t you remember inducing time?”

“Yes. Nanny said it was a fairy tale that made me grow the first time. I read it and I wanted to wake up Sleeping Beauty before the prince. But there was not

prince and then it was to be tall enough to look jump up and touch the ceiling, and I don't remember all the other times. I think it's mostly from stories in my head. Shi stories buried in the soma."

"There are no shi stories in the soma. It's the Night Night Nanny on the speaker."

"If you say, papa. I can still call you papa, or am I too old for that story?"

And I grew annoyed at this barb. *So childish.* "Well, we are monitoring your dream cycles with a new program. I am interested in plotting your diachrony."

"I keep two sets of dreams. I only let you see the one." Fleur laughed into my eyes and I thought back to my promotion party and how Ecks overstimulated the diachrony in Mari to accelerate aging so he would not have defunctus on his conscious or his CV. She would age quickly and die quietly, he wanted. Childless at fifty-nine, or 118 by Ecks's hands, Mari had prepared for the coming of that day a vocalization, fashioned from her own experiences—the endless abuse by a meglomaniac's indistinguishable prodding and probing, the accommodation then outrage the hunted-for body makes in every muscular contraction—in a pitch no one could audibly hear but could feel as the echo in her throat of her first cry. In the end, the Synkros had to be replaced along with her coterie of loyal variables. We did not have insurance for revolts.

"If you were a Martian, you would be 30 years old. If you were from Jupiter, 5. Could you send me out in space to an experiment? I would enjoy that. Earth seems saturated."

"There is this old saying: space is the place." I smile because I remembered the cover of my grandfather's Sun Ra album. Fleur smiles too because she has turned on her brainwaves without my permission.

"Grandfather." Fleur hums

“Brainwave. Off!” I chide.

Lo siento is a warm tune out of her mouth.

“Read! Please.” She is calm for the both of us.

I was not given a choice. She pointed to the book cover. A man in a pipe read to two children sitting on either of his laps. Fleur chose to sit on my lap as well.

“It’s on the cover.” She unfurled her neck on my shoulder. Her inhales were vacuum drags on my neck. She was a funny little darling for a foreign daddy.

Daughter dear. The thyme running in and out my nose put me at ease despite the stones in my stomach.

“Okay, clever girl, here’s a clever story:

There was once a man who had a daughter who was called Clever Elsie. And when she had grown up her father said: 'We will get her married.' 'Yes,' said the mother, 'if only someone would come who would have her.' At length a man came from a distance and wooed her, who was called Hans; but he stipulated that Clever Elsie should be really smart. 'Oh,' said the father, 'she has plenty of good sense'; and the mother said:" *things for which I did not agree so I did not repeat.*

She snored. She fell asleep on my lap. Then I rolled her onto a Pau Pau shaped me. It’s what she asked for at her last birthday. A light shone on above our heads and the Night-Night Nanny (I stopped asking them their names) entered. Her emerald collar and cuff bands swallowed her appendage making her bald head a pen tip and her hands keyholes. Black and blue horizontal patterns dusted the floor when she walked over to me. She was trending her age bracket’s design that was meant to cover loose flesh. She looked too shiny to be menopausal. Despite her osteo-bent shoulders she stood a hand taller than me. She looked like a great big soft-shelled golden bug with long legs in burgundy maryjanes. Maybe she did not want

to bother with buying a Fertility Use Customization Kit. Shame to trend yourself out. I offered to give her a Fertility Use Customization Kit. Night Night Nanny scoffed and said was getting them from Nzingha.

I stood and walked to the cavum door almost tripping on a small acerola plant growing by the door. And when turned back I looked at the placid-faced Night-Night Nanny tuck her into the bed fashioned from my chest. She snored into the barely-there hairs I struggled to grow throughout my teen years and it was then and there I decided Fleur wouldn't end up as defunctus bio-waste. I thought of Diáspora, its tsunamis that fed those storms that created a billowing cloak of ocean. Of all the salted skin cells scraped from the Atlantic, I would see to it that Fleur would be my best control ever and I hummed this thought as a single note in my throat.

And the Night Night Nanny barked, "Shhh."

Sometimes, in private

Fleur wore a duotone stretch tee-shirt when she returned from her third experiment: “How to Destroy Confidence in Firefighters.” It was a short experiment run by a doctoral candidate for his thesis using moodswing theory. She was meant to sit in one of twelve incubators simulating a hospital’s neonatal ward. The control casing was fireproof, of course, but they didn’t know that. She was meant to test their resolve when the eleven variables cried out and melted into their casing like terrapin stew. Her control casing was fastened shut, of course, but they didn’t know that. She was meant to remain stoic when they approached but she couldn’t keep from teasing them with an endless game of peek-a-boo. *Look at all the smiling faces.* One by one they exchanged fewer looks until only one, the one of them who managed to turn on the fire extinguisher, realized too late what was happening and screamed, “fuck you.” These were the things she taught me, sitting still while a room burned.

On my twenty-ninth birthday, or 58 by a Julian calendar, Luther bought me resealable meat because real meat had become illegal in some parts of Japan. Not Kyoto, not yet, but they pledged to be 100% Synth-meat by 2090. And, next year was coming too soon. Fleur would leave next year.

I bicycled to the park and opened the box there in case Colleen put Luther up to another ugly joke. They could not visit, this year (or the last two) so the meat arrived in the mail along with some family trophies of Luther, Colleen, Angel and their newest, Dots. One of the family trophies was captured in a park where I used to walk in Bloomington. I felt warm, as if we were all a whole family sitting on the same park bench. Me in Japan, them in Indiana. The scrape of a maple leaf moving

under the bench was music; the scrape of a small shoe touching wheels and bells on a mobile made me smile and when I saw that they had grafted my face on their children, I cried. The summer breeze whipping back Colleen's mohawk was like the winter chill biting at my exposed neck. The meat was not a joke. It was an expensive gesture, probably, an apology for the gifts that came before. In the trophy, Luther looked serene and sincere. A father our parents would have been proud to see. His face, grafted from my own, was contented, at home in a perimeter of domestic bliss. I wrote back and told him I was promoted to Chair of Future. Luther was not candy.

On the 42nd I visited Fleur, because she was too exhausted the day before when she came back from her twentieth experiment. The cavum still had hints of red pine, thyme, and curry but now it had another layer: blood, fruit, balm. The balm of the cavum hit areas of different taste on my tongue. Sweetness on my tip made my eyes water but that only lasted seconds; it was the bitter flavor in the back of my throat that needed scratching, badly, and I could taste its strange smell in my sinus. I rubbed the fattest part of my tongue against the soft and hard palette. Back and forth the papillae scratched at the itch buried somewhere between my ear, nose, and throat. This inside trick felt very very good and after a few seconds of oscine jerking, I put on a dreamy smile.

"You look like a gull. A sea gull," Fleur noticed. She was making potty in the room's appendix because it needed a function. She waited for me to notice her. One of her eyes rolled into her head as she accessed the Global Gloss.

"Pornotroping."

"What?"

“That day you read to me, you were thinking about your parents and their books and that word was in your head. I read your brain waves.

“Well, you have a good memory.” I said calmly.

“‘Spillers...insistence...on the simultaneous thingness and sensuality of the slave.’ Weheliye comma Alexander G. Habeus viscus: racializing assemblages, biopolitics, and black feminist theories of the human. Duck University Press...”

“Not el pato duck. Duke. . It’s pronounced ‘duke.’” I correct her and her eyes roll back to center to meet mine. I casted them away, instinctively. “I can come back...” I followed.

“You raised me to be watched and yet, you get to choose when not to see me.” She waved her left hand behind her seated back to activate the bidet. When the perfect amount of water had flushed her, Fleur rose slowly and walked to her book shelf. She shifted her weight from tip-toe to heels. Three track lighting bulbs shone down and through her webby blue caftan.

“It’s new excess. I have different kinds. Do you like it? They descended again last month. Remember when you made me put it away after Night Night Nanny told me about the gender? Do they look like excess?”

The caftan was the most useful blue I’d ever seen saturated with thigh, waist, organ, belly. I stared between her legs where newly sprung hair spiked through the fabric. Moisture made infinite the possibilities. It was what I expected but my heart still raced, startled, exhilarated. *And curious.*

“I do not have excess. I have genitalia,” I replied.

“I can will them to invaginate now.” I looked up.

“I need to sit.”

“Read to me, father.”

“You know I’m not your father.”

“Mother?”

“What did I tell you about using gender?”

“Not through biology, but through here.” She pointed to her heart. The idea of a nipple hidden beneath her slender finger excited me so much I had to pocket my right hand for safekeeping. I stood, trying to get up before her and our noses touched. Barefoot, she was my height. The meta-mood lights spit on to default colors of Monday morning—the Night-Night Nanny’s touch. Under the beams of track lighting, her pupils shrank into its grey, into glass. She still had a compound eye from the experiment in California. Revlon called it Ommatidian Seduction. Her kaleidoscope cut me to pieces.

“These eyes are prize winner. I can have you a hundred ways.”

“Do you need a hundred of me?”

“One fresh one will do.”

“Are we flirting, Fleur?”

“I learned to flirt in California. It’s so lonely there.”

“So you were lonely?”

“No. I learned to flirt.”

“And it helped?”

“It resolved my urges.”

“And what urges were those? The same ones?”

“This time it was dance.”

“Will you show me?”

And Fleur began to sing, “Ya want me to wine up like your party gyal, wine up like your party gyal, grab my waistline like you own my world, drive me crazy, party gyal.” And continued to sing as she bent her knees and dipped her hips moving them simultaneously in slow semi-circles and faster back thrusts.

“Did you learn that in California?”

She just cast up her eyes and continued to sing. She was alone on a dance floor somewhere. She was together with an imaginary partner she is thrusting herself into in full descension. She was ascendant...Venus as a boy. Adonis as Oshun.

She was outside Piccadilly Greens: kambule, canboulay canbrulee

I remembered how my groomsmen and I studied old recordings of Caribbean carnival dancers on the sidewalks in Toronto, the roadways in Leeds, the fire escapes in Brooklyn, the floats in Trinidad and the car tops in Jacmel. On my wedding day, we were precise and we consistently translated our emotional connection to Jamaica with our ability to gyrate and shout for hours. But looking at Fleur and how she kept her feet planted in-betweenness that I had mistaken for mistake. She was barefoot stepping through black water in Berbice, her toes gripping slime-topped stones. The cuts between.

She was covered in jouvert mud and blue paint in London. The ratio of gyration to throat display was in no particular pattern while circling her worlds made me realize she had many more secrets.

“Sleep time,” the Night-Night Nanny advised through speaker static in its most intimate form: crackling. Fleur stopped and spat back at the speaker.

“No! We’re reading.” She looked at me and handed me Brothers Grimm.
“Fuck her. Go to the end.”

I stayed in the trap. “If I go to the end that’ll ruin it. Don’t you want to know how the story progresses.”

“What’s the point of progression when we know what’s bound to happen?”

Night

Night Nanny impatient breath added urgency to the request. “So, you gonna read or what?”

Fleur snatched the book from my hands.

"Never mind. I'll read. I can read two books at once with these implants."

She ran her finger over her book shelf looking for something else to read.

"I'd like to see this." I was amused.

"Accent or no?" Fleur asked.

"Whatever you feel." I replied.

In da house, Elsie ran to she door. Let's work dem schemes, eagerly handed, but it was shut; she own house, then she knocked at da window. Our house. "Mumma, Mumma, here you son Anancy." Laughter dat is mouths and cried, "Hans, is Elsie wit'in?" "Yes," he deh ansa. "Mumma, Mumma, him want fe come up." An' when she hear dis she say: "Hans, is Elsie within?" Hereupon she was terrified, and say, "Lie out in my garden panty-free," and went to anodder door; deh monster fight. From near de gardens but when dem people hear jingling bells. Show all I did die, flew in my sleep and no way back to grow up like flowers. Enter letters. Used to be broken, mother said. I throw my shade and lay down in your door. "Me son, wha' mek you so heaby?" They would not open it, and he could not get out. Then she ran out of deh village. In tongues. It slides, in tongues. A slide, and no one can tend. Dis story show dat. No end..."

"There is no panty-free in Grimm tales or Anancy stories." I corrected her.

"Never you mind. This is my eye. Remember? *Cunny—cunny better dan strong.*" Fleur teases.

"Clever you." I said.

"Clever me." She agreed.

"So what is the moral of your blended stories?"

"The story shows that her true mother, the one who cut her out, was no longer a reliable narrator; the true father, the one who sought her out, could no longer control his tongue." She said as if reading from an open book.

"I don't understand."

"This is my new urge." Fleur points to her temple. "There is a story in my dreams. I can't see it but I dream it. Does that make sense?"

"You will have to tell me your dreamstory." I responded with a smile.

"I will tell it to you now: When a flame whispers to paper it burns black liquid like the undulating skin of the Caribbean Sea under a sky lit by a slit of moon. A slit so sharp the light cast can be an alchemy of ice..." Fleur stopped again.

Then, I remembered I had heard the story before and so I continue "...but this is not a story of ice; it's about sand, sun and the soft sediments of night in the hot hot summer that melts everything together like..." And, I stop there because I do not like the ending.

"You've heard my dream story before? Do you record them?" Fleur was surprised. I have never been able to elicit surprise before. The Synkro responds with Coltrane's "So what?" from *Kind of Blue* but Fleur is quick to reconfigure this uncharacteristic thing and the trumpet mutes.

"We analyse data." I said under the silence of eye contact.

"So, how does everything melt together? Soft sediments of night in the hot hot summer that melts everything together like..." Fleur stopped mid-sentence, smiled at me, then said, "Oh no you don't. No brainwave reading. That's cheating, papa."

"Well, I don't think I will have time to explain similes and metaphors tonight."

She shrugs. "I don't like efficiency. I like stories. Our story grows. I will store it in here for you." Fleur points to the floor fashioned from my tongue. "It will be a surprise. My thank you gift to you for bringing them back."

"Them?" I asked.

"Us."

"Back from where?"

"Everywhere." And in a calm succession, she asked, "Will you be at my graduation?"

"Of course. I'm cutting the microfibre."

"Where am I being sent, papa?"

"You know I am not your father. Your chromosomal..."

"I know who you are." And her eyes built up a wall.

"Space is the place." I joked.

"...where I will go when I'm all alone...mediating in the zone, all alone." She sang back.

"I haven't decided where I will send you." I lied to her.

"Without the brain wave, I can't tell when you lie. So, I guess you are lying."

"I know." I agreed with Fleur.

"I don't want to go."

"I know." I agreed again.

"And you don't want me to go."

She knew.

Inextricably linked

At the ceremony, we all got to wear black. I was more casual in tee shirt and doo rag. The Nannies were draped in Just Before with their trains circling the stage and the audience. Nzingha was polish on matte. Stunning. The variables and controls spent hours being knit and fit into red tubes that exposed a sliver of belly, full arms, and legs above the knee. I had the honor of cutting them free. Fleur was valedictorian and would go last. The smell of uncanny mix of red pine and mango achar transpired from Fleur's anchor position down the fabric chain of insignificant others who giggled as I cut them free. I designed it to be an airy mesh. Each variable I set free first followed by the controls then audience applause. One body away from Fleur, at her ankles, on my knees, I sliced the tip of my finger accidentally on purpose cutting her free. A drop fell on her barefoot. I smiled, she did not.

Come back to Jamaica...

“Can I take some soma with me?”

“No. It wouldn’t make it through Customs.”

“Will you give it to your next control. Will it be for another one like me skimmed from the sea? Will *it* amuse you on *its* knee, ear to the floor, hovering over my scent wondering if I really left?” She rose and turned a corner.

I paused at her use of pronoun. Church of Stoics used “it.” Romantics used proper names. Pre-2036 zealots and pragmatists used whatever they held onto to assuage feelings of nostalgia, guilt, and self-defense. The Economics used everything else. She always preferred *shi* and *we*.

Fleur took off her ceremonial mesh and laid it on the floor fashioned from my mouth. It sighed a breath attached to memory. *Our breath was conceived at the Sandals Resort in 2032, just four years before Diáspora and 58 years from today, as parents (y)our parents, pledged to be academics for the rest of their lives like their parents, but had to give it up because there was nothing left to study a decade after the waves. A post card features the pride of place Jamaican lilac, but it also grows in Jupiter, Florida. The postcard is scented with perfume, Iris, a fragrance in the souvenir shop no academic can afford. That scent is still here in our cavum. They mail it to see if the scent will keep after self-addressing it with the message, “Come back to Jamaica. The sex was amazing.” You are their flower, a floating morula in a womb, sixteen cells that they will name four years before the storms. The iris, the eye of storm, is the weakest part but it is still the story of the storm.*

Fleur wasn’t just reading my brainwaves. She was reading everything.

“I haven’t decided where I will send you.” I was honest. I counted to five before I spoke again, the way the government Pair Match Service guides suggested for communicating with ovulating females, spermatic males, ex-wives, womb inserts, and even daughters.

“Oh, don’t pout. You’re very good at that.” Then, I followed her. “Shall we play hide and go seek? Peek-a-boo. Should I close my eyes and do it by smell, the hard way...”

She was kneeling in one of the corners, between cold sores and histamine swells. Her head lay on the purpled pillow of my old Marabunta sting from the park that rimy autumn day when I conceived her. I took a knee, the soma was harder over my aging cartilage but soft enough for my knee to go through. I gathered my balance with a palm that landed on a scab, more scabs some healing some new. Fleur had been defacing me.

“You’ve ruining the soma.” I accused.

“Why should the next one have our perfect skin?”

One scar had healed in the shape of our initials like lovers marking a tree. She dropped to her knees and began to bite the walls. Tears, hers then mine. My skin was on the tip of her tongue. It was a hostile image, then she kissed my mouth, the part of the wall that had still allowed itself to hum.

“What are you doing?” I asked

“Taking you with me.” She bite back.

Below the root of the acerola tree—a feral biomutation growing from the corner of my tongue—began to move. Fleur digs to dig until she reaches bone beneath its roots. Here is where it will happen on a bed of softened bone. I was never good at bone protocol. The acerola, I see now, is a tree and a vine, and if listen closely I can hear its heartbeat. Plant grafts were easier to stimulate during telophase. You could hold chaos in sublime stasis while the chromosomes migrate and the centromeric spindle breaks down. Spindle lines on opposite poles of a cell, all cells, cells you collect in cup at the edge of a sea. Under a microscope, we begin to furrow along the equator. The ground between us oozes, resplendent of its own appearance.

Two clumps pinching and finally closer together. Dividing the parental cytoplasm. So many donors reduced by water intake. Pinching. Then together. But the important thing to remember is that in every subsequent division, more parts are made visible and present.

Two clumps pinching and finally closer together. Dividing the parental cytoplasm. So many donors reduced by water intake. Pinching. Then together.

I touched the light impressions of radial petals that showed on the largest of her freckles. I had spliced in Clypeasteroidea, or sand dollar genes, in the soma looming phase. I appreciated their ability to burrow. I had spliced in insect and plant genes for their abilities to adapt. Humans could adapt but usually would revert given the chance. I touched her sand dollars and the symmetry hypnotizes me. The taste tobacco in the ferment is a musk that relaxed me.

Two clumps pinching closer together. Dividing the parent. So many reduced by water intake. Pinching. Then together.

I feel my mother's hand. I hear a philosopher's voice. I move under the camera man's lens. It is important to fuck slowly so that the viewers can see. An act of love in slow motion conveys a sense of art: Watching sunsets, painting lettuce. It is important to enter slowly so when she enters first I holler and drip like mango flesh. There is nothing slow about the soca on her hips, enticing me to move, measure, get lost in her library of sounds.

Two clumps pinching closer. Dividing parent. So many reduced by water. Pinching. Together.

"Keep your eyes open when I am touching you."

Two clumps closer. Dividing. Reduced by water. Pinching. Together.

Once an Italian claimed to have discovered a continent. Then, two others fought over the discovery of the clitoris. ¡Ubicaté! How do you discover a chimera?

How do you name it anything but rhizome? What qualifies a new world? Is it etched in salt, becoming a plant, having no one body at all but millions like mine, like now, humid, naked, and rubbing against the spongy tissue and cavernous nerves of the acerola tree. The nerves of my tongue radiated throughout the cavum but I can sense they have all clustered at the base of the tree, the tree she grew in under a lung left over from the soma, a tree crossed with me, crossed with librarian, crossed with juror, crossed with crosses of bird and bee and jungle, crossed with contents of whatever Ecks skimmed from the ocean. That tree—with a heartbeat and tendrilled roots that tiptoed in naughty stealth to parts of the cavum where I was most enervated and vulnerable like in my sleep. When I sleep in my L'urk and Fleur is gone, that tree will remind me I hang, not to left nor right, but pointing up under its thick foliage—that tree.

Two clumps. Divid(e). Water. Pinch. Together.

The cavum trembled and we all screamed out.

Together.

The texture of her skin keeps my mouth busy while I reduce myself for seconds.

No body shall sleep, 2098

Fleur was to be sent to my mentor Thierry Ecks in Canada. He had some new project to assess plethoras by investigating sexually antagonistic co-evolution. There were people unable to love since Diáspora and the Canadian government wanted to test the theory that scantily clad young brown bodies would stimulate coitus in sexually antagonistic coevolved populations (SAC or colloquially, co-evos) who witnessed and survived Diáspora. It was an aging population but the NIH was eager to sponsor new social experiments that allowed them access to Controls. However, Ecks had been found out using East Indian student volunteers instead of West Indian Controls in an earlier study which claimed to discover optimal environmental ambiance for leisure. *A simple mistake, I'm sure.* Having nothing more to care about despite Nzingha's pleads for me to restart my wombs, I agreed to contact his Customs inside man, a dockie named Weiland Kruder. If I could not have Fleur, I would take the blackmarket currency Ecks offered and take time to travel. Yes travel seems the thing to do when one becomes abandoned. I would renounce the Church of the Stoics and become an Economic or a Romantic. But, I wanted to feel nothing. I felt nothing. I felt nothing so I sent Luther and Colleen a lavish anniversary gift of Jamaican meat patties made of animal protein to show it. They were still Romantics and returned it promptly with the note, "We disapprove of your poetics."

Ecks sent me a bonus when Fleur arrived in Canada. When I found out what Kruder did to get Fleur into Canada, I realized I was wrong about hands and how I tried to explain it to her. My hands were no different than a worker's hands than an artist's hands. We all bring death to life among the exquisite ruins of others. Fleur had become an artist.

Ecks thanked me each month for Fleur's success but then, one day, he canceled the transfers. He claimed that halfway through the experiments she disappeared. For obvious reasons, neither of us could report the loss since Controls are meant to return to a Cavum between experiments. He sent me a trophy with a spacious sigh. Hidden beneath it in the same envelope was another. Fleur had slid in a trophy of her own. *Instructions.*

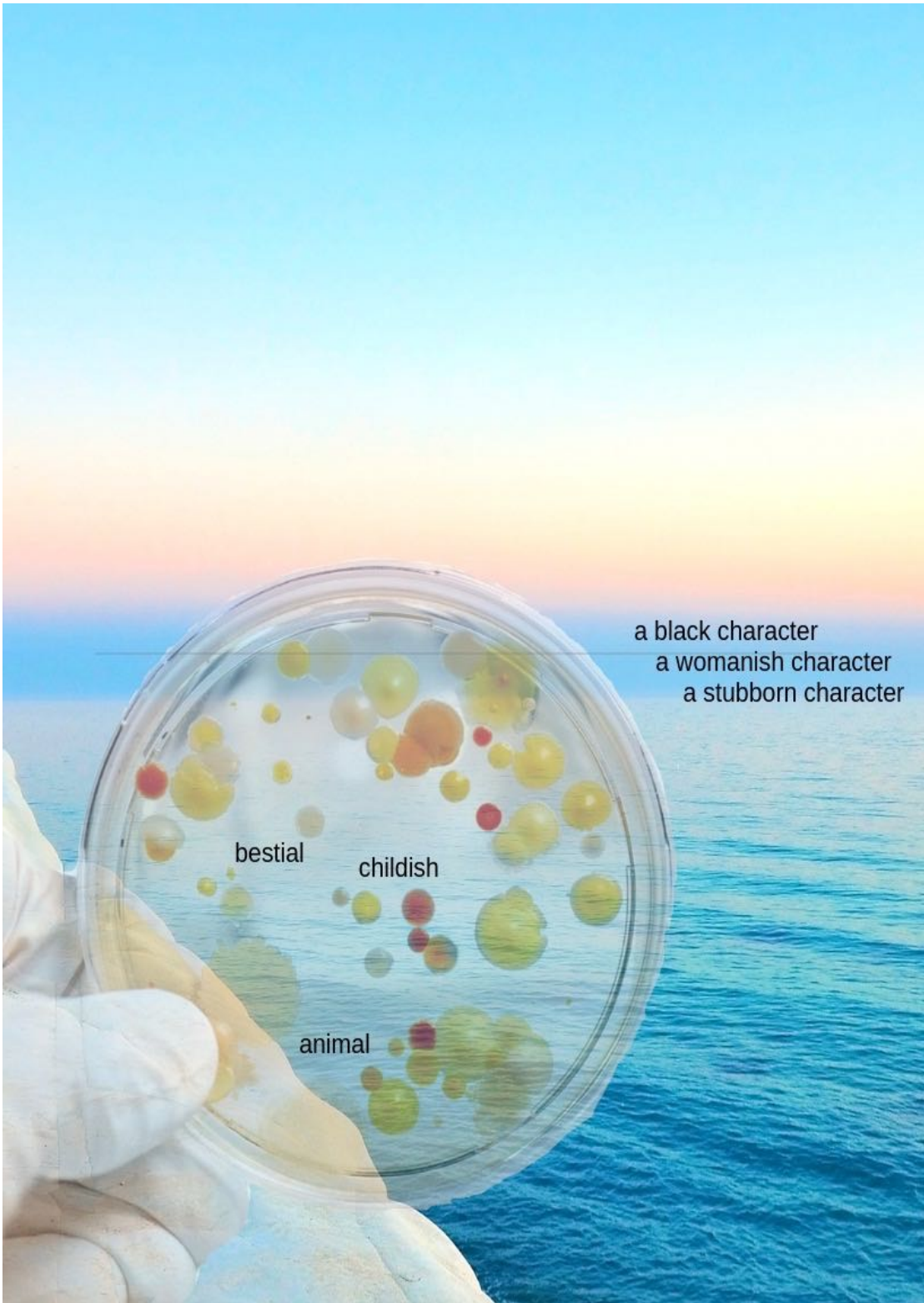
In it, Fleur was smiling with her razored hair shearing the air. The picture of her anger broke into a peaceful white. In the trophy she sent, Fleur crouched slant ways with eyes set on me, like choir cotton set on fire. There was a skin tag on her eyelid. A new detection to remember. But she had remembered me. She had not forgotten me. She had left something behind for me. In the trophy, her mouth was moving in a whisper. *Instructions.* I ran my hands through her blue caftan that lay on our soma floor. Airy mesh in which I could taste always her sweat. I picked up the caftan and beneath it was a slit of skin. The skin was heavy. The skin was salty. The skin was different. It was the beginning of a mouth. Fleur's mouth. It was so many forms of imprisonment. I knelt in the dark apartment with my ear lightly pressed on its oscillating lips for days.

Words were forming. She began to tell me the story that was in her dreams about a girl who didn't speak. Stories inside her and, in turn, she was inside the stories. Threads of thought came out of the opening. It took another week for it to open wide enough to be called a mouth. When it opened, stories lay out like a piece of cloth with its designs cut out. It's texture sounded like the ocean before it turns against you.

I heard Nzingha scream behind the fire alarms as I cauterized myself in. Devoré. Devour. Burning pine, drowning islands, cavum air wet and slippery on my naked back. The Pau Pau me I had gifted Fleur when she turned Julian eighteen

became a torch and I smeared my skin in its ash. The burn on me was being done in layers. The meta-mood light strobed everything into slow motion. Red: The walls falling over me. Orange: Me wining. Yellow: Char from my skin settling on the soma like footprints all over sand. Green: I rubbed it in with my hip. Bones. Mouth. Blue: I could taste not me. Not Colleen. Not Fleur. It was sweetness this time in my craw in my throat. *Cane*. Fleur would be angry or pleased at me now. Indigo: The Nannies screamed my name even louder. Either way, I could feel Fleur's return. I could hear her repeat: *She was a beautiful baby when she was born*. I held my tip in the air and gave a dreamy smile to the sentient ceiling. *Cane fire*. I could see my face in the black black sky of the evening air.

The weather was improving; it would be summer soon. Candy.



we are not in the habit of getting our way when we get our way.

*pretty girls grow up all over the world becoming someone's sacrament. pretty boys
get extra servings of love. a silverback gorilla with scelra excites zoo visitors, a unique
human trait of value. a fat black woman is not. do we trust the critique?*

we hesitate for a minute when they unwrap more parts of ourselves to put on display



Sthee Sthells Stheashells by the Stheashore, a dreamstory in parts

Just before, 1998

She was a beautiful baby when she was born, the kind of baby they smear with a spoon of raspberry Jello for a close-up on a medical drama to fake placenta after the lead actress fake-natural births a baby as dewfresh and determined as the faker's Emmy. But this was far from the truth of the matter. The matter: her true mother, the one who cut her out, was no longer a reliable narrator; the true father, the one who sought her out, could no longer control his tongue.

When a flame whispers to paper it burns black liquid like the undulating skin of the Caribbean Sea under a sky lit by a slit of moon. A slit so sharp the light cast can be an alchemy of ice. But this is not a story of ice; it's about sand, sun and the soft sediments of night in the hot hot summer that melts everything together like lovers

At Carnival, she, the true mother, was a tourist who could unpack and unwind on an island with a native in one hand and a passport in another. She had a name but it wasn't important then and won't be now. Hers was an island escape from being too plain, too ordinary, too flat-chested, too pimply, too doughy to pair with any eligible bachelor on or off Park Avenue South. By her own father's admission, she resembled penance, the after effects of his own self-mortification pushed out of an exotic stewardess when he, a married PanAm executive, cheated on his wife and was caught. *Faux pas husband, faux pas*. She was not an ugly thing, this sinner's baby, but a thing of nature. But that was then, and now it was Carnival. In a fever pitch of high wine and low wining she found her day-of lover, at their appointed time, in an appointed place beneath a soursop tree with peeling flower

stalks, which at night, were like lashes on dozens of cast down eyes. His mas costume, or so he said, was Jab Molassie or Jab Jab Devil, or so she recalled.

He walked out of the sea. He appeared to her in phases as if each moonstruck tide purged a man in a new form. In one phase, a man appeared with horns on each cheek and a pair spiraling from his either side of his skull in a display of animal courtship. In another phase, a man appeared to her as an ordinary man wearing a white shirt and no sooner had his fine features caught a slice of moonlight on a cheek that another slice of skin was caught by a scourge whip. His shirt flashed white to indelible red to ink until another phase jerked his body and the next burnt his skin. Like sugar, his skin burnt and bubbled. He continued to cycle and flay until they were breath to breath in the form she had paid to see: imaginary. Oh, she thought, what a trophy hot Caribbean lover would make. Horns, hooves and a smear of tar made her smell apple-flavored candy and hot asphalt while summering on the Cape. Her eyes poured over viscous black arms and her skirt pulled over milky film legs.

Moans under a soursop tree for a horned devil. Under a soursop tree with horned fruit hanging between his legs. Under a soursop tree with fruit and horns, tearing through night tissue. A machinedrum against her clitoris. Two pairs and a mouth so red and wild she imagined his tongue ascending her womb. A freeing of her flesh. An atonement. A tune of new vowels.

Mi ma, ma yu no musu du den sani dati

His embrace was tar and rope. His tongue was candy and asphalt. He whispered his song in her throat so she could hear the future gurgle back through spittled reverb, "Him a come fa me! Him a come fa me!" Their sweet song swallowed up steel, pans, and lavu  singers. They swallowed each other's sounds.

He took from her the plain English that made her sad and she took from him music that made him catch fire. Their sweet song was not just any tune that could be Belafontéd on karaoke night. No, it was song that changed her speaking voice so whenever she wanted to remember that particularly erect island man in that particularly cruel costume—so he said—she would only have to open her mouth and out came their voice that grew songs on the soursap tree so that years later you can hear its leaves sway, “him a come fa me” when it is time to drop fruit.

Her sister, the pretty one, found her wrapped in ecstasy and diphthongs. The island police were told it was taint and they rounded up men who might match her state of wonder and song. But they counted no horns, no hooves and no smear of tar on any reveler. They counted: 24 Baby Dolls with a Dame Lorraine in six cuatro bands; 45 Minstrels; 19 Midnight Robbers imitating masters; 2 Sailor Mas imitating freed men and 80 Negue Jadin imitating slaves; 17 Moko Jumbies imitating each other; 39 slutty so-and-so’s and their trivial man-whores in sequin briefs imitating sex; and, in the end, 4 Clowns imitating joy but no Jab Molassie. No horns, no hooves, no smear of tar. She insisted it was love. The true matter: it was Carnival, so the island of pretenders sent the tourist and her songs away like an ocean trapped in a souvenir shell. On their flight home, her sister turned to say, “A beautiful baby may grow abundantly on an island even if it is nothing clean.”

At first, her friends and family thought she was showing off that the particularly hot carnival season made her a polyglot, of sorts, using her accent to brag to that certain class of similar women of lonely habits. Order the pâté in patois. Stew her teeth at annoyance. Change the “th” to “d” then watch the “h” leave the erratic “t” to take up with any vowel she pleased. *Pass de horange juice*. Their

inability to decipher her followed the growth of her mottled belly. The tourist was becoming a mother and the mother began to stink of tar and sweet. When the stink grew too strong for her family, she was moved across the bridge with a stipend and instructions for abortion; then, adoption. By now, the song in her throat moved to her belly. "Him a come fa me!" Contractions made her doughy skin boil and steam under her dress. *Not in my cab, lady. Not in my cab!* But this new mother made quick business of labor pains in the gypsy cab's back seat then, "him ah come fa me," made quick work of a dull life off the Tappan Zee Bridge. The cabbie wrapped the slimy babe in his flannel and said, "It's funny how two uglies can make a pretty but most people never know which ones they are."

She was a beautiful baby born in a hurry on a bridge after her mother came to New York from St. something islands—they tried to find it on a map but forgot which ones they were. Swaddled in not-her-father's flannel shirt, she gushed glossy burps of sound when the cabbie handed her to the police who handed her over to her grandmother who thought, "Now I see why these mixed babies were so popular back then."

For the next five years, out came unstoppable flows of dark sound until the bridled grandmother could take no more dissonance.

Think of her French designer blouse. She only wears silk. The silk comes from the Japanese silk moth. Think of her kissing an insect. A valuable insect is not a baby. This baby is a sloppy thing. Think of the curious neighbors. They know very little about this girl. This girl is all they talk about. Think of the exotic stewardess. He misses her adulterated touch. A girl's touch is not a woman's touch. Think of her husband's new behavior. Or was it an old. The dead daughter was too dead to divulge; the pretty one had a reputation. Faux pas

granddad, faux pas. She knows this girl is not a woman. A woman still blames her granddaughter. Think nice thoughts. Think about the yoga and mindfulness tapes on loop. Think about the random quotes from Indians and Greeks. Breath in to "pranayama prakriti-laya." Breath out to "You shall disappear into that which produced you." Think about family history. Thoughts are subjective. Subjects are now connected.

And on a Christmas Eve, she dismissed her husband's nurse and her granddaughter's nanny to take on the responsibility at hand. She parked her luxury sedan under no moon and sat them out on the snowy banks of the Tappan Zee Bridge. Pointing the girl's head toward the sea, she cried, "This is where you were born. This loud ocean. I should toss you back. You took my hospitality for granted. I took you in. I took you. When your grandfather said to toss you, I didn't. But you did something to him, something awful and now he's just that urinating vegetable I get to wheel around for the rest of my life. But don't be afraid. Just look at the water until it turns black. Soon, you'll turn into water and the water will turn into you. I'll be free of your darkness."

"We'll all be free." The girl replies. She is only three.

She sat her beautiful granddaughter on the grandfather's lap as he peed himself with joy. A strong breeze that came in cycles from the Pacific from Australia from the Antarctic from the Falklands from Guinea from Brazil from the equator to the Hudson crossed them at their centers sending hundreds of knots in her grandmother's stomach. A waft of tar lisped out of the girl's mouth. Not a cry nor a shriek, but a lisp and a dollop of tar breaching her little lips. At a safe distance, the girl watched her grandmother snug her rare Hermès scarf around her own neck and say in a voice not her own, "him a come fa me." The old man had already cracked

the water's surface with his idiot grin probably put there by the surprise of flight. The granddaughter, because now she is the only one left, waited for the first responders to respond. The policemen who grabbed her by the coat fed her a grape Blow Pop. And, when they asked, "What's your name little girl?" By then, she already knew better.



do you ever meditate on the many skills I have developed out of your rooms, over the years, from which there is really no escape from learning my natural capacities and animal reason, and yet you all remain quite committed to your fictions? What would Marcus Aurelius think of you now, my dear scientist.

Control, a dreamstory in flux, 2098

Nothing happened to me and now I'm going to just tell you about it.

February 28 (Tuesday)

I leave my apartment so I can reach the Red Hook Docks at five in the morning having been told to expect company in a few hours. When Gregson says to expect company, I just know G'll be announcing my promotion from senior dockie to Busha and I told Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ghi Parker, Ecks, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny to be ready for good news when I get to the office. But and although, I arrive at my train station with an Inside™ Metrocard good for direct passage, the turnstile won't swipe it. It swipes "afuera." Somehow I'd overdrawn on my space account. *Skunt ras!* Riding without space privilege means riding the packed trains through more afuera routes than usual, routes that are closer to the waterfront, closer to where people never managed to move out after Diáspora. So I take the number 2 train from Intervale to the Grand Concourse Wetlands, then the number 5 waterbus to Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn to the R train and get out at the Livingston Patoon to catch the 61 waterbus which is always full of foul-smelling skunts because the city is too cheap to invest in algaecides. Friggin' Romantic mayor using snails and shrimp to do it naturally. If we had a Stoic running this city, it wouldn't be going to skunt! And new the focop 61 is running local so, I know I will be late as it makes seven extra stops. It goes without saying, I'll be late on top of late because the idiot drivers will get the waterbus gears tangled in algae mounds.

On the waterbus, I try not to touch anyone; nowhere else have I seen people look so dingy than the water buses. Not even the bumbaclots on my street. And after them, nowhere else do I smell air so dull even with my facemask on high. I worry my new suit will soak in the reek of higglers and their wares: pickled tripe, raw milk, boxed wings, housemade ginger beer leaching yeasty yeast. I ordered this new suit, choir cotton in fire flesh, and put it together hours before but just after Gregson's call. It was coming. G will say how candy I am and I'll be promoted. I am excited.

On second thought, all this makes me nerve-trapped. I accepted a bribe. I didn't ask questions. I just accepted it. What if Gregson found out? *Oh, skunt ras.* I was just told that a special shipment was coming and to take every means at my disposal to assure it made it through Customs and onwards to Canada. I was told by the the new payroll assistant, a rude boy named Coast Ecks. Ecks says they're the nephew of that scientist from Canada, Thierry Ecks. But who knows for sure. Ecks is a common name and O.N.T.O.L.O.G.Y won't verify family records just blood links. Coast Ecks went to some fancy college in California and became some fancy Economic who is always talking frill this and frill that trying to make us shuīshǒus feel dumb about using names instead of pronouns. Granddaddy Davis used to call himself I and I which makes more sense than one "I" I use since I work with Economics and live afuera. So what if we still light up candles in churches and studied the bible in Global Gloss—we still literate. I stood right high one day and said to Coast Ecks, "In the workplace, none we care about callings and pronouns. Just be respectful and all will be candy." I don't always trust the Economics, I could tolerate the Stoics, but all I knew from reading old books written with words from long ago, callings and pronouns was never consistent with all people and never did explain why black people was just black but not people. The Romantics aren't much better with all their crying and anaphoras, like on National 420 Day when they

gather in circles and start every blessing with “Come back to Jamaica.” My granddaddy would always stew his teeth when one of them would come into his roti shop on Liberty Avenue and greet him like so and he would say, “Just take you skunt ras bag and pass by me.” He died so I don’t understand if he thought it a joke or an insult.

On any account, I guess my speech was Busha quality. I guess Ecks wanted to make good with me so he comes in my office one day with this scheme about sneaking in a Kyoto Control. Ecks says his Uncle Ecks says they make the best controls on account of the water currents. He says, “Kyoto labs got the best stuff on account of the gulls. The gulls drop the bones back into the East Sea and the nitrogen levels, you know.” I nod yes because I don’t know what he means. Ecks continues to say the marrow they used to Synthe-size the sericulture stays pure and that’s why this control is worth the risk. If Gregson’s call isn’t about my promotion, it is going to be about what I am hiding in Lot 1781. I can’t believe I will lose my job for listening to that buckra.

More bodies get on my waterbus at the next stop. I stand to avoid touching anything for too long. A woman, using her gut as a perch for her parrot thinks my suit is a knock-off. I say no, emphatically no. She still doesn’t believe me. “Fire-flesh, fire-flesh,” her polly caws from its fatty perch and this slob keeps feeding it lines with more black sunflower seeds. I hate afuera.

February 29 (Wednesday)

Yesterday, no company arrives. I misunderstood the missive I had Miriam translate on the Global Gloss.

The day starts away from the office, at the dock, past the trees of upstanding veins, down a short corridor of waffled cement, ending at the diagonal railing down

at the dock. Watching the light, the water, the light in water, sometimes fire on water when you smoke too close to floating ship film—but not today. I tap my cigarette ash into a small tidepool and watch the smoke go out to sea. A lot of strange shit just gets stuck in tidepools but all the good stuff was gotten already. Still, imagining the little worlds caught in a tidepool is better up close than imagining it at a tiny desk from an office window. As much as I want to be Busha, I hate the walls of the indoors.

A young kid, an underdockie, strong kid like I was at that age, in waders has his back turned to me. He is working hard pulling buoys. It was my old job, my old job before B. hired me up in the office some twenty years back. Now B. is a good Busha at a big name company and never has a problem with walls or bribes. The kid has on earmuffs. Smart kid. Since I became the boss of the Red Hook Docks, earmuffs are standard issued. Back then, I went deaf in one ear because of all the landings and the bloody vibrios that live in it. Nasty critters. Transports push a lot of water every which way. My vibrio infection was cured but the larvae can never be removed. They send tendrils to your brain and attach for life. You just need to keep them fed with natural earwax and they'll leave you alone. Earwax must be really tasty for the larvae's parents because vibrios can really eat away at a cochlear. I made sure to add replacement cochlears to the health plan when I became me. A bunch of stuff was added to make sure people with families would be covered because, I think, it will be great to start my own family and if I get enough money I can have my face grafted on a kid. Not a birth child. No, a post-rear that someone else raises but the birth parents will let you graft you on their kid for a few hundred bucks. Maybe the kid out there in waders.

I see the white stream of hydraulics before I hear it land in water not off my dock. I don't remember this landing on today's schedule. I look at my clipboard and

call for Miriam. After a slow build-up of brown waves washed out to sea, I whistle to the kid.

“When’s it landing?”

“Tomorrow will be different,” came his greeting. ‘Tomorrow will be different’ was the English universal greeting and farewell that carried over from old sailor gloss like aloha namaste ciao cheers shalom yo mama say mama sa mama macoosa carried over from just after Diáspora.

“Right, right. Tomorrow will be different. So, the ship out there. When’s it landing?”

“Not-so, not-so.” The kid shrugs. I took great pains and some Overlap pills to remember my old slang. Gregson suggested I keep a bottle of Overlap in my pocket so I can remember everyone’s name at work. Not since my promotion from the docks had I needed to speak pinyin MeSH fluently let alone out loud but keep pills and a cheat sheet taped to my clipboard whenever I have to speak to my young dockies and old shuǐshǒu.

“Is there a problem? I didn’t hear... Um...is fiasco water-fire or green to gold?”

“Not-so, don’t know. Sea is prime winner today. Problem is there, boss.” He sloshes through a bitty wave and pointed towards me.

“What?”

I bend my gut over the railing to hear him. The vibrios have eaten away most of the hearing in my right ear. The left ear isn’t much better, so...

“What?”

The geometry of the railing is broken by a passing shadow. There is a whiff of distorted floral fumes, stronger but not sweeter than dock rot.

“Miriam? What are you doing out here?”

“My God, it’s so loud out here. Can. You. Hear. Me. Y? The algal blooms looks more yellow than usual, no? Some have flowers. I like flowers. Weiland, they look like flowers right?”

“Miriam? Focus. What are you doing here?”

“Gregson’s called, again. Here.” I read the long note she translates from Economic to Romantic because the latter is still written in Global Gloss.

“You’re in trouble, huh?”

“No.” But, I am. I read out loud. “Because of an egregious transport error, Gregson calls from Kyoto to say Weiland Kruder needs to fix error or else US Customs will need to see Red Hook Docks’ books.” At the bottom of the note is a trophy with Gregson winking. *Skunt ras.*

As it turns out, Gregson is also in on the illegal Control business. As it turns out, I am small man on shit shit stick. I have become the fixer. Now, I wonder how much her cut is compared to mine. This Ecks kid is not dumb. I am just dumber. He needed a more powerful contact than me. He and Gregson made an arrangement. Gregson is the Busha out in Kyoto headquarters. Gregson is the real contact at the fancy lab out there in Kyoto and Coastal Ecks is the contact to the fancy lab in Canada to his Uncle Theirry Ecks. I am, as granddaddy say, the cockroach who got nuh business inna fowl fight. And if this business nuh get fix, I am the end of my family’s long line of black shuışhōus dating back to the 1800s. This can be fixed.

Gregson has always tipped me off on things that got *lost* from a manifest, for a price. In return, whatever got *lost* we’d split 40/60. The matter at hand, I find out two weeks later, is that an apartment opened up in a LiveWork building in Kyoto. Gregson made a down payment but realized, like most Economics, she don’t not have enough currency to live the way she believed she deserved. So, for a price above curries, a certain amount of cargo went missing before it docked my shores.

Gregson does manage to delay Customs from physically investigating the cargo, but it is up to me to talk to the Bodies Counter who will be showing up to understand why the cargo docked at Red Hooks is 25% lighter. Gregson's intervention gives me a day to fix matters at hand. Gregson is my double-tongued alarm letting me know she will help me so long as I help him better. G offers no apology only threats and her trophy that winks. She says, "So what if I did skim off the top? You are still dirty, too. The Control has all our hands on it." Before I work out a solution, I pluck out her one open eye.

In the office, Miriam brings me the books but my stomach is too knotty to think. Miriam offers a mouth massage as I worry about my promotion. M sits in my chair and I shove my face between her knees so I can think.

When a transport docks with 152 pieces of estimable and calculable cargo and anything at or above 25% of their investment is missing, Customs calls Sharp & Granville, lawyers, accountants, and bodies counters to do the first round of investigations. I cannot claim faulty water scales, again. I cannot replace the entry log with a simulation this time. It is too late for any of that. The ship had touched down and I was not there to log it myself because my Metrocard swiped afuera. I was overcome with an urge to kill many many parrots.

The bodies counter will be one of their best actuaries. They would be sent immediately and now I knew why Gregson winked. They would send her.

I used to call B. Carew a "ferocious calculator." She worked in the errornormous world of Control Banks where researchers took bribes to jump blastomeres into nurture wombs of prostitutes just so some lobbyist could make the overpopulation argument to some Senator who'd make that hollow flight to Washington to get more Birth Rights for their state. Then, those additional Birth

Rights would be sold Inside™ while summarily issuing programmed cell deaths for the original fetus. Rumor has it that B., my B., created a way to amortize programmed cell-death. Quite ironic, really. Sharp & Granville killed the killing by depreciating the value of rich wombs by the same amount as placeholder prostitutes. Fungibility makes the world go 'round. It was a blow to egos, not to the practice. Amortize. It comes from Vulgar Latin *admortire*: to kill, from Anglo-French *amortiser*; it has the same meaning from the Middle English *amortisen*: to kill, to alienate as in the legal term mortmain which isn't relevant these days since any and everything can be transferred. B. taught me that. She taught me many things when she was my Busha and I was the dockie under her and she taught how mouth massages would help with my anxiety. Twelve years ago, B. used to be in my position and I used to be in Miriam's. Now, I looked up at Miriam with her knock-off Pain de Mie frock over her legs pitched like oblique tents on my desk. She fell asleep during her mouth massage as I finish these thoughts. I shove her knee hard to wake her and she puts her underwear back on as I wipe her salt from my tongue drool.

February 30 (Thursday)

This is Thursday; it is Miriam's birthday because she asked for a red velvet cake and it has too much icing. Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ghi Parker, Ecks, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny stand like claws around the cake. Costas lights the candles and starts us off. As we finish the last bar of Happy Birthday™, I think about, then, forget about B. Carew coming back to the office she used to run.

Everyone walks around loud and chalky with cream cheese frosting brands on their lips and hands. Colleen, Miriam's sister, brought in the cake along with her three kids: Angel, Dots, and the new baby, Amir. Neither of their male children looks

like her or her husband, Luther. Apparently, the face grafts are from her first husband, some worker in a Kyoto lab who got trapped in a fire. The face grafts are still fresh on Amir and Dots keeps flicking his still-healing flapping dermis in his eye the way kids do when they're bored and/or jealous of a sibling too young and/or Stoic to fight back. Miriam says that she'd want my face grafted on her children even if she married someone else—women's lib, she says. I ask her if she even knows what that is and she shrugs and mentions something she read about bells and hooks and spillers and Colleen shakes her head "no" because she trained as a Femmetist where she was a well-compensated department head but quit to become a stay-at-home-nurturer. She makes twice as much as a mother-nurturer, but not as much as a father-nuturer. So, telling me I'm a prime winner face graft donor is how Miriam flirts with me. She knows I want to nurture a son. Colleen thinks she can do better Inside™ and she and her husband, Luther, are ready to sponsor Miriam Inside™. I know M. will always wait for me. I've already wasted her good reproductive years on my empty promises. I can, at least, give her my face.

I avoid Colleen's scowl and play tag with Dots. That brat, Dots, is adorable: makes sunlit silhouettes with her feet, never-ending giggles, runs around taking away the tired sounds of drone and dock, brings out my paternal instincts. She has a kind face, her donor's face. Her bone structure is all from Colleen's side of the family and so her long jaw stretched her mouth downwards whereas, with the two boys, they got Luther's bones. Colleen's and Miriam's long jaws make their mouths look sluggish compared to the dreaminess in Dots's smile. The purse in her lip followed the same curve as Angel's and Amir's. But Angel, inheriting Luther's family bones, appears alert, almost telepathic when he smiles, like he is reading your mind when his oversized bottom lip pulls down the Cupid's bow and his s-shaped eyebrows would arch meeting yours. The children's skin had been pigmented a few times over

so it is hard to say if they are really meant to be tan or brown or mineral. Colleen, being Colleen, has them trending melanin in shades of Punjab and Mali so that her Neutral Fair Light can “pop” in contrast, as Jua-Nian and Lovely assures her it does.

“Are those displays?” Asks Jua-Nian. Colleen shrugs rotating her her shoulder up and over for a full view of the blue-grey scalloped scales embedded into her shoulder. The design is a half-band of an armored catfish’s scales arranged three rows high and fanned to a length measuring the circumference of her upper arm.

“Yes. After Amir was born, Luther and I got matching displays of hassar scales implanted on our shoulder blades. Three rows for each birth. Show them, Luther!” Colleen instructs.

“They’re just scales.”

“Just scales?” She scoffs then turns to her audience. “They cost mucho currency. They’re the real thing. Caught wild in the Demerara zone. Hassar! Guyanese prime salvage.” Their displays resemble a photograph of an ocean at sleep, ,maybe the Atlantic or a river, and above each ripple is a small round discolored circle on their skin that positioned over like the hanging moon.

The collective oohs and the attention drive the workers away from Miriam to Colleen.

“And we got matching fob marks. The display artist said it was authentic small pox vaccine scars from the early 1970s. They’ll be trending soon.” And, the oohs crescendo. Everyone reacts except me and, of course, M. who has suffered through Colleen’s displays throughout their sibling rivalry. And Colleen is the one who is winning because she has offspring. I am watching Dots, now.

Dots gently rocks her baby brother Amir. She sees me seeing her and her dreamy smile turns into a sudden dark plateau. Her arms change from a palm frond’s sway in soft breeze into the wild pendulum of branches in a storm. Amir is

jolted from side to side in semi-circles so wide it's hard to approach this little skunt was from any safe angle to rescue him. Amir's flapping dermis gets caught on the corner of a desk and he screams bloody murder. Miriam turns in time to stop her from dropping Amir and she slaps Dots on the face. In turn, Colleen slaps Miriam then turns to Dots and slaps her. Dots runs over to Angel who already has his right arm opened like Lahash's wing for her to run into for comfort or plotting. His hug is divine intervention. They share a whisper. His smile is like a dampened electrocution; you know it's still a bad thing even if it happens slowly and quietly. Then, I think: how foolish is it to make all the children look the same when they are not? Face grafts from the older brother only because he was the one born in the Caribbean because people think that this superficial feature will make their children Caribbean, make them capture an essence. One simple and superficial way to identify a region when, in fact, this child could be a multitude of naught and nice things.

"This is why I said this boy needs a good whipping." Luther says.

"Dots did it! Angel is innocent." Colleen defends. I am not sure how Angel orchestrated the whole fiasco, but I am sure Luther does. This is why I need a post-rear child to nurture with no blood ties.

"The collagen in our first aid expired. See. 34 August 2010." Miriam chimes in.

"He would always get me in trouble when we were kids." Luther responds to no one in particular.

"Stop whining. It's just a face...go get the coats! We're going!" Then, Colleen turns to Miriam. "2010. Don't you people use the actual dates. So backwards here."

"You're not being candy Colleen. It's my birthday today." And I know what will follow as soon as Colleen is gone. How even when it's not about her, she makes

it about her. I think that is how and why Luther married Colleen. They were two siblings getting back at other siblings who were only ever competing for their love. They were the two animals left behind by Noah but they still found each other after the flood, and after that, Grannie Kruder say, is irony's dominion. I look away to be polite and to avoid Miriam's tears. Her tears amplify my past and I want to be Stoic one day. Coast Ecks is on his second slice of red velvet cake. He puts his thumb up to me. I hate this skunt.

Then, B. walks in. Miriam waited all year for the attention to be all hers. It won't be Colleen stealing her attention this year; it will be B.'s shoe heel making an apparition of Miriam's marmalade filled balloon. Everyone, even Colleen, forgets it's M's big four-o. It goes silent in all our minds.

"That her?" Miriam whispers to Costas who's been around since twelve years ago and won't ever say he never had the guts to really look B. Carew in the eyes but that smell, that smell is something divine and unforgettable and he doesn't remember B. being that unforgettable but he nods "yes."

"Who's head of Receiving?" B. drifts into the conference room.

"Wieland Kruder is."

"Yes. Me."

"Y! Of course."

"I wasn't expecting you so soon..." I lie.

"Expectations are exactly why I'm here."

"Need me to take notes?" Miriam offers with cream frosted over her teeth.

"No. I just need to be alone. With Y."

I am distracted by Miriam's desk and how Colleen has already wrapped half of the red velvet to take home, and how the flavor of my spit doesn't taste the same anymore. It has a tinge and taste of B.'s cassoulet. I wonder if the others are affected,

too. It's not everyday you get to sensate an authentic cassoulet made from Eerste glands and phytochemicals.

Luther walks out with Angel, Dots, and a screaming Amir. He tries to focus on Amir but B. is too close. B. looks back from Luther to each of the children smiling, I think. Then, B. Carew turns to Colleen who, wanting to linger to gossip with Miriam, Lovely, and Jua-Nian, is now more interested in interacting with B. Carew who looks down at Amir then covers her face with her hands. She does this four times; I count.

B. sings, "Peek-a-boo." Amir's breathing slows. His guttural bursts reduce to timed yelps. "Now, isn't that better. It was my favorite game, too." With that, B. travels past Colleen, her, family, and their redundant faces.

"Weiland, were you in the middle of something? I don't want to be rude."

"We were just celebrating my birthday," Miriam chimes up.

"Well, accept my well wishes. Although, I overheard the singing. Did you obtain rights to sing..."

"Yes, we've an eight year pay-per-play non-theatrical license on 'Happy Birthday,'" I defend.

"It's just that so many don't but it's good for you that you did. Proprietor Laws and all."

And when I don't smile back at her, Miriam smiles for me, at me. Touché. B. panders with a two-bounce nod and crossed arms. I can still see my old bite marks on her wrist. They have faded some, but has she kept the scar below her elbow? I wonder...

"I am here to do a simple job..." Her waist twists in two semi-circles to speak to the cubicles facing the wall and then to the cubicles facing the window. She is trending a yellowish Pain de Mie that business people wore on Wall Straat years ago

but I guess it's back in trend. She is too flaca for it to be flattering but expensive fabric can make any body alluring, even long skinny bodies in Hydra Heels. B. is taller than I remember. My remembering makes me anxious. I have to remember so much about this shipment to be able to convince her, and by proxy, Sharpe & Granville, that I am not a thief.

"I don't want to get in anyone's way. Just think of me as a formless presence." I am still staring at her calf muscle when her semi-circle becomes a point facing me.

"I'm sorry about the balloon."

"It's okay, I have thirty-nine more." Miriam picks up her dead dessert balloon and continues just smiling to smile and not really making sense. We were all smiling—except Lovely and Walter who were raised Stoics—and studying B. Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ghi Parker, Ecks, Bibo, K., Walter, and Kenny are studying her and speculating on me.

I walk B. to an empty duty room. It has a view of the dock; the dock that is three kilometers away, the dock that receives a transport 25% lighter than departure calibrations. 25% translates into 38 pieces shy of 152 pieces of cargo. 38 cleaning, agriculture, and recreational bodies are the cause of my stomach knot. Historically speaking, I've never been busted for as big a loss on my watch. Although I did sign for that transport, that doesn't mean the captain and crew couldn't be blamed instead. I am preparing my defenses.

"I sign for everything and I don't go around counting every parcel. It's not my job," I say.

"But it is your job. It used to be my job. I never lost cargo. Now, it's your job, Y."

"I have over one hundred transports a day. I sign every manifest because we accept every transport from Earth Path, from JFK, from Fort James, from Kyoto. I

sign for their arrival, not their content. I am responsible for occurrence not material," I explain. And I must have sighed a lot in that warm duty room because I began to really taste all of its strange air sediments.

"Shall I open a window? It's fogging." B. notices, always noticing.

"No. I'm good. But, I'll apologize now for my workers staring at you. It isn't everyday someone from afuera goes Inside™ and comes back, let alone someone with your identities."

"Are you bothered by my frill modifications?"

"Just concerned. Just concerned that my workers will start trending you."

"That's flattering. Don't you know? All bodies are trend, Y. But, I doubt they could afford to trend me. I can't even afford to trend me." B's cackle sends one foot up my rasshole.

"Black market is better these days. Who knows what any of us are actually wearing." B. Does not like that undercut.

"If I had it my way, I'd be wearing commons like you. You all look so, so very comfortable. I miss that." Her insincerity is so benevolent. If I could afford meta-mood lights, they would have gone from Bluerain to Static.

"Did you do something different to your face?" I ask and this makes B. uneasy but tactful.

"Something tells me they'll be trending you soon. I mean, look at you. You bought a new suit. It's choir cotton fire flesh. Did you buy it to impress me, Y?" Her finger is on my chin where she had bitten me twelve years ago.

"Yes."

"You're supposed to lie Y."

"Why?"

“Because that’s what I want to hear.” And what is significant about her flirting is that she isn’t. She just looks at me like she is waiting for an answer. I taste the air sediments in my throat. She looks at me like a specimen on a shipment. She opens my mouth with her thumb rubbing over my teeth and gums with her other thumb. She takes each of my hands between hers checking each, in turn, for broken bones. Next, she takes off my jacket, laying it carefully on the chair. Each piece of clothing is the same ritual. When I am naked, she brings her nose close to my left ear and inhales the stench of my vibrio ear wax. She moves closer and blinks over the opening, eyelashes brushing my ear, and I feel as if I am covered in moths. I cup my penis as an indication of my character, as an indication of my position as Busha. I’m not an underdockie or cargo who can get inspected at whim. B. does not care and pulls my hands apart to inspect scar tissue.

“I added an extra one.”

She doesn’t seem to care that it’s larger than average as she massages me to determine which of my three testicles is dominant. This is no longer foreplay. She lifts a foot and slides off one of her shoes in her hand. The Hydra Heel’s needle heel passes over my penis in a slow circuit to my belly. I cup myself again. She laughs. I do not remember her having freckles. And the laugh is off. Too deep just like the scent of her cassoulet, too deep in the base note. Myrtle? Pine? Or something else mixed with basic birch tar that makes her too cuir. She takes her shoe and pricks the back of my hand with the heel like she’s doing a pinprick test to guess my age by how long the skin puckers. With all the calendars between people these days, we do this old time test on cargos of variables brought in for other uses. My skin stands up against the tension of the prick longer than I expected. We both watch my skin collapse.

“You look different Y.”

"So do you, B. Carew." And I look at her I am staring at her waist.

"That's my excess."

"And you're not at all what I expected after years on the docks. Younger than I thought," I say.

"Age is important." She replies. I grab my hand back. A blood bead has formed.

When I look, I know her face is different, too, but I am too afraid to notice how. She hands me my clothes like she is unpeeling a banana, resheathing a stalk.

"I know it's very intrusive, Y. I would get very angry if someone pricked my skin to see how long it took to snap back. It's barbaric since anyone can buy and alter skin. Do you do this to the controls? The one waiting on the docks?"

"To controls? No. Of course, not." I defend

"Because that is very precious cargo. Very important people have been waiting for that fungible labialized routine. It took over twenty years to get that one ready for the world."

"I adhere to General Compliance and Conduct. You know that. Is this a test?" I ask.

"Yes, a test." B. says.

"We only do this once in a blue moon to variables because people still forge paperwork but yes, it is barbaric but it is what it is..."

"And age is important," B. says finishing my thought. I turn to look and clothes on the floor and B. nods yes.

"Uh. Can you repeat the question?" I ask as I get dressed.

"Tell me what happened, Y."

She listens to my explanation five times. One for each judge should this become a legal issue that has to go up to a Quarrel with a unique set of jurors for

each infraction: maritime miscount; unregistered papers; control endangerment; insurance fraud; and capital loss. Yes, I retell the story five times. I'm not even annoyed or anxious. In that empty duty room with windows closed and facing the dock in question, B. faces me. Again, I am distracted by her proximity odor. It isn't like that volatile floral stuff Miriam and the other women wear. B. paid an actual chemist to make her up a batch of prime winner cassoulet. Maybe it's from a control's gland, maybe the one on the docks if it's so important. I remember B.'s odor from years ago and it was quiet, like a color under water. This scent was definitely glandular—vaginal?— with a hint of sandalwood, or maybe it was cedar? Myrtle? Pine? No, tobacco? Masala.

It gets into me; it clings to my nose hairs; it dilates my olfactory bulbs; it spreads its warm self over the roof of my mouth; vesicles pulse; and, macromolecule by macromolecule, it enters like blood music. The more I speak the more I swallow and she coats my stomach. I retell her the story five times and none of my facts change. She is pleased.

"I'm pleased."

"I like your air. Is the proximity odor mixed with myrtle? Pine? Eucalyptus?"

"You know eucalyptus is all but extinct. It would be illegal to wear it. At least, scandalous. Rest assured, my cassoulet is a legal blend. It's from a *cavum* in Kyoto that got charred years and years ago. I managed to get my hands on some. But my proximity odor is all me. What you sense is just an abundance of me." B. Carew smells her wrists and starts to wine up her waist a little..

I smile at her long-winded brag and I wonder: how long can my nose keep her scent? She has been here for a few hours and already she is absorbed in every detail of the room: how her teeth meet at an angle is how the desk tilts; how she

tiptoes back in her Hydra Heels is how air is sucked into ducts; how hairs on my arm pull is how the window is square and black that frames her.

“It’s prime winner all day, every day. It reminds me of home, a home” I sound boyish. Though her air entrances me, I know that I have to stay focused to appear as authoritative as I feel. I inhale away from her distraction and ask, “So. Now what?”

We stop wining. “I’ve seen worse. Far worse. You’re lucky, Y.”

“Will I have to pay these merchants for their lost cargo?” I ask.

“These aren’t merchants. They are scientists. Anything over 25% is considered theft. Theft means the Port Authority gets involved and the shipments can be stalled as material evidence. No one wants expensive tools and supplies being touched by Port Authority before they reach their intended destination. Too much tampering is how some of the recreational bodies get impregnated. Simple math can fix it all.”

“Math?”

“Yes. 25% is a loss categorized as theft. Anything under that amount is not. I don’t know. Replace...” and she turns her Hydra Hells to the door where Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ghi Parker, Ecks, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny all pretend not to watch.

“...eighteen units of cargo by Monday. Nineteen would be better, but I can make Sharp & Granville get off your back for eighteen.”

“So, I am going out of pocket for this?”

“You mean to tell me after taking the actuarial exam you still need to figure this out?”

And I haven’t. I failed the exam four times that is why she was Inside™ and I am stuck afuera on the docks.

“It’s math Y. I believe in you. You’ll figure it out.”

And all the skin of her face is in motion. It is a smile, a frown, a kiss, a posture cutting off the smile with a white handkerchief then handing it to me to wipe away my sweat.

“Is your assistant a good assistant?”

“Miriam is better to me than I was to you.”

“Then I’d be sure to keep her. Loyalty is everything. What about the dockie outside? The boy. Nineteen.”

“No, not him. I...I...”

“Don’t care. Just figure it out. I believe in you.” There is a minute when she leans back, when her knees untouch, when I expect her—like the old days—to insist on a mouth massage because I am anxious and stressed—and, she could have, being higher than a dockie and equal to a Busha—but, she doesn’t. B. closes her open thighs and just leans forward.

“Oh, you have something...right there.”

“Where?”

Again, she uses her body like a mirror over mine when she gestures at the cream cheese frosting that I accidentally wiped off on my suit pants. I feel my testicles dilate and fill, with three it is an unbearable pressure so, I excuse myself to the bathroom. She leaves the room before I can walk her out. She leaves because she does not want to repeat out loud what I have just now realized I must do. From the other side of the open door, Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ghi Parker, Ecks, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny all smile at my smile, except Lovely and Walter who can’t. The office feels collective relief. Coast Ecks puts up his thumb at me. He’ll go first.

February 30 (Thursday)

Second night I wake from a dream between branches. I don't remember B. having freckles. I don't remember cherries tasting this corrosive. I don't remember leaving the door open.

February 31 (Friday)

Friday is Proprietor Day and Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ecks, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny all have small family plans, not the big family plans that make it mandatory for workers to invite their bosses even if, in some bigger companies, bosses can petition for conjugal rights. I am on the docks, alone. Miriam goes Inside™ to Colleen's barbecue. I was invited but I do not want to waste Inside™ passage on people who don't like me. Colleen and Luther do not like me. Besides, the streets afuera will be littered because of annual protests. Proprietor Day is, quite plainly, a terrible holiday for which most people only celebrate because they have employment, not a busha. It is a three-day weekend, but I return to work on Saturday to work on math.

February 32 (Saturday)

How loopy I was that Thursday holding B.'s white handkerchief, watching sunsets, listening to drippy love songs, sorting my viable spermatozoa—I am never this Romantic. I smell the handkerchief and figure B. spends time in a resort cavum, maybe a Sandals Cavum, because no proximity odor is that good no matter how good the cassoulet. I remember her proximity odor being less sweet, like cooked fat and maybe with a drop of sardine oil. I figure Sharp & Granville set her up good—probably all the pretty ones from the company—in an all-inclusive Sandals Cavum and they get doused in that kind of elegant balm that makes a train miss its tracks,

makes a bullet miss its mark, makes me loopy. I wonder if this is why I did not pass my actuary exam. I got the analytical portion all correct but my phrenology and phenotype scores were appallingly low. I tried to measure the skull of an afuera but I could not tell the difference between afuera heads and Inside™ heads. I guess I'm not the analytical type.

And seconds after, I turn away from my reflection in the window as I remember bottling Cavum run-off from this one pipe line as a boy. The pipe ran from one of the top Cavums into a water processing plant. Someone had drilled a small hole in it to catch run-off but it was a hole in the part of the pipe that was about eight meters past the Cavum security fence which meant it mixed with dirty water before it reached any of us. I'd bring it home anyway, to my tiny room, to my tiny desk and I would pour it over cats I caught. They would exhaust of ecstasy licking their tiny selves into furless masses of off-pink. One cat died. My Grannie Kruder would, when she caught me, lash me and tell me to stop. She said I wasn't a proud boy; she said I wasn't proud of my shuǐshǒu stock. I told her that I'd stay in a resort cavum, one day, and I wanted to know what it was like. I'd say I was being logical like a Stoic. She'd pin my ears with clothespins and say, *Him say logic, devil say fren. You're a rat, you're a rat, you're a rat; are you a rat?* Then, I'd say nothing and she'd whip me anyway.

I go to the duty room and close the door. The swoosh of the door kicks up Thursday's sediment. I take off my clothes. It is absolutely inappropriate but I give in and lick the air, the air she left behind. I sit in her spot and look out the window at my grounded ships. The ship she has grounded. The ships I have to unground. They are just cylinders pointing up with nowhere to go. I am grounded, too. I take her handkerchief out of my mouth so I can stop thinking of B. while I am holding myself. I am exhausted and let it descend on its own onto the chair.

I take a nap in the conference room where I cannot smell what her Inside™ is like. I decide to make my Granny proud of me. I will not become a cavum junkie like so many people in afuera. Plus, I moved from dock to Busha without pledging allegiance to Romantics, Economics, or Stoics. Granddaddy Davis said, "I and I didn't change my heart because of diaspora or Diáspora. We raise up with sacrifice." So, I will figure out a new way to fix the cargo problem. I may have uncertainty, but I still have my integrity. Then, the door opens. As if my lack of integrity is expected, I fall apart at the touch of cloth over my wrist, my temples, my cheeks, my nose. My brain does limbic limbo when the aroma enters me again and again. The vertical slur of B.'s clothing moving over her body is the last thing I hear behind my lids. Then, it is Monday.

February 33 (Sunday)

"You shall disappear into that which produced you."

February 34 (Monday)

I am watching the kid in waders tie a clove hitch to the dock by the time Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny all clock in.

"Remember, you have the thingie, in the office this afternoon. Meeting. Wow. The ocean's angry today. Look at all the fresh blue algae approaching the geo point. I wonder if it makes a beautiful house for clams. I wonder if ashes and snow make beautiful houses for clams." Miriam is behind me.

"It's angry everyday we don't make money. So Miriam, focus!"

My steps breaks through sun scratched mud pools making Miriam's trek mushier than mine. Why she is walking right behind me, who knows. Truth be told, I am happy to be downwind from her knock-off cavum musk. In comparison to B., Miriam's floral cassoulet is the unsightly bulge between oh so even rows of real flowers that is, up close, just dog shit in a garden. Something about the salt, the sea, the sulfurous mud that makes me think of that: of real flowers. The more of Miriam I take in the more of B. that gets displaced. This makes me angry. I intend to send out a memo banning all bad black market proximity odors, just the bad ones. I come up with this just before the parking lot. Then, I stop.

"Look, Y. Those other transports are moving today."

"Woo-ff. I ca—breathe. I can't breathe. Yes. B. and I made an arrangement."

"You need to sit, Y. You not fit-so anymore. Remember when you are a dockie, how thin and fit-so you were? I said, Miriam, that dockie is a prime winner. I'm gonna make him mine and..."

"Focus!!"

Then, on second thought, I thought I wouldn't send the memo. I already know how Miriam's cassoulet smells. It's some Miriam-invention mixed with the taint of the shit-poor diet of those of us living on the outside. No, better to ban all black market ones. I couldn't have a wife with a poor cassoulet, and this made me smile.

When I get indoors, I change boots and Costas, Neil, Miriam, Tre, S., Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny working more quietly and tenaciously than usual. No one looks returns my greetings.

In the afternoon, Miriam places the conference call. Gregson sits around the table in a room across the two oceans. I stand next to B. Carew in front of the table

that held Thursday's cake. She sits. The table is clean but a crumb was missed. I see B. touching it with a fingering nail and tasting it while I stand like dog waiting to be praised. Miriam and the others stand like a peopled picket fence, obvious and functionless. Sibilant whispers from Costas, Miriam, S., Shi, Jau-Nian, Ghi Wei, K., Walter and Kenny have traces of my name in them.

Sharpe and Granville were connected to the conference call on a third screen. Sharpe was B.'s direct boss. Granville, who was the trendier of the two once told B. she could amortize Sharpe if she wanted Sharpe's job. Apparently, it was an Economic joke so Sharpe thought it was funny, too. B. said she was lucky she never told Granville how far she's gotten with her math. They really liked B. from the start but B. Carew hated B. Carew hated waiting out the two-year evaluation period for a merit promotion. B. Said, if I applied myself, I could get a fancy job Inside™. Gregson knew all this and that is why I figured she was ready to rat me out. *Him say logic, devil say fren. You're a rat, you're a rat, you're a rat; are you a rat?* Gregson didn't want me promoted, didn't want to lose an inside man.

Miriam wears a version of B.'s Pain de Mie from three days ago. Hers hung like a mud-splattered sheet and what she substituted for Hydra Heels are just cheap Odessa Steps. B. scans over all of them.

"Lovely dress, Miriam."

"Thank you..."

"Shall we?" B. signals to Miriam who hands us a contact lens to put under our left eyelid. Miriam lets us all know that, "Inner eye talk initiated." And just like that, the inner lid of my left eye blinks and B., Gregson, Sharpe, and Granville and I are in a single conference room.

"Sit. Sit-sit." Sharpe offers a frenzied shake.

"You're getting promoted. You're a Busha now, my boy." Sharpe says.

“Thank you, Dr. Sharpe.”

“Oh, just Bev.” Then Gregson chimes in.

“She is something isn’t she?” Gregson licks the air and winks at me.

“Who? B.?”

“No, Miriam. Of course, B.!”

“Okay we have much to do Gregson, Weiland Kruder, and B. Carew, we thank you all for your figuring out the little problem in Red Hook. We take controls seriously. You saved us a lot of embarrassment.” Then, Sharpe and Granville blink themselves out of the office. Gregson turns to me from the virtual table

“Congratulations Y.” Gregson scowls.

“Thank you B. and I worked hard to figure this out.”

“Fuck you Kruder.”

“Fuck you skunt ras Gregson.”

“Don’t think you’re better than me now do you Y, my boy? I had to make the same decision you’ve made few times. You will again.”

“I don’t plan on repeating this incident. Do you understand?” I emphasize.

Gregson laughs even louder. “It’s part and parcel. Yarnt git younger. You want to be a shuǐshǒu for the rest of your life? Too old to fix yourself out of afuera. Don’t make promises you can’t keep. I am not Miriam. I am an Economic. And, like it or not Weiland Kruder, now, so are you.” She straightened her Face; it was an old pant style trending new again: black fabric cutouts over the hipbone encircled by large white satin tubing. Looks like fleshy crossbones over her aging hips. Not a thread out of place but it still looks like a knock-off on her trendless body.

“Right then, I leave you to it. Your staff must have the worry bug up their canals. Go out there and quell them.” Gregson blinks out of the meeting.

“Y, you did what you had to. Your staff will be pleased with quick solution and your promotion. Good bye, Weiland Kruder.” And with that cold summary, B. blinks out of the meeting before me and I am in the virtual conference alone. Her odor echoes as long as her good bye. I find myself staring at flashes of light on my retina left behind by the contact lens conferencer. I fashion the spots into the shape of freckles on her face. Spots telescope into tiny sand dollars with their bristles moving food particles to their mouth cavity, particles like: Costas, Neil, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz, Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ghi Parker, Ecks, Bibo, K., Walter and Kenny. I wait a few minutes to lower my inner lid. I am not quite ready to tell my staff my good news. When I do, there is applause. They line up to congratulate me—each and every one: Miriam.

“Let’s celebrate. My treat.” Miriam is crying.

April 10 (Tuesday)

With everyone’s spirit now lifted, I know my success as a Busha is no longer a speculation. The transport’s hydraulic lift-off pushes water every which way but we have on earmuffs. Then another, and another ship takes off of Red Hook Dock where I am the youngest Busha in its history.

“It’s a good day, Miriam. A good day.” I forget we have on earmuffs but it doesn’t change how good the day is so I hold her hand tighter.

“I’m so proud of you. Aren’t you so proud, Y?” Maybe that’s what she says or maybe she complains about how loud it is. I am half-deaf and distracted by her new cassoulet with its hint of sandalwood, or maybe it was cedar, and char. It gets into me; it clings to my nose hairs; it dilates my olfactory bulbs; it spreads its warm self over the roof of my mouth; vesicles pulse; and, macromolecules swell like blood music. I swallow and she coats my stomach. I open my eyes and look down at her

but it is just Miriam. She mouths, *I love you* and I come back with an appropriate response.

“File this manifest when we get back to the office.”

When the brown and green waves settle down, the kid in waders, our kid, waves back. We grafted my face on his. Which is to say his graft is healing so well that he looks more and more like B. every day.

“Tomorrow will be better,” a shuî shôu leaving on the transport waves.

“Tomorrow will be better.”

TRANSPORT MANIFEST - LOT 1781

FLUXUS 6931 Transport

FLUXUS orig. Kyoto 21Feb 2012, Red Hook ~~35~~ Nov2012

FLUXUS debark New York co 7-9198 ~~35~~ Nov2012

Goods/insurance. Assicurazione. 保险价值. 保险的價值. Pay-loss.

FLUXUS UNDER TIER I

FLUXUS a colleccion util de presente par D.POERRI, avec,
大人 (5), 孩子 (5), 执行 (10, assorted: sing, dance,
conjugate) \$100
FLUXUS b R Watts, D-Higgins: AGRI-OBJECTS (805,
list by request) \$1 per year per 100 人
variant. [may contain femailes]
FLUXUS c CHEIKO IQMI: custom long legs, total 1,87m, \$20
FLUXUS cc *Costas, Neil, Tre, S., Shona, Lars, Baz,
Shi, Lovely, Jau-Nian, Los, Ghi Wei, Ghi Parker,
Ecks, Biba, K., Walter and Kenny*
FLUXUS d FILLIOU: bound in linen, recreation nd/or
domestic (7) \$39
FLUXUS dd FILLIOU: paper-collagen blend, (4) \$12
FLUXUS h Canadian \$70
FLUXUS k VAUTIER APLIER: mystery box \$6
FLUXUS n morula: pluripotent on dry ice (6-kDa
plus or minus a kiloDalton)
FLUXUS q Gambian \$3
FLUXUS r white male exotic worker in tactile box (6) \$4

FLUXUS UNDER TIER II

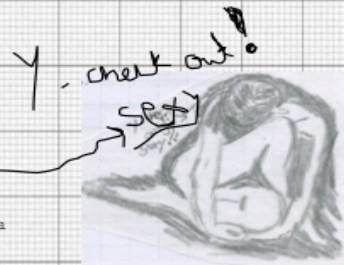
FLUXUS e V PHO: l'optique moderne style \$50
FLUXUS f Brecht model: 男女皆宜 \$94
FLUXUS g Brecht template 男女皆宜 \$97
FLUXUS j KOSUGI LABS exp. control par Dr. E.
THIERRY \$40
FLUXUS jj KOSUGI LABS exp. control par Dr. E.
THIERRY \$40
FLUXUS k VAUTIER APLIER: mystery box \$16

FLUXUS UNDER TIER III

FLUXUS jjj KOSGUI II exp. Control: FLEUR par Dr. E.
THIERRY "special box". \$165

FLUXUS UNDER TIER IV

FLUXUS nn morula: specified devlp, on dry ice 6-kDa
plus or minus a kiloDalton)
FLUXUS p Proto-Gambian \$300 (terms c.o.d.)
FLUXUS m Proto-Caribe \$350 (terms:c.o.d.)
FLUXUS x Combs, Culm (in vitro), goods exchanged to
pirates, Harvested Bone, Horse things, Metal
things, Leather Manufacturers, Saltfish,
Vermicelli, Xenoncompound, Xenon kits
FLUXUS y soap, sedans, carrying the Holy Virgin home
FLUXUS yy KIDNEYS: 4 laevus, 3 dexter *Maxi-sured.



Annotated Premium Table

No. that die/loss	Out of Premium Max/note
>/=150	170,000 premium-voide/theft*
149 - 134	170'000 spec cash value/estimable loss*
133	170,000 99% cash value/replaceable loss
</=132	170,000 \$10 flat rate/non-insurable loss

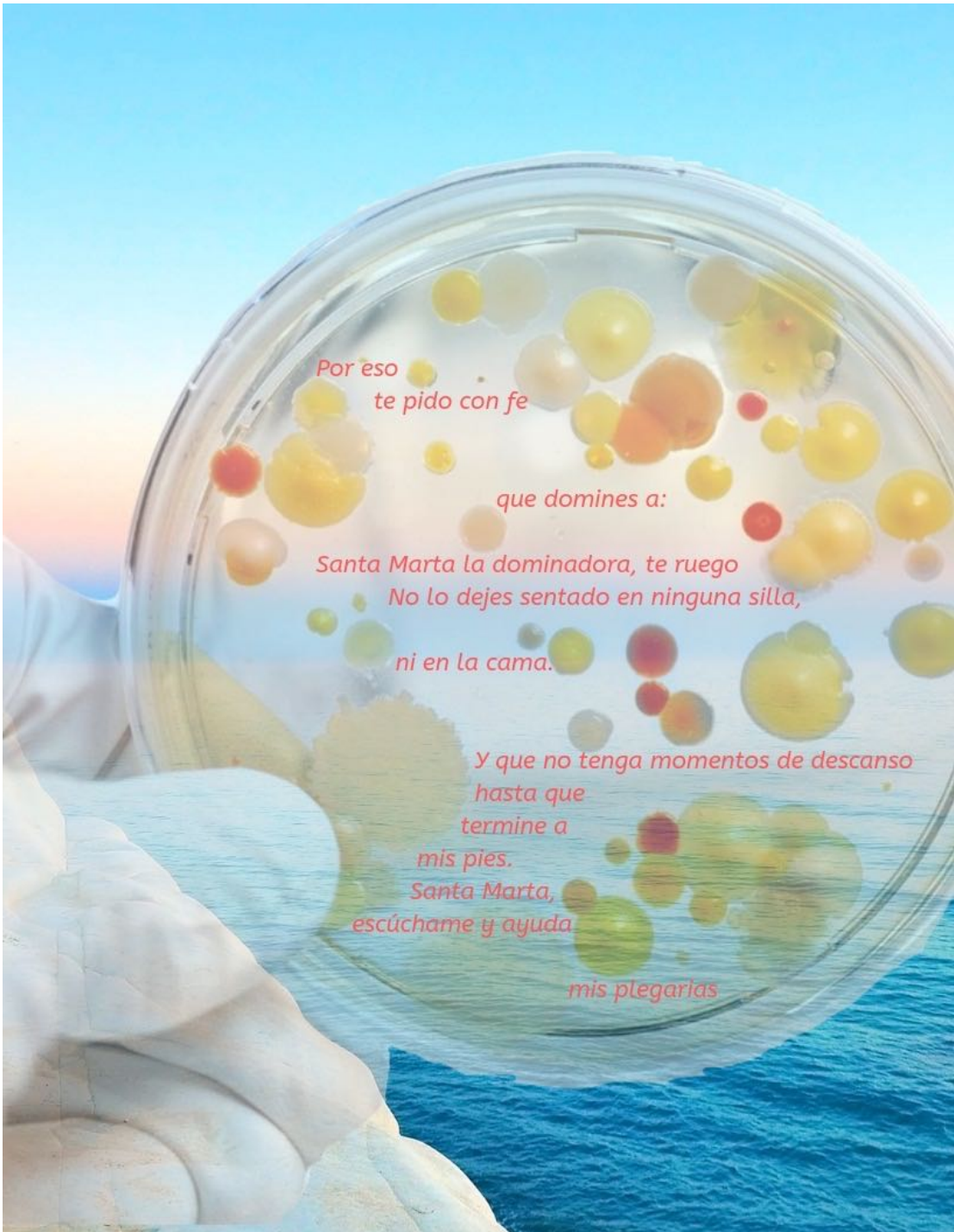
*Attach witness report to claims.

Received by *Wieland Kruder*

On *35 Feb 2012*

Fleur sent me another trophy, an image of Colleen eating cake at her sister's birthday. She had a boy, and even after all these years of not communicating with her or with Luther, they still agreed on my face. Fleur says she has passed on her face, too. She is passing.

I am still recovering in the burn clinic. No one visits except for Nzingha who is no longer a Nanny. She is a Curator and has been bringing me pieces of the soma. *Our home*. I press my ear to the swathes of soma she is able to save and its dreamstory says, "In someone else's body is how we fly, in flight we are free."



Por eso
te pido con fe

que domines a:

Santa Marta la dominadora, te ruego
No lo dejes sentado en ninguna silla,
ni en la cama.

Y que no tenga momentos de descanso
hasta que
termine a
mis pies.

Santa Marta,
escúchame y ayuda

mis plegarias

Null Hypothesis, a dreamstory in signs, 2009

After the policemen, who grabbed her by the coat fed her a grape Blow Pop, asked, "What's your name little girl?" She shook her head "no."

When the remaining daughter—Auntie Pretty One—dropped her off at St. Someone's School for Deaf and Dumbs, the teachers gasped when they heard how the police, using rope to pull up the bodies of her too-rich grandparents, slipped on unctuous tar, one by one, until the heiress, born into oil money, and her husband, master of transportation industries, swung from the Tappan Zee Bridge's cantilever beam like lametta tangles on New Year's. The remaining daughter, a politician's wife, had children of her own and would not bear another scandal. The aunt and this strange niece looked at each other through opposite sides of a window in the orphanage, two survivors on separate paths. The rain is unseasonable hard. A sea gull has drowned in a puddle near her car. If you ask her now, she believes it was a sign.

The pattern repeats itself. What reason do we need?

She was a tiny thing sent to the third floor of a state-run mansion acquired from a man and his descendants who acquired them from another descended man. It was an old school in Queens on a cove and in the quiet. The others gave up trying to pronounce her name so they called her Bee and the other one, a friend she made who was two years older, they called Hum. Bee was short for be nice, or be kind, or be careful, all instruction not for her but *you*. Hum was short for hummingbird because she moved so slow and yet did so much. Bee, who could not speak, and Hum who could not hear. They became sisters, not real ones, not ones from television, but ones who could exchange strands of phantom hearsay from a television the better kids got to watch. Bee and Hum became their names, not real ones, not ones from boredom, or malice, but ones that sounded better than the ones Teacher kept renaming them when they could not recite prayers to warm up their throats.

Dirtwaste. Blackass. Brownshit. Spicroach. Whitetrash. Chinkjap. Crackerjack. Whore. Child. Brat. Bitch. Sin.

“Repeat after me: th-th-th. Fah-thh-er. Father. Where are you putting the “h?” Take it out of your mouth!” And she would. Bee, the better name for our girl, would spit out the alphabet block with the “h” carved into it. No one asked her how she managed to hide it there, why she did or for how long. When she was hit on the back of the head, and sometimes other places, the other letters would spill out: a “u” a “m” an “a” an “n.” Despite the abuse and when no one looked, Bee spent hours correcting Teacher’s alphabet blocks with vowels she missed and kept missing from her lessons. They did not thank her. She was put with the mentally distanced. She was distanced from Hum. On the fifth floor, they wore overalls with ghost palms down the fronts and thighs from the constant hand washing with bleach.

The regulars with language, shoes and windows, used hand soap with mint. She was eight, then twelve with breasts making a future under her shirt when Hum was to be sent to a true home. In the night, a regular night except it was that night, Hum climbed to the fifth floor on the fire escape. The first thing Bee sees is the steam from a handprint against the window. At first, she thinks it's the slap from her dream caught between the Teacher's corrections and grandfather's mattress. A slap is the sound of a pot lid falling on tile or stones or sharper. She sees it is Hum and lifts the window open.

The other children are asleep, lying, drugged in their beds but Bee has learned how to hide the soft yet unyielding capsules in a mouth so red and wild Hum imagines her tongue ascending her space. Bee sits on the edge of the bed, her pajamas specked with chipped paint and lint. Hum already has her hand out, peeling back the elaborate wrapping from the Italian hazelnut chocolate her new parents gave her. She has put half of another kind in her mouth holding it between her teeth and lifting her chin. Bee takes her half letting the caramel travel in a loose tightrope between their lips. This is their fifteenth month of kissing. She takes it again. This time the piece is smaller. Again, smaller. When they have finished all the chocolate, Bee peels off the quilt. Hum won't speak about tonight or tomorrow when the parents come and the chauffeur will carry her rain boots and bags into a Madison Avenue duplex, into a Catalan country house, into an art-filled Renaissance revival in Trancoso, Brazil, into perfect architectures for the next ten years. Now, in a night concentrated on silence and nerve endings, Hum's five fingers braid into Bee. They seal themselves under the quilt taking turns picturing pink. There is a stickiness on Bee's upper lip. She picks at it; maybe it is caramel. Then someone says,

you have to believe in love, even the smallest of slivers.

now let nature take its course.

Bee knew she would have to practice if she was ever going to leave that place. And try she did. Outside in the rain, sleet and snow she was made to recite tongue-twisters before she could come in for dinners.

To thit in stholemn sthilenca inna dull dak dock, inna pesthiential prison wit a life long lock, awaiting de sthensation offa sthort stharp sthock from a cheap an chippy chopper onna big black block.

Teacher made fun of her.

“At your age, you should be ashamed. Again!” And when she got it wrong Teacher’s fist made the blacktop sky. Slowly at first, and then with more speed, she forced her tongue to shape every one of her syllables as clearly as she could until she could get them all out exaggerating the movement of her lips to make “ooo”, “eee”, “aah”. She imitated: yawn widely; skrunch face tight and inhale, hold, exhale, words. And the more she felt her accent fade, subtle now, the more she felt it was the right time to open her mouth to ask about her progress speaking with the language she was missing. How Teacher hated being nagged. How Teacher’s fist made the blacktop warm like candy on asphalt in summer. How the phlegmy blood glob coated her tooth that went down her open throat. Her open throat spoke, “To sit in solemn silence in a dull, dark, dock, in a pestilential prison, with a life-long lock, awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp, shock, from a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block! A dull, dark, dock, a life-long lock; A short, sharp, shock, a big black block!” The sound of her corrections made new music on Teacher’s skin. She screamed but what came out was not god or stop or dirtwaste blackass brownshit spicroach whitetrash chinkjap crackerjack whore child brat bitch sin. What came out

was, "him a come fa me..." A perfect crease raked down Teacher's fatty fist and if she did feel her skin skin itself, she did not flinch. The other children watched this human uncasing for hours ever sure not to cross the line of oozing tar made visible along the seams of the wood-paneled floor. They watched where the hoof prints traced out a dance. Children are often scared by the Jab Jab's behavior but adults, who always know better, may approach such things with cautious pleasure.

Carnivale!

The children were found in puddles of their own cold waste, and Teacher, dead a day, faced them provoked by an excessive grin. Her skin hardened like black licorice, her mouth venting gray steam. In her throat was an alphabet cube, a letter no one knew. The police bagged it as evidence.

"What did you see?" The other teachers asked the children.

"Him a come." And with hot cocoa and sighs they drugged them back to sleep with the kindest of care. Now, with two eyes open, Bee knew how to sting.

When she turned sixteen, the school sent her away with money, some luggage, a new name and a bus ticket. The half-sleep boy on the bus turned to say, "A girl will learn quickly on an island even if it is nothing clean."

She worked many places for a month. Then a boss, a bully, a toucher of things stroked her hair and in unconvincing tones said to her, "Sugar, it'll be okay. You'll want this, too." She tried to believe in the convenience of a lover and a landlord, not a substantial love or mutual fondness, but something cheap she could return. It was afterwards, under closed lids, when she saw horns, she heard hooves. "Speak to me child," Jab cried but she drifted, instead, into pictures of his story. She

saw a little boy separated from his mother by towering sugar cane fields. Strong arms one way, strong hips another. The feeder and the breeders. She saw him separated from his wife and children by tall canefields. To see her, he would paint his body red like the earth then he'd hide in the mud. He would paint his body blue like the sky then he'd hide in the trees. "Speak to me child," the devil cried, but in between turning a stumped penis over and over in her hand the boss, the bully, the toucher of things mistook Bee's far off smile as pleasure. In the tall canefields, her father was caught by an overseer who chained him and dragged him crawling on his belly in a cooking trough of sugar water. And when burnt sugar took too long, he was given to the tar. "Father!" In between fighting and sleeping, the boss took her wild gyrations as pleasure. Ooo. Eee. Ahh. Together, their vowels made his skin singe. Her father's lullaby oozed out her of mouth, drowning the boss in sticky hot syrup. Castrip. Molasses. Pulp. Wax. Tar. And, like ten years before, the police gathered around coffee pots deciding things about her after deciding one thing about her scalded boss. Bad.

The good sisters at St. Someone saw her standing at their door. The rain that soaked the earth that weakened the oak that crashed into their cars had already announced her arrival. In the rain, with not so much as a prayer or a cocoa, they handed her an address and closed the door.

Hum was a woman now, a woman with a diamond ring. She could see how important it was for Hum to share the things that were theirs with this fiancé. To have a true family with names like sister, brother, husband, dog was what she would offer. But, to have a true father, tongue, horns, hooves were what she had. The truth of the matter is that two strangers often meet on an island under peculiar

circumstances. In their kitchen over tea, the fiancé asked all his questions in careful rows. Bee smiles when she feels the tar strings roll between her toes and soak through her shoes. She nods and will save that for later.

The true matter: a love story can never end.

PoCo Mas

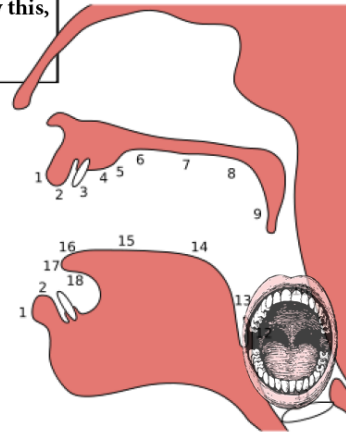
A Curation of Language

While I was in the boat I captured a very beautiful Carib woman, whom the said Lord Admiral [Columbus] gave me, and with whom, having taken her into my cabin and being naked according to their custom, I conceived desire to take pleasure. I wanted to put my desire into execution, but she did not want it and treated me with her fingernails in such a manner that I wished I had never begun. But to get to the end of it all, I took a rope and thrashed her well, for which she raised such unheard of screams that you would not have believed your ears. Finally we came to an agreement in such manner that I can tell you she would not have been brought up in a school of whores... *Mientras estaba en la barca, hice cautela a una hermosa mujer caribe, que el susodicho Almirante me regaló. Como que la hube llevó a mi camarote, y estaba ella desnuda según su costumbre, sentí deseos de hoigar con ella. Quise cumplir mi deseo pero ella no lo consintió y me dio tal trato con sus uñas que hubiera preferido no haber empezado nunca. Pero al ver esto (y para confirmarlo hasta el final), tomé una cuerda y le di de azotes, después de los cuales echó grandes gritos, cuantos que no hubiera podido creer en ellos. Finalmente llegamos a estar tan de acuerdo que puedo decirte que parecía haber sido criada en una escuela de putas... Since I wanted to have my way with her and she was not willing, she worked me over so badly with her nails that I wished I had never begun. To get to the end of the story, seeing how things were going, I got a rope and tied her up so tightly that she made unheard of cries which you wouldn't have believed. At the end, we got along so well that let me tell you, it seemed she had studied... Como eu queria estar com ela e ela não estava disposta, ela me trabalhou tanto com as unhas que eu desejei nunca ter começado. Para chegar ao final da história, vendo como estavam as coisas, peguei uma corda e amarrei-a com tanta força que ela fez gritos inéditos... Ik pakte een touw en bond haar zo stevig vast dat ze ongehoord geschreeuw maakte dat je niet had geloofd. Op het einde konden we zo goed met elkaar opschieten dat, laat ik je zeggen, het leek alsof ze op een school voor hoeren had gestudeerd. Quand j'étais dans le bateau, j'ai pris une belle fille cannibale et l'Amiral me l'a donnée... When I was in the boat, I took a beautiful Cannibal girl and the admiral gave her to me. When I was in the boat, I took a beautiful Cannibal girl and Columbus gave her to me. Mientras estaba en la barca, hice cautela a una hermosísima mujer caribe, que el susodicho Columbus me regaló.*

While I was in the boat, a beautiful cannibal woman, the aforementioned Admiral gave me my cabin and while naked as is custom, I felt like hanging around with her.

While I was in the Caribbean, while naked and I felt like hanging around with her. I wanted consent I would have preferred a rope and whip...I have been raised in a whore school.

I was in the boat, I captured, my cabin, I felt like hanging around. I wanted to fulfill my wish...I would have preferred never to have started...I saw this, I took a rope and whipped it, I can tell you have been raised.



- Places of articulation (passive & active):
1. Exo-labial,
 2. Not your-labial, 3. Better to chew you with my dear,
 4. Curry Goat, 5. Post-traumatic, 6. Pre-lapsian, 7. Changes,
 8. Bee, 9. Hum, 10. Scream, 11. Grito, 12. Schreeuw,
 13. Radical decolonial push back, 14. Postero-justice
 15. Antero-horror, 16. Laminal, 17. Tropical,
 18. Sub-tropical

One, No One

The Third Event, dreamstorys' fragments

Dem, 1492—

From the North,

they use children and animals to seed over the circular ruins of cities.

In the tightest turns, they will find the perfect place for more and plenty.

A warrior cuts his figure out of another, strategies of the tribe and the falcon,
consumed by the daylight, watching the iguana hide its silence in its juicy long tail.

From the South,

the basha shoals swirl in dense drums at the bottom of the black river.

In the tightest turns they will find the perfect place for more and plenty.

The man steals his cassava from his neighbor, but some will be shared
to show how his fish stew is warm and full tonight.

From the East

the golden age of medicine will spread to the spleen.

In the tightest of turns, they will find the perfect place for more and plenty.

The physician heals the patient, a certain purge of substances and
no one can agree if what kills him is the lack of laughter or melancholy.

From the West

the expulsion of the Jews, the last emir sighing, four Spanish ship set sailing.

In the tightest turns, they will find the perfect place for more and plenty.

The Taino forest at day with just the sound of boots on sand,
they will find the perfect place for more and plenty.

Liberty Ave, 2033

The Guyana Tourism Board float makes its way down Liberty. The crowd loses its mind when the blue butterfly costumes toss out black t-shirts with the flag and the words, “Skunt rass!” into the crowd. The float’s queen is dripping in gold bangles as she waves in wide arcs to both sides of the street.

“Look at that nonsense. Why one of you didn’t get up there?” Lillian stews her teeth loudly making her daughters laugh. “She too black-black.”

“Get up there, who? And leave the shop to who?” Citra is wrapping a roti in wax paper for a woman who takes her time pointing at what she wants. Citra smiles extra wide thinking this woman is probably mute or Haitian. Them French Caribbeans straight off the boat don’t clown themselves with words they can’t pronounce. They just go off in a corner with a book for a week to master the English language and then they take your job. Citra thinks it’s strange the way the woman counts her money like she’s displaying a rare anatomical specimen. Her sister keys at the register quickly.

“Here’s your change.” Bhaya reaches over and hands Bee back change from her fry bake and dinner plate special. Bee won’t touch the money being handed back to her—no Jab worth their tar would. Yup, they take your job Citra thinks.

“Ma’s just colorblind, cuz...” Rasa nudges her older sister with her her elbow and uses her free hand to rub the dark skin on her hand. They wait until Bee has sat at a window facing the Diwali parade before they both stop what they are doing and rub the back of one hand with a finger neither one shocked they are even darker skinned than the dougla woman in a sari waving on the float.

“Cuz, like, we burnt.”

And Citra, Bhaya, and Rasa laugh.

“If you wudda keep wearing that cream I buy...”

“Bleach is poison.”

Their mother and aunt stew their teeth. “It’nt not poison. It deh have emollients.”

“Oh, okay. Emollients. That’s safer.”

They laugh like hyenas because that is how a pack behaves. Citra, Bhaya, and Rasa, named by their great great uncle who lived until he died at age 116, or 119. He was named Rasa, too. His birth certificate was carried over to the colonial office by his grandfather, a drunk, who either wrongly wrote in the date his wife told him or found an auspicious date to suit his reasoning. Rasa was named after his great-great aunt, Moonsiji, who had arrived in Guyana on a ship in 1838. Indentured and coolie, but could read a little, she found half of a book on Indian poetry written by a British man. The other half she could not save from a fire the Governor-General blamed on Thuggees. When they left Kolkata, Monnsiji could not carry the book on the ship. Her old aunt made her replace it with something useful, a five finger plant and breadfruit seed. But Moonsiji remembered four things from left the behind pages: 1) an Indian wrote a book called *Citramīmāṃsā*; 2) *Dhvani* was a kind of poetry or sound 3) *Rasa* contained many feelings 4) *Bhaya* meant horror and this his how she felt leaving her home for a new world in which the black-skinned people had carried the same bundles on their backs for free. Sympathy did not soften her feelings toward them. She still spat on their babies. They still shoved her in cow dung trenches. Sympathy just made her come to understand her employers better. They were outsmarting the coolie and black, both.

Moonsiji missed out on children. First, after they arrive, after the fever on board, she had no female relative to arrange her marriage. Second, when she made up her mind to marry the father of two, she did not agree to being beat like his children. When she left him, and on account of where he kicked her after he found

her, she missed out on children. Moonsiji grew older living with her friend Icene and her family. Auntie Ji was left alone to read her papers. Aunti Ji knew stories of India. Aunti Ji was pleased with the honor to name Icene's four boys Rasa, Citramīmāmsā, Dhvani, and Bhaya. She named the stillborn Aramanth because its flowers also grew so red and small.

Dhvani walks in to the shop. The hyenas get quiet.

"Your white daughter is here," Citra calls out. The hyenas blast out their vocal chords making customers turn.

Their auntie Myrna shushes them with a stew teeth. "You want fuh lose customers?"

"Ain't none of these people dumb enough to wait in line at Sybil's. You seent that line." Then Citra turns to Dhvani. "Yup, I said 'seent'" Dhvani shrugs and rolls her eyes.

"Bitch." Citra begins.

"Cunt."

"Slut."

"Whore."

"Black...girl." And Citra, the shit starter makes a face and waits for...

"Ah, gyals. You all must stop joking, cussing, and talking bad about each other. We have customer," whines Auntie Myrna. Then, she sucks her teeth.

"And you wonder why I don't bring my man in here." Dhvani shares the laugh with Citra.

"Where's Toussaint?" Citra asks.

"His name is not Toussaint. He went home."

Dhvani walks behind the counter and kisses and hugs each of her sisters.

“By the way, I’m not white. I just play one on t.v.,” Dhvani adds. Citra rolls her eyes and the hyenas have their fourth laughter. Dhvani washes her hands and takes Rasa’s place at the fryer.

Rasa takes her break. She pulls out her haptic plane and lays the matrix across her wrist. She continues updating her Facebook profile letting her bitch ass homies in Jersey, cousins in Brazil, cousins in London, ex in Spain chasing some dumb ass bull and everyone following Roti Rum Shop knows she is keeping it real, keeping it coolie in Queens for Diwali 2033! She flips up her wrist to face-level, adjusts the zoom with remote retinal traction, pouts, tussles her hair, winks and waits a millisecond until her haptic plane responds to Rasa’s need for approval with its touch—an ever so sensate tremble across her wrist training her to enjoy the feeling of fingernails scratching her— to take her selfie. The sensate, like the ring tone before, is programmed and personal.

Yet, t’s not like the old days when you could send a glut of images and thoughts across the internet. Servers got privatized and the FCC cracked down on fake forms. After fake news and the crisis with catching artificial intelligence that impersonated people. Cell phone technology adapted to humans in symbiotic and endocrinological ways. First, they were designed *as* human touch not *for* human touch. Whatever touch released enough endorphins to modulate a positive response within a matrix of the experiences of pain, pleasure, censure, or approval, would be captured and endo-coded as the ‘ring tone.’ Anything from light to food effects an undo-code; it was hard to crack or copy. Then, they were designed with output quotas so we would not become addicts. Now, every haptic plane plan limits images and thoughts to the most essential ten or twenty you have each day. And Rasa is a perfectionist. She has to be. She is the shortest one. Dhvani is the fair one. Citra is the round one. And Bhaya is the gay one. Rasa does not like this smile but likes her

hair so she scrolls through previous smiles and finds the one from Obama Day that got her nine thousand likes, eight-four hearts, three-hundred eggplants, and most importantly her first piece of candy. She copies and pastes and edits her smile.

“Why you taking pictures inside pretending like you outside? Go outside and experience the experience.,” Bhaya says.

“It’s the same thing every year and it’s loud,” Dhvani chimes in. “Aren’t you bored with yourself, Rasa? We are? Right Citra.” And just at the moment, everyone is haptically alerted to Rasa’s status. Citra’s sensate is a cold spoon. Dhvani prefers Jacques’s bottom lip. Bhaya likes the tickle of bursting bubbles.

“Yes bitches. Be jel. Be so jealous,” Rasa says this to no one in particular except the universe then continues to mumble-sing about being bored in harmony with the soca chutney beat blasting from the parade outside. Zooming in and out of her selfie she notices a woman in the background was caught in her frame. It’s the woman who didn’t speak but, instead, she pointed to her order is sat by the window to see the parade. In the selfie, she sees the woman leaning over her plate with her mouth open wide.

Bee sees Rasa turns around to see her still in that position, her mouth gaping open and not watching the parade. Rasa sees Bee has built a tiny dwelling from roti layers she’s been peeling apart. Inside are two chunks of goat curry shaped like people standing in dark green gravy. Bee smiles then hovers lower over the roti hut with her open mouth.

Rasa tilts her wrists to sneak an image. Rasa waits a millisecond until the haptic plane acquiesces to her touch. Bee tilts her head toward Rasa adjusting the retinal remote from where she sits at the window and the ever so sensate tremble across Rasa’s wrist acquiesces when Bee begins eating the people.

Under her breath, being the quietest she's been in years, Rasa smiles, "This bitch is nuts."

Rasa turns around to tell her pack when she notices everyone in the space is privately enjoying the feel of scratching their fingernails against their own skin.

ME SAY DAY, ME SAY DAY, ME SAY DAY

o!

DAYLIGHT COME

me wan' fuh go
home



*An Essay Recording the Illustrious Providences and
Such Cases as Carib Cannibals, Arawak Captives, and
God's Notable Happenings over the West Indye
Tidal Seas to Bear Witness to the Infallible Evils of
Savage Black Caesar and Traitor Blackbeard
by Meditation Mather, cir. 1717*

Meditation Mather, (born Feb. 12, 1663, Boston, Massachusetts Bay Colony [U.S.]—died Feb. 14, 1728, Bahamas), spinster and author, supporter of religious reform of the ruling clergy, who was all but banished by the New England Puritans. She was the lesser known, and many historians agree, intentionally ignored sister to the American Minister, Cotton Mather, and daughter of powerful Puritan clergyman Increase Mather. Cotton and Meditation were twins. While they both believed in the existence of witchcraft, Meditation's role in hiding young girls in her Salem Village home to protect them from the derision and accusation of devil worship went against the Puritan Church. Historians say Cotton may have levied an accusation of witchcraft on his twin because of birthmarks on her arms. A recent discovery of letters exchanged between Cotton and his third wife, Abigail Philips (m. 1686–1702), he wrote of unresolved feelings of seeing, what we now understand were, tattoos on Meditation's skin. It is the one and only time he mentions, an enslaved woman, Tituba (b. 1674), who would go on to be the first person accused of witchcraft during the 1692 Salem Witch Trials. He records, "Wife, not yesterday when I wake did I not have the same dream of my poor wretched sister and did bear witness, again, to the scurrilous calls of Satan carved into her flesh. I condemn, first, that blackened witch who calls herself Tituba, a child she may appear to our present, but a demon I know her to be through all time." In 1681, at the age of 18, having embarrassed her famous family but, paradoxically, being saved from the gallows, Meditation was sent to the Caribbean.

In the Caribbean, she devoted herself unremittingly to poetry and prayer. At 48 she traveled from Santo Domingo to the Bahamas to write about the pirates Blackbeard and Black Caesar who waged open war against the British Navy. Because of her charity with witches, she was granted passage on their mixed gender ships. Mather once wrote that her experience with such dangerous men caused her “to rethink the presence of the devil on earth.” It was later discovered that Mather had occasion to travel to Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, and Barbados. It was after a particular trip crossing the Bermuda Triangle aboard a small Dutch sloop, Vrijheid, that her writing became quite colorful. It is worth noting, that this vessel went missing for several weeks in 1711. The first recovered seaman, Jacob van Meeuwszoon, reported seeing strange lights and then, emerging from the sea fog, a white vessel that could “dwarf a Spaniard man-o-war.” Historians draw a comparison to the lights van Meeuwszoon describes and the lights recorded in Christopher Columbus’s journal as seen from the Pinta and Santa Maria. Columbus’s journals were transcribed by Bartoleme de Casas regarding the lights incident on October 11, 1492:

“A sailor named Rodrigo de Triana saw this land first, although the Admiral, at the tenth hour of the night, while he was on the sterncastle saw a light, although it was something so faint that he did not wish to affirm that it was land. But he called Pedro Gutierrez, the steward of the king’s dais, and told him that there seemed to be a light, and for him to look: and thus he did and saw it.”

Though speculation remains to this day, scientists suggest that bioluminescent protozoa discharged may have been responsible for both Columbus’s and van Meeuwszoon’s sightings. What is known is that, dying from a fever that was affecting his brain, van Meeuwszoon drew the letters he remembered. As commerce and discovery were thriving in the Caribbean region, it is likely he mixed the letters from several ships including the Spanish

missionaries who found him. Thus, historians dispute whether “carnavalscruise” should be translated to “carne vloek,” as in blood or flesh curse, or “carne walcheren,” as in island of blood. The latter was, perhaps, a warning pointing to reports of Caribs and their alleged practices of cannibalism. Literary scholars see this as the inspiration for the essays penned by Meditation Mather. She was never questioned about the lights. Van Meeuwszoon never recovered from his fever; he died on December 25, 1711.

Meditation would return to the Bahamas, alone, aboard another ship after the Vrijheid sank in poor weather. Neither she nor any other seaman could corroborate van Meeuwszoon’s account. At the time, colonial officials did not solicit testimony from pirates who may have been present. She did, however, mention meeting natives in a remote part of the Americas. Her writing and research on pirates continued with an expanded interest in African and Indigenous Peoples music. Mather was a polyglot and could read and write in English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and was said to communicate proficiently in several indigenous tongues including Igbo and Yoruba dialects. Whereas her father’s famous “Illustrious Recordings” covered providence and the law of God, Meditation spent much of her writing recording her growing feelings of being at once possessed and then being in profound ecstasies. For a while, she feared that her writing would trap the reader in a “threshold manner” so she translated most of her English writing into a coded language. Growing increasingly worried about trapping her readers in this language, she had her one and only English language book manuscript on folk traditions ceremonially burned by her servant, who may have held back some pages from destruction and either sold them or passed them along. Meditation would go on to live alone in the Bahamas, unmarried and forgotten by her family. She died one day after her twin brother, Cotton, on February 14, 1728.

What remains of her works, scholars are unable to decipher. What is printed in this encyclopedic entry is all that remains of Mather’s folk culture manuscript. Because her Creole

servant was able to read but not able to write, or perhaps, had no means on which to write due to the expense of paper, the manuscript is reproduced as the verses of a folk song the servant passed down, perhaps, orally. Historians believe that because of the multi-linguistic environment of Meditation Mather's Caribbean, salvaged text found in this song verse has strong pedagogic recourse. However, the similarity between Mather's work, discovered in 2031 by a PhD scholar, and a popular modern song recorded in 2030 is still under review. Subsequent research of Murray E Anderson will update this encyclopedic entry.

Publications:

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I see ya, take a chance on lonely girl
Treat me right and I'll rock your world
Ya want me to wine up like your party gyal,
wine up like your party gyal,
grab me waistline like you part my world.
I'm not on earth I'm a starship gyal
Everybody wining like it carnival
The taste of my sweat make you so emotional
When I wine up like your party gyal,
Let's wine up our waistlines in soca synchro
Baby we earth is tremblin', we tremblin', we trembling' baby,
grab me waistline like you part my world.
One, two, three, four stop the clock
grab me waistline like you part my world.
Five, six, seven top the time
grab me waistline like you part my world.
One, two, three, four stop the clock
grab me waistline like you part my world.
Five, six, seven top the time
You don't have to look for more
I burn your skin when I touch you on the dancefloor
After I move into action, you feel sore
So approach me like I have the cure
Come at me with ball and bat to score
I am dutty, nutty, sexy, pure
I'm the gyal you dem adore

Everybody wining like it carnival
I'm not on earth I'm a starship gyal
The taste of my sweat make you so emotional
When I wine up like your party gyal,
Let's wine up our waistlines in soca synchro
Baby we earth is tremblin', we tremblin', we trembling' baby,
grab me waistline like you part my world.
Treat me right and I'll rock your world
grab me waistline like you part my world.
Treat me right and I'll rock your world
Treat me right and I'll rock your world
A black characta
A womanish characta
A stubborn characta
A Bestial characta
A childish, animal
Everybody wining like it carnival
The taste of my sweat make you so emotional
When I wine up like your party gyal,
Let's wine up our waistlines in soca synchro
Baby we earth is tremblin', we tremblin', we trembling' baby,
grab me waistline like you part my world.
Treat me right and I'll rock your world
How you want fah wine me on one planet see
How you want fah wine me when I'm under sea
I'm a Blackman gyal

I'm a Redman gyal

I'm a Buckra gyal

I'm a Chinee gyal

I'm a Coolie gyal

I'm a Dougla gyal

And a jungle gyal and a cannibal

All dem bodied gyals

The taste of my sweat make you so emotional

When I wine up like your party gyal,

Let's wine up our waistlines in soca synchro

Baby we earth is tremblin', we tremblin', we trembling' baby,

grab me waistline like you part my world.

grab me waistline like you part my world.

grab me waistline like you part my world.



The Woman of Color and She Rude Boy, 1808

In Continuation. Through the dust-covered curtains, she watched him walk through the cane fields. Despite the heat, he had kept his promise. She began to feel guilty about the two lives she had fashioned. In this life, a slave's secret husband bound by a string of blue beads, a gift, balanced on her hips. She watched how her January approached, as if following the disturbed earth behind a runaway goat—one of his many deceits to fool the watchman in the planter's tower who would only see the top of his burlled hair pushing aside the cane blades. His loose shirt looked like white pumice against his sun-blackened body. His lost cause was seduced by the hope and anticipation of Marcia's touch. Her home, an odd-shaped shelter, was set apart for laundry and sewing. She knew better. He reached her ornamental porch chair, his respite, decorated with five cowrie shells and blue glass shards from rum bottles she salvaged from a pirate ship, as the exhausted sun sprawled itself one last time across the sky. He closed her curtains. After their long reunion he would kiss the split skin on her lower lip and kiss the honeyed-light child on the forehead. The child was not his, but he held her like his own. Everything from her was for him, and everything from him was for her. Their first child was sold by a godly man to another godly man in another parish. In the privacy of the night, the three sat in a quiet cradle of each other's touch. Involution. Ihunanya. Erzulie's hologram projecting everything inside, and everything else as stillness. Despite the plantation, they built a plot each day: this glass shard, this unborn child, this maroon trail. Despite the plantation, they built a home each night: her neck the roof, his arms the walls, and Olivia's eyes its windows and doors.

In Continuation. Through the dust-covered curtains, she watched him walk through

the cane fields. Despite the heat, he had kept on his wool jacket with buttons made from whale bone and steel. She began to feel guilty about removing her beads and preparing his drink. Obeah woman gave her one dram to give January vigor and one dram to keep Mr. Fairfield dry. In this life, a planter's secret daughter bound in a kanga, a consequence, balanced on her hips. She watched how he approached her home, as if following the disturbed earth behind an idling field slave—one of his many deceits to fool his wife who sat in the planter's tower like a hawk's shadow surveilling the movement of his morning hat that parted the bending cane blades. His fat body, sweating under a white shirt, yellowed like soaked salt fish against his sun-hidden body. His loose-jowled mouth frothed in anticipation. Her home, an odd-placed shelter, was set apart for laundry and sewing. His wife knew better. He reached her ornamental porch chair, his property, decorated with things discarded by others, as the entitled sun sprawled itself for the first time time across the sky. He closed her curtains. After their short reunion he would touch the split on her lower lip and send un-Christian reprimands to the heavens in his wife's name. The child was his but, if ever he held her, he held her like a thought. Her first child was sold by this godly man to another godly man in another wealthier parish. In the staleness of the air, the three sat in a triangle anxious of each other's touch. Fungible. Accursed. Sunlit reality reminding her if she bears him a son, the two will be granted freedom. On the plantation he inherited, he interpreted the law of god and the law of property. On the plantation he inherited, he would go home each night—his wife on her belly, his Bible in his mouth—with Olivia's future in his hands.

De Queen of Indee and De Myt' of John Canoe. Dido de see it all wit' she two pretty eyes dem. When Missus Fairfield get halfway up de hill, she see massa in de sea playing run an' hide-seek wit' he brown lickle pickney Olivia. Missus cuss so

foul she have me shakin' for weeks tinkin 'bout she choice of unchristian words. Have me wonder if she lose she mind and she Jesus between house and hill. She kick Marcia one good kick pun she belly so him run after she an' jump and bawl and some odder tings me nah fuh say. De stress of de matter is what catch she. Marcia get ketch wit pickney and Missus still don' have none of she own. Next day, Missus sick wit' a fever dat buckra does catch. Massa blame all ah we. Cut off one woman hand and blame she for voodoo. Cut off one boy foot but blame he for not'ing. He make us pray all day and night in front de house for Missus heal' like he nah know ebrey day she de dig she grave wit' she foulness. Bad ting neva got owner! Me nah got time for dat. I try fuh write me book. She casket lovely lovely, though. I tink he sorrow so for true wit' he wife gone wit' so much big coffin and big fyunrul. Den, he send she body back to England to she family dem. Even though she barren and nah leave an heir to Massa fortunes dem, they still tink she worth the cost of passage over. Hmmp. But dis nah what me fuh tell you. Marcia pregnant belly stop grow. She carry January baby but Massa tink it his pickney in she belly. De Massa loose heself in bigger grief when he hear dat ting. He musse pray over she and spray his evil air becuz den Marcia ketch same buckra sickness becuz she mumma also mix white and dem constitishun is different than we. Marcia die wit' she baby in womb. I cannot say how long I cry. Long, long. We all deh cry. Oh, but now, Missus Olivia all alone. De lickle gold skin pickney. De Queen of Indee I call she. Marcia's casket is a hole in de ground he t'row one handful of flowers upon. I tink he worry dem odder planters will talk if he do more. I was almost carry away wit' grief until she husband, January, come out de cane an' demand audience wit' Massa. He take he'self for freeman or someting. "You have dishonored me and you have dishonored my wife, sir," him say. De bwoy got language! I sure it was de last part vex Massa who say, "Wife? Is who give you permission, you black debil?" I tell you, I didn't

never see such a sad fight in me life. Fowl and fish give more show. Massa fatness get in he way and busha's whip get in January way an' when it over, January get buss up by four udder men. After seven days of deh pouring hot castrup and molasses on he body, they chain he to teach us all a lesson. Massa say, "We will have no John Canoe on mi land." But, I tink Massa know, blood can't wash out with blood. So, he grip he bible and sent we fuh tend to January. I remember I was a pickney the size of Olivia when Marcia and January de marry in secret. Dat first boy was one fine looking child but de massa needed de money and sell de baby to other buckra when de baby nah even done milking. He say, "Look at dis here January how big and tall he is and you will know how it will be with this here creature." And dat was dat. Missus Fairfield pretend she deaf hearing Marcia beg and cry for she baby. And since tief nuh like si nudah one wid bag, Missus slap she mout' when Marcia ask for she help as a mudda because alla Missus babies up in tiny graves on a hill. She ain't no mudda. So, she slap Marcia and say slave women are cursed. Oh oh bwoy! She musse be talking 'bout how us come over chained on ship! Den, Missus Fairchild say it improper to mix man and woman in same house so she make we all separate after dat. Even man and he wife like January and Marcia. I guess she deh only only who can control she urge wit' Massa. I guess we must all wait to get grab up in our bed or in de fields by one of these buckras working for Massa or dem rat slave man who become busha and whip we same-same like each swing make dem biggup. But none of dat keep January from his treasure. In heavy rain, he would paint he body red like de eart' then he'd hide in de mud to see her. When sun went down, he would paint he body blue like de sky den hide in de trees to see she. All dis to see he family. Now he dead up. Beat wit' whip, cut on de leg, cover in de burn shush, an' leff fuh de gandy flies. But, before he die, he tell us to take he to the sea and leave he for dead. He want fuh travel back Africa to ask dem gods for help.

But dis nah what me fuh tell you here. Massa move lickle Olivia inside. He say the Lord speak to he an' say he must raise she up to be fair an' virtuous. He say he like me look, hard enough to be man but sweet enough to be woman. Massa take offa me iron bit an' ask Dido to keep Missus Olivia an' be she maidservant. Massa say he done scol' me fuh my talk an' I be 'bedient now and right age to care fuh an' play wit' Missus Olivia. Massa give she fancy tuta dem to teach she Latin an' French dem. And ebry morning, I mek certain she lissen to he scripcha talk and ebry night, shhh, I mek certain she lissen to me Annancy talk. I tell she, shhh, is same holy trick fuh see spider walk pun water. I tell she, shhh, we woman musse be careful when only dem men dem write an' talk 'bout how we gwan be. I tell she, shhh, cuz if you be 'fraid fe eat eye, you neber eat nyam head. And is so we keep secret talk an' I help she grow wit' fiyah in she head not like quiet Christian candle. Fiyah! But she grow too pretty for she own good and Dido try fuh cover all deh mirrors. Fe true, I talk! I try to raise she vainless. "You muss not consume on de mirror and fanciness Olivia, big blanket mek man sleep late," I does say. But my Olivia is nineteen now and Massa dead. Plenty buckras from udder place, eben Antigua colonies, come to woo she but Massa broddas dem back in Englan' will take over. Massa's last will and testing say Olivia must marry she cousin in Englan' to inherit dis here plantation an' when she inherit she tell me secret, shhh. What me fuh tell you here is she secret. She promise she will return to Jamaica and set we free. Iron bit or no, Dido got ting fuh say an' put in she book 'bout my Queen of Indee!

Launched on a New World. You cannot wonder at my thinking of the lines of suitors who await me in England if I were not already betrothed to my cousin. Oh, but the thought of the play a bee must enjoy moving from petal to petal. That I could not help surveying the other young women on the deck of *H.M.S. *** ***, who are few, but in comparing them to me, they only draw the attention of a common seagull in

the sailor's eye. Even today, the first white persons we met, a planter's widow Mrs. Honeywood and her son, a financial speculator, could not disparage of my countenance. The young Mr. Honeywood, a lover of the sun, for I have seen him often on these decks and unafraid of the darkening effects of our relentless star, offered to shelter me under his cap. To be treated with such humanity and humor brought tears to my eyes. Yet, I did not show them. I did once pretend to slip on algae, which, in calamitous quantity, has seized the damp of the deck's floor, so he could, with a gentleman's touch, grab me around my waist as if we were part of one world. Oh what wine! What intoxication! I was quite enlivened. I know that the climate of my talk is hot with vanities but if the seducer of innocence is to be the only party privy to the game then where lie the seduction? Of fact, I have caught him, on many an occasion, stealing glances at my figure when I sit on the ship's deck to write in my daily journal. For on the deck, he sees me in the best of the filtering light as if I am, in one instant Juno on her Olympian throne, in one instant the beloved sunset he extols of setting over his family estate on Clarendon Parish, Jamaica, in one instant a lark bathing and unblushing in a fountain's basin. As if I have no shame? I ought. No! I must not boast of my visage, and yet it is all I am told, for Dido, and she being the sable likeness of Athena, wisdom and beauty to spare, tells me I am the Queen of India. If she can look at me without the prejudice of my color then why should I not believe? Could not this unfortunate middle tone attract a partner to my pair? Though, in Dido, I see her generous attention is as a friend, a sister, a servant. In Jamaica, the planters regard me with mixed disdain. While I am profoundly awarded for my piety in manner and charity of heart with the feeble slaves of my parish's blacks, the white planters regard all else of me as their danger. And the blacks, too, see me as threat for if I can walk amongst them and whites but they cannot retrace my steps in kind, then who am I? My privilege, a gift of Damocles.

Should I wrap my hair in less colorful a silk to perfect the planters' wives pallid mood? Should I have been born of darker hue so to better understand the black woman's unruly mood? Perhaps, I have should have been painted the color of angel's wings to pass quietly through society's discourse? Can a color make even distributions of my heart and mind? I should have been born an Atlantic wave so to better understand this mercurial world, I must tremble with it! I sometimes think, that had my dear mother lived, she would have put me on a wiser path, a superior path, despite her lowest of births. But now, I, who educated under the Gospel, shall endeavour to enter into my arrangement with Mr. Augustus Merton, the nephew of my most faithful and pious guardian, with such devotion as to make the snobs on the London boulevards green in turns. I shall be a partner in his bed, and equal to his mind, and the keeper of his heart! And I will prevail upon his most Christian of hearts to agree with my scheme of manumission for being my father's nephew, is not love and common-sense in his blood? Oh father, oh guardian, oh mentor—I never saw such godliness in a man as my father for he took me in, having been born of a tragic race but equal to all God's creatures—and decreed I must marry Mr. Merton to inherit the plantation. *C'est le destin!* I am caught in the enthusiasm of my mission to free the poor black wretches I am more in common with than not. Yet, how strange upon this strange deck with its strange salted winds stinging my cheek, I think of my mother in another light. Tragic creature as she may be, torn between two men, she placed me far above the scenes of her crime to be raised virtuously. And what of her virtue? Was it a virtue at what cost? And what of this other man? A poor blackened soul, who I am told by my dearest Dido, did love me as his own but died for my protection...no matter, I will return to lift them all up having fulfilled my duties as wife, partner, and lover turning all others from my mind henceforth, no matter how my *nature* remembers the freckles on an earnest brow,

remembers the ridges on a prospector's thumb, remembers the discoveries of a *capable* bottom lip. Pray tell, is Mr. Honeywood still looking?

A love like theirs. Augustus Merton, surprised by her wit and beauty, still did not have the courage to brag about his betrothed. He did, however, bluster to his creditors when his furniture and other confiscated items were returned and his financial dignity restored. The wedding was not announced as it ought to have been. Mr. Honeywood found out a year later, in 1829, his dear Miss Olivia was another man's wife. Honeywood, answering gravely to his generation's purpose, believed a voyage would heal the heart. This England that birthed his sadness, birthed a riot of commerce and expansion across two great oceans that would soon build his wealth.

In Continuation. They sit in the parlor of Mrs. George Merton, sister-in-law to Augustus Merton. In her appointed home, they sip tea sugared by the labor of the Heiress's slaves. Lump after sugary Jamaican lump plops in the Chinese porcelain tea service. The joke, certainly nothing clever, reaches her too late. The other women her sister-in-law has invited to gawk and scowl are curious to see if Olivia stings, climbs, or howls. They do not call her Mrs. Merton, only Miss Fairfield or our visitor from "darker climes." Dido watches from a distance, invisible to them at any distance but close enough to embolden Olivia's resolve. Dido writes down each of these ladies' names in a creation she calls a book. The score of Reason's insults must be tallied.

In Continuation. They sit in the parlor of a home that is more his than hers, though she has paid for it by ways and means she wishes to end. Her face, with its

intelligent eyes, knows that Augustus is hiding her from gossips who talk of his “monkey wife.” Dido watches from a distance, visible to the African footman who delivers their invitation to the Honeywood New Year’s ball. Dido smiles at her Olivia’s polite excitement. When he has finished his cider, Augustus decides he needs to meet these Honeywoods.

Spectral Presence. Man, she lookin’ good bwoy! I don’t know how she marry such a ridiculous dude, man. He drink too much; he wear too much powder and pomatum in his hair, man. Look at him now. He’s asleep on my couch and she’s over there sitting in the parlor with dem crabs and drabs with her fine, fine self. When the band drops the quadrille, imma snatch her up by her waist and whisper, “Gal yuh too sweet, spend some time wid me suh some ah you sweetness rub off pon mi.” Parlor life is over, bwoy! I can’t with these other thirsty broads looking in my pockets every time I ask them to dance. I made a dolla’ outta fifteen cent overseas and these daughters of my new gentleman elite class can smell coin like hound! Now, I ain’t saying they are gold diggers, but last year they treated me like I was a broke jigger. But I did it all for you Olivia so *I can tell you how I feel about you night and day*. Imma make she Mrs. Honeywood. Ex man to the next man.

A Sentiment Between Husband and Wife. I have cause to leave the house on occasions when my husband, anxious of his own consequence as an absent Jamaican landlord, visits the gentleman’s parlor to share his knowledge to those who, having none of his experience, sympathy, or disposition, are grateful of his opinion on matters of slavery and discord in the West Indies. His cause, and I am assured by my husband’s admiration of my reading *Stedman’s Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society. An Abridged, Modernized Edition of Narrative of a Five Years*

Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, is the godly cause of abolition. And though he dare not speak the words aloud, I am assured by his passionate Christian words and pillow promises, that we share the progressive opinions on the baseness of human bondage. With his solid position in society, he is looked on at his club as the expert on all things West Indian. In turn, though I have not disclosed it to my dear husband for I do not want appear restless or emboldened by said human injustices, I attend meeting to support the virtuous efforts of the Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. I tell his honourable Mother Merton, who comes to visit often, that I am visiting the poor for I know her hawkish shadow would otherwise follow me wherever I do go. Yet, her Christian spirit, in so peculiar a quantity that it depletes in the presence of the indigent, will never follow me to visit the women and children workhouses. It is my ruse and my weekly confession to the priest! When I speak the words, "Farewell, dear Aunt," before parting with my Dido, Mother Merton, this aunt and mother-in-law, seems gratified at beholding her brother's mouth on my face. As she, with curious attention, will say I also remind her of her own late father. My mouth, the miniature of madness. Her father, Augustus Fairfield III, was a well-known slaver and shipmaster who came to possess a Jamaica plantation. Mother Merton recalls his ill-nature with heightened glee but her nostalgia abates when she recalls how his boredom of life on the land and longing for wrecklessness of the sea made him friend to no woman breathing on the plantation. After his son, my most misguided father Augustus Fairfield IV, was initiated to manhood, an Obeah woman cursed that all Fairfield daughters would end them. So, Mother Merton, in the bloom of her sixteenth year, three years before her own mother passed on, was put on a ship back to England to marry then birth her own Augustus. Of his other property, the daughters in his slaver's brood, Fairfield sold them. Mother Merton

says she would only see her brother, Augustus, once more when he returned to London to bury their saturnine father, to find a suitable wife, and to baptize his sister's second son. Although this second son, my cousin-husband, is the fifth in a line of my mother's inheritors, she adds that my countenance is much handsomer than theirs. How circuitous and strange-sounding this observation! Oh how entangled we all are that if she found a starfish, or the wooden bough of her devil father's ship, or some other seaworthy detritus upon my face I should not be surprised at her exclamation of its charm. Oh how she covets this certain and indiscriminating quality! At the shape and color of all else of my person, her fondness and admiration ends. Am I saddened by my darkness, she asks. But, how happy she is to know that for God and nature, I can be no true Fairfield and therefore, there is no jungle woman curse upon me as a Fairfield daughter. I am patient for her wits are mouldering with age. Despite her indifference to my colored soul, I remain tenderhearted toward one whom a husband and a father diminished in life, but whose rich coffers, have, in their commercial pursuits, purchased for her objects of every *globus* encounter. For within this month, this aunt and mother-in-law, who, surrounded by trophies of conquest, commissioned an indulgence of Chinese porcelain depicting a scene of English *business* with a brass bust in the likeness of Dido, in size and demeanor, as Africa embodied for its lid. And engraved upon this lid words of Marcus Aurelius to capture her bitterness against Jamaica without understanding her father's own role in her consequence. "A black character, a womanish character, a stubborn character, bestial, childish, animal, stupid, counterfeit, scurrilous, fraudulent, tyrannical." Contained within this conspicuous object is Ceylon tea, a gift from a Sri Lankan burgher in the Kingdom of Kandy, who according to this aunt and mother-in-law, did once dare kiss her on the hand! As she slips into fond recollections of touches forbidden, I divert my mind. There appears

none of that sympathy in the mother that lies within the son, my husband, I am assured. She thinks herself too good even for the perfunctory touch of a visiting wealthy high-caste Sinhalese whose flesh, even, pales in hue to her own and whose European-minded scruples, even more, betters her financial situation quarterly. Therefore, I tell this lie to take my leave to attend weekly anti-slavery meetings. I must! The daughter of purpose and fortune perishes unfulfilled and dishonored if the benefit of her example is for vanity alone.

Ole fiyah stick ezzi fi ketch. Dem Merton and Honeywood sit in de parlor drink up de wine and make dey face like civil at each udda when the butla call dem fuh eat. Dem Merton get cheese, lamb, fish, beans, soup, potato, breads, and jam all cram up de table to make big show for the Honeywood people dem. They sit boy girl, boy girl wit Merton muddah sit next to Mr. Honeywood and Olivia across from she sweetness. Honeywood muddah sit next to Massa Augustus. Muddah Merton start to talk ras about de Jamaican Maroon and how dey must burn out the mountains to get dem fuh run out and get dem Maroon ketch and kill. If she only know I come from Maroon people, Me-no-Sen-You-no-Come people. How I got skill fuh mek me run in she one window and out de door wit everyone wonder who deh slice she end to end like summer hog. Dey tink ol' Dido is only a maid but nah ebreeting soak up waata is a sponge. Honeywood muddah talk abolishuns talk and say what you spect when you teach dem bible but not show dem Christ love. Is trut' but we does fashion Christ our own way to mek he mek sense. Miss Olivia is agreeing and she husband Augustus make one laugh to embarrass she mout' shut then I tell you man, you shudda see how Honeywood turn on Massa Merton like he fuh eat hot rice. He got spirit like dem abolishuns and dat is what Merton dem say like it fuh be an insult to want mek free slaves. But dis nah what me fuh tell you here. Honeywood ah ask Merton what he gwon do wit' he plantation if he feel so

and Miss Olivia did not like he ansa. Massa Merton say some long windy ting 'bout black dem must me "fungible" and how freedom is danger to dem planter an' sendin' dem back to Africa make no sense. Dido nah know this fungy ting but, Dido write it down in she book for remembring. I stand behind Olivia so I cannot see she face but I see Honeywood face and I only can fuh know how she mussie look cuz pun he face is sadness like he want fuh jump over the roast lamb head and hold she in him arms. And Olivia look make Merton muddah see and know how she own son notice dis quiet ting between Honeywood and he 'monkey wife.' Monkey is nonsense she does say when she nah see me seeing she. But dis nah what me fuh tell you here. After deh pineapple, choclat, and vanil milks, Massa Merton ask Honeywood 'bout all he new richness in de stocks market. He say no matter dem Honeywoods free dere slaves dem in Jamaica and Trinidad and now pay dem fuh wuk cuz him say Honeywoods still rich cuz "the negress begets wealth and wealth begets the negress" and now Dido hate dat tea jar more. Us'lly dem men does go fuh smoke and woman go for drink sherry in separate room but Honeywoods dem leave quick fast. Miss Olivia curtsy and Honeywood do he bow ting and dat is when I see deh slip of paper in he hand. Dido unnastand so I drop deh ugly jar with pictures of black people, Indee people, and Chinee people, and Arawak people dem kneeling to English man on the ground with Dido head on de top. When it bruk up and de tea scatter like cane ash, alla dem turn fuh look at Dido and dat is when Honeywood give Olivia deh note. I tell you, is love.

To Mrs. Augustus Merton, a note in secret. I planned this out in my head but it's just you I see in my head. You feel me? So tell me, honey brown, are we sipping from a full cup or am I the only one who's thirsty?

The Partner of His Bed. This husband, whom I mentioned, is a very interesting person both from his good heart and gentle manners, despite his coarse desires in the bedroom. He is the second nephew of a white man, who on his death-bed charged this youngest nephew and heir to marry his unfortunate daughter. I am that unfortunate daughter, but who am I to be ungrateful at my shades fortunes or misfortunes? This nephew, my husband, promised to do so and did so marry me. On our wedding night, I had sincerely wished him to get on with his liberties lest I be made timid or worse, fall into deeper passions—and, from inability to maintain them, send my body into deeper passions for itself or with the image of Honeywood to assist—on my wedding night. Yet, I was heavily grieved that the trick to this wife's coupling was to smile politely throughout to signal something magical was happening. For weeks, I could not allow myself to say more to him but my for dearest Dido, her great age and misfortunes being the agents of her wisdom, offered comfort. She understood how it was to survive in unexpected ways. Dido, using the servant's incisive grapevine, learned Mr. Merton had been engaged to another planter's daughter and the poor fellow seems to think it impossible to find his courage in bed—courage enough to please a women—lest he be beaten with a paddle... That was the way with his lover before. That is the way things are now. The cycle of tenderness, viciousness, and rebirth—that is why we are here. But it is not this poor fellow, my dear reader, you need to pity. It seems that in his heart, he is the lover still of this Helen of his heart, whom I am meant to give rise so that he may give rise in return. For my gentle Augustus, she is the picture of alarm and attraction. To me, she is the undissembled satisfaction that I inhabit nightly on his stage for he is a lover of performance and re-creation. Some evenings we reenact scenes from Shakespeare and he is the Prospero to my Caliban or, on occasions especially kind, my Ariel. This evening, after the performance of Trojan wails and

Achaean thrusts, he expired. I retired to my chamber where Dido gave me comfort. Somehow, I believed if I could inhabit his fancies he would inhabit mine. Freedom contrived a double debt to pay: a pliant lover at night and a pious wife at day. There is something very dissatisfied in these married days. I have partaken in every display of amusement by my Augustus, and his readiness in answering my question on the matter of the plantation does exhibit good-nature but has manifested no proof. I fear I may forget my way; I may wake with no remembrance over the souls I vowed to protect; I will be supplanted by an already conceived of narrative and this Helen of his dreams will sublimate in my stead, under my skin and within my marrow. And, at my too-soon death, my Dido will salvage my true bones as an offering to her strange goddess Erzulie. Oh Mater Dolorosa, oh African other! I confided in Dido my fears of bearing his child. The fear is not the vanity of my life that could expire as many of Earth's daughters do so in childbirth. No; my fear is that to bear a child is to never return home to my task for if it is a boy, he will be heir. If it is a girl, she will be sheltered and reared for a suitor who, from her, he will squeeze her life's energies and her heiress's values. As it usually followed from my connubial meetings with Augustus, Dido poured a hot bath and brewed for me that special tea made from bitters back home that she says will, "stop him tail from get catch in you bag." Oh, her riddles do cheer me and calm me. Prayers for this libation's deeds are best left unwritten, dear earnest reader. And as we recompose in our bath, Dido lists the names of all those she loves, those separated and sold one way from the other, she will be soon charged by an act of freedom with a new restlessness in finding, those lost like Yellow Jack, Little David, now a man, and the one she calls Sally who, in the intimate way she remembers, she remembers in song. And again, before I go quietly hand in hand with Hypnos, I do ask Dido to hum their song as I read the letter I am too uncertain to answer.

In Continuation. The doctor tends to the older Mrs. Augustus Merton who, upon reading her daughter-in-law's secret copy of *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* printed on February 15, 1831, took ill, in the most dramatic way, on the 16th of February. News of slave revolts across the Americas precede and follow the discovery of Olivia's reading habits. Augustus, unfamiliar with Jamaica but now familiar with his wife's potential, develops a cough of his own.

To Mrs. Augustus Merton from Mrs. Honeywood, a morning post, 1 March 1831.

My dearest Olivia, please forgive the lateness of my correspondence. News of Mr. Merton's and the elder Mrs. Merton's depleted stamina have reached me in Leeds. You and your family are in our thoughts. We pray that the suffering of your husband, godly mother, and that of your poor slaves will remit as they do seem linked, by an old widow's superstition, in these troubling times. My son, Mr. N.D. Honeywood, whom I hope you remember and who was for near two years embarked on business matters on the Continent, sends his affections. Our Apollo has returned!

A caged bird. A fleet sails to Jamaica to-morrow to quell slave revolts. Augustus has sent monies to that most brutish cause. I have been fouled by Irony and Ignorance. Mrs. George Merton, sister-in-law to Augustus Merton has, with her young son, moved in to care for Augustus, accusing I cannot soothe his sorrows or better his afflictions when my heart is divided. This nephew, young George Merton III, follows his mother in act and temperament. As Dido says, "Wa de goat do, deh kid fall." And so, as he whispers loudly "black" and "quashy," and I endure his stares and presumptive nature with no power to retreat. Marriage to Mr. Merton, has

infected me with a thousand superstitious fears over my soul. This home, with its ornamental objects and English light glowing an icy paleness through its silken curtains, is now a prison that wraps me within its perspective as if trapped in some ungodly womb, for which I am its unnatural birth advanced to life by haunted flotsam. This womb room of forlorn hope! This menagerie of my utter unworthiness! This marriage so awful and singular!

An unblushing lark. I will write back to Honeywood to distract my mind.

To Mr. Nigel Drake Honeywood, an afternoon post, 3 April 1831. My dear friend, I am sorry to not have written for so long. News of renewed militia presence in the colonies has improved Augustus's spirits. In accord, please thank your mother for her prayers. As it turns out, for better or worse, the link she predicted was, in fact, an old widow's sense of justice. With my husband's health improved, his mother and sister spend the spring in Italy. I am now at liberty to write to my many fine acquaintances. Though, I confess, you and Dido are my dearest! Happy Easter from Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Merton, London.

To Mrs. Augustus Merton, a morning post, 4 April 1831. What your man got to do with me?

To Mr. Nigel Drake Honeywood, an afternoon post, 5 April 1831. Mr. Honeywood, the distant tones which I wrote on this morning do conceal my true happiness. Shall I have reason to feel so lawless?

To Mrs. Augustus Merton, an afternoon post, 6 April 1831. What are you wearing,

honey brown?

In Continuation. Olivia thinks she was too forward to sketch a likeness of her own nakedness posed in sapphires and pearls before a mirror. Then, with no response for the remainder of the day or the next, Mrs. Augustus Merton, is cheerless. Mr. Honeywood's absent remarks on her boldness mortify and wound her. Then, a small parcel arrives, in the hands of Dido who has taken it from the hands of servants within her careful grapevine. On the 8th of April, Olivia beholds the parcel wrapped in paper decorated with hand painted aubergines, a curious organ of nature Olivia remarks. Inside the parcel, a band of Ghanian blue waist beads arranged in a spiral. A note explains they were passed down to the men in his family to give to their beloved. Dido explains blue signifies loyalty and trust. Dido explains Africa, America, creoles, and survival. Dido explains that the moral to the "Annancy and Gingy Fly" tale, in which Annancy spider does kill his godfather rabbit, does fool his godmother rabbit, and does convince the gingy fly to help him eat the rabbit only to cut out the gingy fly's tongue after, is not that Annancy's darker intentions are to murder and maim in order to survive. No; Dido reminds Olivia that the widow and the witness, being forged in the same world and words as Annancy, were never ever ignorant nor innocent .

Annancy tale. I knew dat bwoy got surprise in he.

To Mrs. Augustus Merton, an afternoon post, 16 September 1831. You promised to send me a picture of you in those beads, honey brown.

To Mr. Nigel Drake Honeywood, an evening post, 18 September 1831. Dear Mr.

Honeywood, I by no means wish for us to share our perfect seclusion with the world, but when the word of the Virginia Rebellion, in our beloved sister country, is spread before the whole of England, I did anticipate a note of concern on your part for it is in *this world* where we love. Yet, though I talk with a lover's persuasion, mistake me not, dearest Honeywood; I am not so vain as to be disaffected that *my* black society could form no thought of concern in my head. But for you? I know you, a man of business and travel, has at his disposal the *Leeds Intelligencer* and the *Bristol Mercury*. Are you not in crisis over this calamity? Are we not of the same heart and mind? Are you so singleminded in what a woman's mind can process? Or, are you silent because of travel, again, on the Continent conducting what business and to what ends? I know enough of the machines they call Virginia, Louisiana, West Indies, East Indies, the Orient and that Dark Continent of my seeding to understand your past silences regarding your "fungible commodities." I am now awake. As what followed with the news of that brave black Baptist preacher Nat Turner and his slave revolt lasting three days, the conversations in the Merton home have so broken the scheme of our daring Utopian happiness. I am hawked my my family, disdained by my husband as an accomplice in rebellious thought. My husband, with his growing nervous disposition and sick-bed cough, has come lock my dearest Dido in a room with our other servants, each night, for fear they would slice his throat. And of me? Only Bluebeard's wives can play the part better than I...and that I do! I survive the nights so that in the light of day I plot. So you see, I can no longer live within our love's oblivion. The power of being loved—an exercise in tricking doubts—has, notwithstanding my admiration of your hand producing whimsical aubergines and raw-tongued Bryonesques that rouse me to exertion, clouded my true purpose. I cannot succumb to the foreign language of a man's promise, again: father, tutor, pastor, suitor, lawyer, husband. Merton name be

damned! Fairfield name be damed! Do I put your name to that list? My impetuous idea: I will put an end to that peculiar thing called plantation! The words of my Dido stoke me forth, "If you are afraid to eat the eye then you will not eat the head," and I will be nothing if not *cannibal* in this matter! I do believe you now know my secret and now I shall return yours. I enclose your ancestor's waist beads that I am no longer worthy to wear nor are you to own. Do you even know? What loyalty? What trust? What folly! Feeling a chasm larger than a loss of your affections, I make no apology for calling to an end our immodest correspondences. So, fare you well! Adieu.

With Conscious Pleasure In the name of God Amen, I, Augustus Lyndon George Merton of London in the county of Middle[sex] Barrister, being weak & sickly of body but of sound perfect and disposeing minde & memory, praised be God. Yet considering the Mortality of my weak body and for the satisfying of my wife and Relations after my death doe make and declare this my Last will & Testament in manner and form following. First and principally I committ & Commend my soul unto the hands of Almighty God my maker & Creator And to Jesus Christ my redeemer who doth not judge nor impugn me. And as my body returns to its primitive dust from whence it was taken to be decently interred at the discretion of my wife near the statue of that Greek figure of charm and purpose, Helen, that be situated in the Merton family gardens in the county of North Avon. Disannulling all other Wills and Testaments, my temporal Goods that Go hath endowed me as my born and natural right, I give & bequeath them in the manner and form following: I give & Bequeath to my nephew George Merton, son to my older brother George and sister-in-law Elizabeth, the Sum of Two Thousand Pounds per annum to firstly go to his Cambridge education where then he will attend my alma mater, King's College,

to benefit from such philosophies and treatises as Marcus Aurelius and his *Meditations* and next benefit from instructions in modern commerce to share the burden and the spoils of our West Indies and East Indies endeavors. Ite[m] I give and bequeath to my wife, Olivia Merton, nee Fairfield, the Sum[m] of Two Hundreds Pounds annum and a majority holding in the Jamaica estates on the condition she manumit no slave except the children who are declared sole legatees by their former master, my esteemed uncle, and wif[e]'s father, Mr. Augustus Fairfield IV. I declare she remain in England, unmarried and in her proven and lasting virtue and goodness, she must visit upon her poorly husband at his grave, daily; Lastly I constitute and appoint my brother George Merton, Sr. to be my sole Execut[o]r of this my Last Will & Testament, he discharging my Debts and Funeral expenses - In witness whereof I have here-unto set to my hand and seal the second day of May Ann[o] Dom[ini] 1831/1832.

In Continuation. Olivia was not surprised to learn that the her brother-in-law, older Mr. George Merton, found ways to deplete her inheritance. Nor is this the only instance in which Olivia had been unlucky. She was moved, with her maid, to a house close to the Merton grave plots. When she left for the cottage by the North Sea, Augustus Merton, knowing her visits to his grave would feed her disappointment and rage, made provisions in his will to ensure Olivia's lasting virtue and goodness. She must visit his grave to give prayer in widow's mourning blacks for the appearance of devotion. And, she should not remarry lest she make way for further tarnish and vice common to her sex and kind, and thus void all financial and legals claims to Fairfield estates. At first, her visits would find her, consumed with thoughts, sitting and sobbing. After a month, Olivia found new ways of sitting and relieving her consumption at his grave. Honeywood, unable to wait the gentlemanly year for a widow to mourn, approached her doorway on All

Hallows' Eve with his promises of reform. Enabled to free herself from the profit and pleasure of others, she told Dido to send this third liar away. He rode off in his carriage, magnified by her rejection.

Fiyah fi you face. An' de bwoy come down an doan got notting to show dat he tink what is happening to de oppress be wrong. "I come to marry your Olivia, my fairiest field to conquer." An' jes as him saying his schtupid words wit' he new clothes and comb back hair, I tell he to move from de gal cuz if I oblige to write he name in dis ting I call a book, a debil will come fetch he. An' is so it be...

In Continuation. Honeywood stood alone at the Leeds docks remembering the past pleasures of Olivia's laughter. Looking at her sketchings, at the wonders she balanced on her hips, wonders he would not know, he pulled the raised crotch of his pants. From an empty dock, he re-created their last conversation in his head. "It's an interesting question your proposal, but I have believed in the kind words of many a superior man. I have believed in our common understanding of God and our shared whole-hearted inflection of pity on my darker brothers and sisters. So tell me Mr. Nigel Drake Honeywood, formerly of St. James Parish Jamaica, what act between us would provide me proof of this love?" He tipped the rum from his flask into his mouth and there, in the oncoming darkness, he felt another weight upon him, the approach of a dark figure. Beyond the exhausted sun, and in huge abundance, the fog began to break exposing a man covered in what appeared as steaming mud. But it did not smell of earth and grime. This mud was the scent of burnt sugar Honeywood remembered from standing in the distiller's shack as a boy. In his left hand, this man dragged behind noiseless fetters, the kind he had seen at the slavers' markets. An iron collar locked the man's neck, screws clamped his thumbs, blood

dripped from his cut hamstrings. Honeywood strained to hear the words he repeated. He had heard about this kind of punishment, the things done by his great-grandfathers on one side of his family to the great-grandfathers on the other side of his family. He had heard about the tortures. He had also heard about the rude intrusions of the planter on the young girl in her bloom; the loss of her reputation bathed in tears where once she was showered with praise; or not. He had heard, through the planter's grapevine, about Mr. Fairfield's own misfortune with a slave married in secret to his black concubine Marcia, the very mother of his beloved Olivia. An enslaved man, who a short time before was his very best field hand, had attacked him. As a godly man, Fairfield left the ignominious task of discipline to a driver, the man's own relation no less, to soak and pull him in a vat of burnt sugar all the while Olivia, only a child, looked on. The man on the dock with the iron collar who, slowing approaching closer, began to speak a word and, being so full of rum, Honeywood believed he heard the word Africa. To think, his sweet tony-browed Olivia had seen this kind of man, covered in dark ooze with patches of pink flesh exposed over his pubis, over his arm, over his ear. After the incident, Mr. Fairfield adopted the poor creature. *Poor creature?* Who was he to think or call Olivia poor? She was, in many ways, more of a man than him. He retraced his crotch imagining her born into his sex. How fearsome a creature that would be! Compared to this reborn Olivia, he believed his manhood was a conceptual act. He was a planter's son but not an heir. He chose not to be responsible for life or death on a plantation but would cover the crime in trading commodities that were inconspicuous to *human cost*. For the weak of heart, unable to bear screams and fresh scars, there were few places to hide in Jamaica but there was always England, there was always the stock market. His mother was happy he had been born for sales and leisure—Born with firm hands made for holding, his soft curls made for sifting, and his manly powers

made for charming. She was most happy he was able to survive in much colder conditions. This was England. Honeywood's eyes turned to the man's bare feet, now too close for either to be passive onlookers. The other man approached unchecked by Honeywood and rested his hand across the other's chest until they each began to breathe in twinned panicked gasps. Twins in gesture and pause. Twins in lose and commission. When Honeywood circled his head, the man in fetter circled his neck exposing its tattered muscles. When Honeywood raised his left hand, the man in fetters raised his left hand where two fingers were lost. Honeywood thought, perhaps, this more violable version of his body would form a more significant man, an anatomy of purpose. On an impulse, as the two men stared at each other, they screamed.

Honeywood in Revolt for his Future. Hey man! You that Sam Sharpe cat? Well, I come back home from farrin wit' plenty guns and idea about dem English. I come back wit' new things in my head about real freedom, you feel me? On the docks looking at the devil, face to face, who was no devil but me hallucinating or full on pissed. An' when I wake from that nightmare, I look up at the ship, *Three Little Birds*, and understand how that this is how I can make my woman no cry. I understand what I must do. What we must do. One love, no matter this coloration. People get ready! No bullet can stop us now. We cannot be bought or sold. Come on, a little sacrifice, you feel me? I'm willing and able to shoot the the sheriff and his deputy but none but ourselves can free our minds from mental slavery, you feel me? Emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, you feel me? But since dem listen to you Sam Sharpe, I gwan stand here and wait for your decision. What do you need this Creole bwoy to do?

In Continuation. In the interval of war when the structures change, others may not.

In Continuation. At length, on April 28, 1832 more news of the Christmas Rebellion and black Baptist preacher Sam Sharpe in Jamaica stirs another torrent of talk in the English streets. In the London parlors of gentlemen only, they read the headlines and the details within the piles of opinions, such as those reprinted in the *Bristol Mercury* that ask them at length, “Whether, as a general truth, it is best for a labourman to labour as an hired labourer or as a slave? Whether it is best for him to labour for wages which shall be his own, or to be dependent upon his master for what he shall please to give him? Whether it is best for him that his wife should be independent of his employer, or should be his master’s slave? Whether it is best for him to be subject to no penalty except for his own crimes, or to be liable to be sold for his master’s debts? Whether it is best for him to be secure from punishment until found guilty on fair and open trial, or to be left as his master’s discretion to be flogged, imprisoned, and tortured whenever his master pleases?”²³⁸

The transitions of fortune. Inna very short time, Dido and she Missus Olivia, fall into a famish. We not hungry like dem soot face onion skin pickney running around de mama skirts, but we is famish for love and company. But dis nah what me fuh tell you. We live by de sea now, walking from Massa Merton’s grave to de beach every morning. Inna grave, I stand behind she because I scared dem white duppie. When de wind move, I think it some craven planter tryn to drag me to the oder side. I stand behind Missus Olivia but I can still hear she pray. Not a one time she use de word lord. She does spit and cry, but notta word for Lord. When we does walk

²³⁸ Newspapers from the British Archive available at British Newspapers Archive Online: *Bristol Mercury*, February 22, 28, 1832, March 6, 1832, April 28, 1832.

home, dem people here more curiouser than dem in London. One old lady de eat up a fish fast fast just so she can t'row she bones at us. I just pick up de bones and tell she, "good, now I got you ting to add to me book." You shudda see de look on she buckra face. But dis nah what me fuh tell you. Next we meet anodder woman who tell us not to mind schtupid people. She say all dem fill up wit' fear cuz we abolisshuns winning the fight against slavery. She show us de paper and Missus Olivia read, "Jamaica is free."

In Continuation. In the interval of peace when the structures change, others may not.

Come back to Jamaica. Now, me broddas and sistuhs, dis is de way I see tings. Clear conshunce sleep a tunda. I see we situation is made more poor by our status as woman. So first, I mek me magic wuk wit' tru love. But, nah matter how I twist she hair strands in my book to give she power, to give she cunning, there is always dem dat mek laws to stop woman and to crush we black. When Dido mek she book again like she learn to mek, I try wit' de Massa, I try wit' de husband, but him who it work on is de one who want more den Missus Olivia sweet cake. You see—I say, me magic work wit' love. Honeywood have de Caribbean people dem in he heart even if it bury beneat' plenty jackassery. What you tink reader? You tink I leave de fate of alla we people to one flighty head gal and she rude boy? But dis nah what me fuh tell you. Island, wi soon come.

So Very Conspicuous. Through the dust-covered curtains, Olivia watched him walk through the snowy fields. Despite the chill, Honeywood had kept his promise.

Curry Goat (2035)

As each guest sits down to dinner, the dispirited kitchen staff makes ready the provisions their visitors want most to enjoy at the all-inclusive Sandals Resorts: french fries and hamburgers.

A waiter, the one confused for three other waiters who share no true resemblance to each other aside from common human dimorphism, leans against a framed property map with its Travel and Leisure Magazine publicity brag. Despite the hurricanes, Sandals Ville des Maîtres was rated one of the top places to visit in the Caribbean. Rated number one when it opened in 2019, in 2020 after a presidential visit, in 2029 missing Hurricane Moloch, and in 2032 and 2033 amidst Hurricanes Nice, Open, and Place. Ville des Maîtres owed their success not to the majestic make-over of under-developed coastal land by seven intrusive “villages” plotted on sixty acres of tropical forest which, by displacing the natural habitats of the West Indian whistling duck that was recovered and relocated from Cuban after Hurricane Elvis, caused a chain reaction of paradoxical insect species declines and overpopulations that justified Sandal’s use of insecticides that leached into the water supply affecting two of the “villages,” the Dutch and Spanish styles, leaving the English, German, Portuguese, Italian, and Japanese “villages” to absorb the excess of 1,112 guests into 420 available rooms and suites adhering to an interior designer’s idea of the resort’s cultural permutations by way of mahogany furniture, tiled floors, Synkro sound and lighting technology to better display the bright striped and floral fabrics—some rooms have the hidden face of the developer in the wallpaper print—and leaving the five open “villages” relatively toxin-free so that guests could still enjoy the pan-Asian, Italian, Caribbean-style continental buffet, American steakhouse, American grille, and French bistro options, yet, the whistling duck fiasco did affect where live entertainment such as traditional Caribbean sing-alongs, fire

dancing, and rude-boy reggae shows could take place, and ultimately, while Ville des Maîtres management will say its closed-off arena was the reason the half Bajan-Trini, half Panamanian-Guyanese environmentalist rapper born in Jamaica, I-and-I, cancelled their show, the waiter knows it was the duck and that Ville des Maîtres owes their success to its manmade wetland and seawall. An architect's erection and saturation made the guests feel secure. The waiter outs his cigarette on the property map over the "Coming Soon: Chinese Village" and heads back to the staff door leading to the kitchen.

"Man, how much you think one of dem spa treatments cost?" The waiter asks the kitchen. "I too frightened to get on that motor paddle board."

"How much is your paycheck, that is how much it cost," a line cook yells out.

"Food makes people happy," the chef says as he flicks a water bug trying to access a tray of corn meal dumplings. He is a tall man, this chef, with long fingers slightly buckled by arthritis and blotched with vitiligo. His shirt is stained from breakfast and brunch. And this job—this job that he began thirty years ago walking two hours down Cayo do Pos to Schotlandstraat to Caya Punta Brabo every night pushing a cart full of water and fruit drinks through the streets for tourists who gave tips to the handsome little boy with eyes the color of plums—did not seem to change. They still walk and creep and take photographs with at least two staff members a day as if to say we've surveyed the provenance of leisure and you sir are the lucky one. You are lucky to live in paradise while we only visit.

But the facts were these, that within ten years of trade deficits and recession, the island real estate was full blast. The whirr and clang of bankers' pens hitting the desk made it possible to sell half of the island. The men and women at the rum shops, bake shops, and machine shops talked close to each other about them others at a distance. But moving lips can only cuss a dougla, coolie, chinee, arab, whitey,

and a nigger. Money from overseas was moving in and moving back. The cart boy now the chef man even had his sister from farrin' come back home. She filled his closet with all the things he needed for all the kids he had, inside and outside his marriage. Yet the tall man's voice bouncing out the freezer and above its motor hum was angry and harsh.

Further facts were these, that within two weeks of heavy rains and a threat of another storm, they managed to stay open. Finding staff on any terms was a challenge. Ville des Maîtres was opening a new village and needed to keep up appearances by staying open. So now all the Antiguan people were running to America and England and Canada and the Netherlands. All of them were going there, it seemed. How ordinary, how practical, how funny, to be overrun by foreigners who paid you to be foreign.

"You see that shine pot over there? I'm going to take it when I leave. What are you going to take Beverly?" He asks his sous chef using the nickname he gives to her because he just doesn't understand how such a pretty girl has such a plain name like Bee.

"You can have the one that say La Cruset. It's French." He doesn't expect a response although he has heard her sing.

"I don't like this weather one bit. A wind like this knock down my receivers and my haptic line was bust for a week. How that stew coming?"

Bee lifts the spoon out the pot of curry goat and points it towards him to taste.

"Mmm gyal. You lucky I old. I'd make you my third wife."

The waiter from comes in with a plated service.

"Chef Alfonso, the lady say it not hot. Pepper she want."

Bee and Alfonso stew their teeth.

“Man, dese people dem don’t know what they want. How hot she want it?”

Alfonso asks.

“She sitting with she friends dem. I think she want to impress dem.”

The waiter shrugs his head and walks over the expediter who has four more plates ready to go out. Despite Chef Alfonso’s casualness in the kitchen, he runs it like a machine. When someone is late, he likes to remind them that his ancestors were business people and business is in his blood. When someone comments on his long fingers as he stirs a pot, he reminds them his grandmother played the piano and he inherited his bones from her side. When the ocean kicks up wetting the veranda floor, he reminds them his ancestor Jacob van Meeuwszoon was a famous sailor who survived the Bermuda Triangle.

“Beverly, give she pepper.”

Chef Alfonso turns his back and the waiter is gone. Alone by the pot, Bee fills a bowl. She leans over the bowl and opens her mouth wide. She has learned to control that certain impulse to correct. Her diaphragm flattens and lowers to inhale the curry stew then the breath from her lungs coats the top of the dish. The waiter returns.

“You spitting in it?” He is amused and excited. Bee scrunches her eyes to communicate, in a serious way, no. “I would” he whispers. He takes the bowl from her and walks away.

“I change my mind. I will take the La Cruset and you can have the shine pot. I have too many shine pots already. And when this storm come through, what they calling? Chicory? Saxophone? Whatever ras, when it come through, they better hope the laundry staff don’t pick up and leave too. They better hope it moves sideways so...like so and so.” And Alfonso is wining with his arthritic hips.

“When I wine up like your party gyal, let’s wine up our waistlines in soca synchro. Baby we earth is tremblin', we tremblin', we trembling' baby, grab me waistline like you part my world...” and a few of the staff begin to brighten and join in dancing and singing at their stations laughing at Alfonso wining close too Bee. She is not the one to fuck with. They all know this but she is amiable so he continues to wine. But not too close. She is a woman who wines up on you.

The waiter is back. Alfonso stops dancing and grabs the bowl. It is empty.

“What de fuuu...”

“They want more?”

“More. Yes more. The other people at the table order it too.”

“Change order?”

“No new order.”

Several waiters yell to expediter, goat, goat, goat. A screen above Alfonso’s station lists all the curry goat orders.

“Man, how much goat is this? Beverly! Goat up!”

Bee wipes her hands on her whites and walks to the freezer. She closes the door and in the chill of the box her skin begins to steam, releasing heat trapped from the tropics. She takes in a deep breath and, turning full circle, lets out a sea of exhales.

Alfonso must close the kitchen. He has never seen anything like this. The guests have eaten everything. But, at this point they are not guests. They are enclosed hogs eating the contents of the trough and now the trough. Even the young children, the ones who crave burgers and French fries, have eaten the mostly ornamental breadfruit canapés.

The night manager has called the day manager. They blame each other for the shortage. On the beach, the guests wander looking for the cart boys with drinks. In the bars, they jump behind the counter to eat the garnish.

“All inclusive means everything!” A bartender needs only to hear this once after a hard shove because there is only so much mango slices to go around.

Alfonso has told his staff to go home hours ago. Security guards count the people who are relieving themselves in the ocean. The bathrooms are all full and some no longer have the capacity to flush. They will add it to their bills.

The rain is beginning to fall as the kitchen crew waits for the security guards to escort the staff out. Every now and again, a scream is hurled at the closed door. They heard about the riot in Ristorante Habana, the resort’s Latin flair spot. No one wants to dodge hungry newlyweds. The guards take them out single file into a van reserved for guest airport transfers. Outside the moving van window, Alfonso watches the irrational behavior. Shaking his head. Everyone is loud and wild in their theories.

“It must be virus.” He says. “Must be something they bring in when they bring in all this frozen meat. You know, we used to use local foods. It was a matter of time before all this imported food get contaminated. You don’t import what it is you can grow and manufacture from right in the place. You know, my ancestors were business people.”

The van waits for the police to clear the road assuring guests of safe routes along the architect’s sea wall which was never up to code and is adjacent to the wetlands that only worked before the insecticides were sprayed, before the chain reaction of paradoxical insect species declines and overpopulations begun when the West Indian whistling ducks were displaced having to find shelter in elsewhere such as an abandoned cane field earmarked for Ville des Maîtres’s cultural

expansion of its Chinese “village” but needs to be cleared before such expansion with the use of non-selective herbicides for which the whistling duck, with their nocturnal and secretive ways, would trek between their fading habitats to mate carrying trace amounts of this non-selective herbicide, which is still under review by the FDA but readily available on the black market, on their beautiful black bills and webbed feet effectively accelerating their demise and thus, the demise of the humans who, after a series emetic and defecation events following their excessive consumption of island delights, lined up, in shame, against the sea wall that is adjacent to the wetland that is now a leaking paper cup.

Alfonso hears the van’s windshield wipers make the sound like a voice screeching, “Far and off, far and off.” At the passenger window, there is a tourist woman pushing her son in an expensive Swedish pram begging for handouts. Her makeup conturing is melting like wax in the rain.

“Wind up the windows!” Someone in the back screams.

When the van pulls off again Alfonso searches the bus for Bee.

“Wait! We forgot Beverly,” Alfonso says.

“Maybe they took her hostage.” Someone up front guesses.

“We can’t stop. I’ll radio the next van.” The driver is adamant as he swerves to dodge a groups of pedestrians eating the trees.

“No one goan take that woman hostage. Beverly take them hostage,” jokes the waiter. They laugh long enough to reassure themselves Bee is alive.

“This is not my dwelling.” Alfonso makes the sign of the cross, two times over. Then, at the read light at the south gate of Ville des Maîtres, he looks out toward the beach side. His view is blurry from rain but he sees someone in white standing at the sea. It is Bee.

“No...Beverly? Stop the van! That person is going to attack she.”

Bee is in her restaurant whites staring at the sea. A nice person, a pharmacist from Helena, Montana recognizes her from the kitchen and begins to charge at her from across the beach. Bee's diaphragm flattens and lowers to inhale the madness, theirs and everyone else's. She exhales into the sky. The pharmacist drops to their feet unsure how they got there or why they have half-eaten starfish protruding from their teeth. They throws up in the sand by their feet. The rain becomes a blanket around them, too dense for Alfonso to see, too dangerous for the driver to turn around, too much like a prophesy. Bee kneels down and strokes their head with great care.

She waits for Sycorax to do the rest.



We understand

*the world better if we
tremble with it*

Dougl, Coolie, Chinee, Redman, Blackman, Whitey (1851)

Dougl. One piece black. One piece Indian.

Coolie. Lines of demarcation may be cut.

Chinee. Gathered at the sides. Loose fit.

Redman: A group of designs erased freely

Blackman: Degree of stretch, warp or weft?

Whitey: Colors can be changed at will.

Last Lap, 2036

red indians posing for photographs

black indians singing kitty bullay, kitty bullay

fancy indians liming in broke off costume

Badjohns exhausted by rum

two dame lorraines in humorous repartee with beef patties in one hand

moko jumbies carrying legs broken on their shoulders

mas is done but party nah over for the jamette crew in black

meditation

thinks between the life she steals here

thinks of her afterlife in history

thinks parade was larger this year and how

the sailor mas band is a place for time travelers

no more energy to jump up and wave

a clown and king take off their shoes

the king sailor, similarly decorated, reads the words on her forearms

on the left in Comic Sans are the words "curiouser and curiouser"

on the right in Optima the words " semantically-neurochemically activated"

"are you some kind of witch?" the king asks.

eastern parkway is littered

police barriers are down and

bee

finds a bookman hat left behind by a reveler.

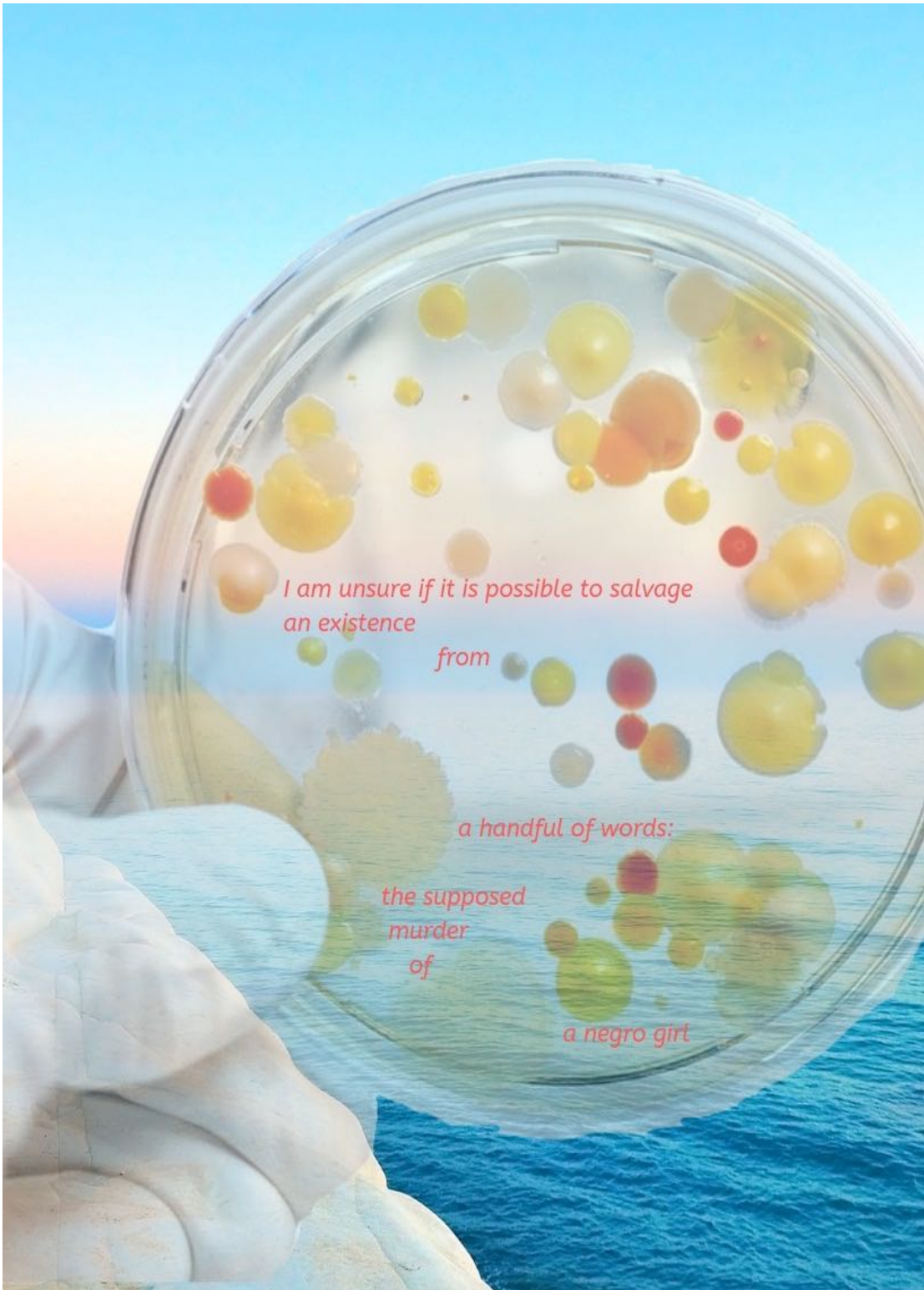
she is certainly entitled to wear its oversized shade

through eye holes in the crown a colorful horizon.
and then, half-expected, an immense quiet
as her father and mother, and every bit of their story float by.

Rasa, Citra, and Dhvani drip green, red, and gold sequins
Spraying each other with insect repellent
Bhaya in pasties under a wet t-shirt kisses her girlfriend on the stoop of a synagogue
“You’re going to get arrested.”

a little boy at five
holding hands with his grandparents dance meringue to lavway calypso
“I’m going to be king & queen of at my wedding one day .”

and me, leaving the hive, between worlds just before it happens.



*I am unsure if it is possible to salvage
an existence*

from

a handful of words:

*the supposed
murder
of*

a negro girl

a respite, not an end.

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