

# **Sounding the Tidalectic: Decolonial Poetics**

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**Creative & critical theses submitted towards the completion of a  
doctoral degree in Creative and Critical Writing**

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**12/07/2018**

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## Abstract

**This Creative/Critical Thesis explores locally generated epistemological frameworks as alternatives to metropolitan postcolonial ideas of literary analysis and production. Focusing on Kamau Brathwaite's idea of the 'tidalectic', the Caribbean epistemological traditions underpinning this idea are deeply sounded. Tidalectic methodologies of wrecking are examined as means for assimilating diverse cultural flotsam in a region characterized by migration and conquest. An accompanying book-length collection expresses and enacts the ideas of the critical thesis in the form of poetry.**

## **Sounding the Tidalectic: Decolonial Poetics**

**Critical thesis submitted towards the completion of a doctoral degree  
in Creative and Critical Writing**

**70,000 words**

**Chris Astwood, LDC, 3987825**

**12/07/2018**

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## 1. TIDAL GROUNDINGS AND GRAPHINGS

### An Overview

As a scholar and poet from Bermuda – an island still under British rule and somewhat difficult to geographically, geopolitically, and culturally categorize<sup>1</sup> – I have always been confronted by the competing perceptions of metropolitan others. Due to European and American media hegemony, these perceptions of Bermuda tend to predominate irrespective of their accuracy. Moreover, the very postcolonial theory that purports to undo such dynamics itself frequently risks falling into the category of limiting metropolitan perspectival models. Nevertheless, one can find in the locally envisioned literature and literary theory of the greater Anglophone Caribbean models for understanding and production that validate and complexly theorize experiences and visions attuned to local experience. By positing and examining a locally formulated perspectival and methodological framework for analysis and composition, this thesis interrogates elements of ‘postcolonial’ readings of Anglophone ‘Caribbean’ literature {particularly poetry and poetics}<sup>2</sup> that malignly limit potential for understanding and production of this literature. Assuming that metropolitan-defined postcolonial theory in many cases oversimplifies or partially misinterprets its subjects of study, my thesis identifies artistic practices and theoretic frameworks generated by these subjects themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Caribbean? North American? Atlantic? British? These conceptions all have currency – if considered at all, in light of the popular maxim ‘*Bermuda is another world*’ ( Hubert Smith And His Coral Islanders).

<sup>2</sup> Due to many of the herein quoted theorists’ tendency to deploy both ellipses and a wide array of variously stylized brackets, I will in general make use of these brackets ‘{}’ to indicate my own interjections or erasures/ellipses within quotations and in my own text, because I have yet to encounter thus-stylized brackets in the source material.

which complicate/contradict/play with mainstream postcolonial literary theory. I will frame my argument between two poems by Vahni Capildeo. One brings in the cargo of this discourse's content, the other flows out into deep seas of memory.

In searching for a truly local perspective of my own island space and the outer world, I have been led to consider the intellectually metaphoric potential of the sea as both physical and emblematic shaper of culture and discourse. Bajan poet Kamau Brathwaite's theory of tidalectics will be the primary conceptual framework that I examine, and the driving theoretical basis from which I write. Tidalectics constitutes at the same time the deceptively simple idea of back-and-forth "tidal ebb&flow"<sup>3</sup> motion and an infinitely complex attendant system of tidal and oceanic metaphor derived from historical, oceanographic, literary, philosophical and cultural sources (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 226). Brathwaite uses tidalectics to discourse on the African, Amerindian, and European traditions informing these cultural sources and their uniquely localized Caribbean articulations. Tidalectic consideration of Caribbean histories and traditions not focused on by Brathwaite – South and East Asian, Arab and African Muslim, and Jewish traditions in particular – is never ruled out as inappropriate, but remains largely unrealized<sup>4</sup>. While Brathwaite's focus on these formative traditions may at times read as a comparative erasure of the Caribbean's wider cultural heritage, the encompassing spirit of his tidalectic discourses does not

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<sup>3</sup> This movement is essential to tidalectics and an understanding of its implications across multiple tidalectic overlaps of meaning. Throughout the following discourse this 'tidal ebb&flow' will either be named or referred to by some construction of 'back-and-forth movement' for the sake of readability. It should be recalled that these terms do not exactly match but that in this context their meanings are mutually encompassing.

<sup>4</sup> See the section on 'Local Revisioning' below for discussion of exclusions and omissions, and the example of Brinda Mehta's *kala pani* poetics as one particular corrective exemplar of the type of theory a further developed Caribbean tidalectics can accommodate. See also Franklin Knight's *The Caribbean : The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (Knight)

impart an air of exclusivity. Indeed, it is difficult to read his works and not conclude that considerations of cultural traditions not examined by Brathwaite would be welcome additions to tidalectic discourse on Caribbean history and culture.

Meanwhile, Brathwaite deliberately makes his tidalectic conceptions appear open-ended. Other scholars in turn tend to iterate tidalectics into the context of its application to whatever critique of theirs may be at hand - as, I believe, is partly Brathwaite's intent in principle if not always in execution. It sometimes seems that the definition of tidalectics used in certain postcolonial discourses derives more from subsequent scholarly discourses than from Brathwaite himself. So, to define tidalectics is a rather slippery task – one that has yet to be fully realized exclusively on Brathwaite's terms or extensively exploring the intellectual frameworks from which he builds.

Any brief definition of tidalectics proves inherently problematic. To offer a brief overarching description, if not a definition, for the purposes of introduction: tidalectics represents an imperfectly cyclical model of progression tied to the particular situation of diasporic communities both separated and united by water, in which the physicality of real-world tidal vectors plays an equally important role as their metaphoric signification. Tidalectics is in this manner quite literally formative, in that it encompasses and considers the real-world effects of, rather than merely metaphorises, physical oceanic processes involved in the creation, molding, shaping, and breaking of forms. Meanwhile, it emblemizes repetitive cycles of behavior, history, and culture that exist within the New-World-Islands. These cycles' ability to bear contradictory flotsam makes contradiction inherent but not the 'fatal flaw' for established forms that it would be in dialectics. Tidalectics makes

allowance for change in which apparent cycles of regression/progression in fact represent the reiterative modulation of infinitely altered forms, even as the structural whole seems to remain unaltered. Stretched to its most overarching attempts to model history, tidalectics rejects ideas of history as linear progress and posits it as something that simultaneously cycles and progresses in a manner that is not just ocean-defined but metaphorically tidal. Tidalectic history behaves in the way that a series of waves gradually rolls in and covers a piece of land as the tide rises while also removing pieces of that land as they roll out – simultaneously piling and rearranging the land onto itself. Then, as the tide falls and retracts, the waves gradually expose and cover the land again – taking some of that land with them and rearranging it, only for the process to repeat its action over again with the next rise/fall {but never exactly}. Meanwhile, currents carry pieces of forms between locales both literal and conceptual.

Reduced to a brief definition or theoretical buzzword for the typical journal article, the tidalectic has not been examined in Brathwaite's own terms so much as in terms of that to which it is being applied. For such an unexplored concept, this seems particularly unfair – but points to its use-value as defined by the postcolonial mainstream. This is not the usage for which tidalectics was created; rather it marks the formulation of a localized perspective that accounts for the so-called 'postcolonial' perspective of our parts of the world that the metropolitan powers now affect. My thesis describes, examines, and then builds upon Brathwaite's tidalectic strategies of perception and literary production. In the course of this exposition, I will attempt to comprehensively examine Brathwaite's concept of tidalectics. In particular, I will deemphasize the extrapolations about tidalectics

made by others in favour of Brathwaite's own discourses on the subject and the sources of inspiration from which he claims to draw. Brathwaite's situation of tidalectics within a truly local intellectual basis exemplifies the potential for shifts in thinking enabled by an already developed local epistemological tradition.

In my explorations of the epistemology deliberately drawn around the tidalectic by Brathwaite, I also highlight and examine the direct yet overlooked links between Brathwaite's thought and the epistemology of Guyanese writer Wilson Harris - a complex and insufficiently examined Caribbean intellectual lineage. Said neglect may stem in part from Guyana's antipodal geographic location within the Anglophone Caribbean, being a part of mainland South America with a significant indigenous population and comparatively undeveloped interior. Indeed, Guyana may be considered one of the southern "outer limits of [...] the Caribbean," with Bermuda its northern antipodal opposite (Dismont-Robinson, *Probing the Wound...* 6). The intellectual lineage running from Harris at the region's edge to Brathwaite at its heart complicates geographic difference, casting Caribbean spaces in relation to one another and the wider world while productively interrogating perceived regional similarity and variation. Consideration of this lineage remains unsatisfyingly explored, but reveals how local thought can build up its own theoretical frameworks and aesthetics while conscious of its forbearers elsewhere.

First, I will examine some strictures and false binaries created by 'mainstream' metropolitan postcolonial thought, emblemized in a poem by Trinidadian poet Vahni Capildeo and plotted graphically in a canonical model of colonial power produced by theorist Stephen Slemon. I will then explore how Wilson Harris and Kamau Brathwaite have produced ideas and works that engage

with similar dynamics of representation and appropriation to Capildeo's poem, and transcend the strictures of Slemon's model. I will then link tidalectics more closely to Bermudian historical particularities so as to both demonstrate its appropriateness and suggest a direction for my own further building upon tidalectic metaphor. Via an incident recounted within the wash of Brathwaite's tidalectic discourses and via Michael J. Jarvis's scholarly work on Bermudian maritime history, I suggest the practice of wrecking as tidalectic model for Bermudian scholars and writers. Wrecking<sup>5</sup> involves not only the exploration and salvage/plunder of empires' lost ships and the reuse of that which is removed, but also the active facilitation<sup>6</sup> of these ships being wrecked. While this is built upon the aforementioned writers' ideas, it is uniquely my own conception and contribution to the scholarship. I also expand on the tidalectic by returning to Capildeo's seas of memory and 'trader/raider figure' to incorporate them into the lineage of Harris and Brathwaite's ideas and practices. I examine how these work in concert with the idea of wrecking to metaphorically expand or augment tidalectic perspective.

Tidalectics as a compositional/methodological tool facilitates the fishing of desirable texts from the flotsam of both my own texts and those generated by others, and the frying of these texts into new poems or, better yet, their boiling down into chowder. Tidalectics as a perceptive tool dictates what subjects are approached and how; a level of consciousness within the poems that is aware of

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<sup>5</sup> For more on wrecking, see references in Jarvis's book *'In the Eye of All Trade'* - some of which appear below.

<sup>6</sup> See Chris Astwood, essay/poetry, *'From Somerset, Bermuda,'* in *World Literature Today* Volume 89 No.5, September 2015. Particularly: "Local lore has it that some of these raided ships were deliberately lured to their doom by fires lit atop Wreck Hill in imitation of lighthouses or markers of safe passage { . . . } stories of false signals lit on Wreck Hill persist to the extent that many people don't know the original source of the place's name and instead attribute it to the wreckers, their memory sustained in part by the popular explanation" (Astwood 31).

the tidal. One can begin by thinking of the poetic logic we want to work with as enacted in the form of a series of waves. Brathwaite himself proposes that New-World-Island poets might be able “to write a poetry of a new, more native way” by “seeing our things and trying to express that way of seeing – the movement, the glitter, the kinesis of it” by looking to tidalectics as providing sources beyond the typical traditional forms that have washed up, so to speak, on our shores as a result of tidalectic motion (Brathwaite 36). Tidalectic discourse offers a means of navigating that which within ourselves {consciousness and society and culture} often must either be suppressed or dealt with and embraced, allows for the contradictions to remain inherent while somehow maintaining a cohesive identity that reworks and extends beyond its outside constitutive parts into new formations.

Brathwaite proposes that the tidalectic define both the form and content of poetry, eschewing the necessity for traditional subjects, meters and forms {but still potentially deploying these in strategic and locally-attuned manners or re-worked formats} in favour of form and content that explicitly articulate a New World sensibility. The sound and image of local landscape must inform this sensibility and its articulation. Considering Bermuda in terms of Brathwaite’s tidalectics and the ideas about landscape and perspective expressed by Harris requires close attention to the language of our own landscape and its changes over recent history. Changes to Bermuda’s landscape have been significant. Within 100 years, acres of endemic *Juniperus bermudiana* {Bermuda cedar} covering undeveloped land have been reduced by a blight from overseas to nowadays’ comparatively few surviving blight-resistant cedars. Bermuda’s cedar forests spanned miles beyond our current



landmass during the Ice Age – now only petrified stumps remain underwater, and for the most part only petrified trunks and branches remain on land. The cedars left alive on dry land struggle to compete for space with all manner of other native and imported plants. But just as the cedars began to die off, the cahow – Bermuda’s ancient endemic petrel *Pterodroma cahow*, screaming voice like a demon warning of reefs and storms – revived itself from extinction. This relates to the idea of what Harris calls “the music of living landscapes”<sup>7</sup>, composed of flora, fauna, weather, and their orchestrated movements as connected to the manner in which people perceive themselves. Harris’s concept of living landscape will remain essential throughout this paper<sup>8</sup>. Harris asserts, “fixed stages – upon which we build our cities – are sentient and alive,” linking, incarnating, and destabilizing both the physical and psychical landscapes Western civilization takes for granted (Theatre of Arts 3). Bearing in mind that “the colonists’ term “cahow,” derived from the voice of the bird,” this sea bird’s resurgence can be seen as rebirth also of an aspect of the language of Bermuda’s landscape that never fully stopped speaking in the minds of local people and which now speaks more strongly as it again rises over sea sounds (Mowbray and Murphy 267). Of course, the cahow remains rare. But even if we never hear it, we know it is there once again and are made conscious of its rebirth. With this knowledge of near-extinctions and rebirths, and some grasp of the greater history of Bermuda beyond these examples and beyond the realm of

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<sup>7</sup> See Harris, ‘*The Music of Living Landscapes*’ in ‘*Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*’, and the section below on ‘Tidialectics: Imagistic Genesis’

<sup>8</sup> As such, I seek to avoid the more controversial or problematic ideas of ‘landscape’ as what can be seen by limited human vision, or as a particular artistic tradition, or as confined to plants and natural features and structures. When using the word ‘landscape’, I seek to remain conscious of Harris’s aforementioned idea, and of how it totalizes landscape into the whole surrounding environment and beyond.

landscape, the role of ocean and tidal force as singular constants becomes apparent. While the sea remains constant, its modulations of our landscape prove variable. Congruently variable are tidalectic vectors of change; oceanic modulation of landscape and the physical arrivals and departures of peoples, flora and fauna, inform cultural, technological, and ideological development. These observable processes underpin wider tidalectic metaphor.

Examining these issues is of importance to both my artistic and intellectual grounding. Tidalectic epistemology provides a tool for viewing my island in relation to the world that functions on multiple levels, from geographic and historic to philosophic and poetic. The local need not exclude the global, and within the local there are spaces for the global to be uniquely understood. This understanding must derive from consciously localized perceptual standpoints, and application of compositional methodology that supports rather than objectifies or trivialises these perceptual standpoints. A tidalectic poetics of wrecking must differ from appropriative practices current in contemporary poetry in that it must consciously enact tidalectic movements of perspective, voice, or formal/rhetorical structure. Tidalectic perspectives of the ideas of wrecking can provide regionally and cross-culturally appropriate models for the production of a local poetic tradition of literary analytic discourse and creative work.

### Peacock Feathers: Metropolitan Appropriations

In “Oslo Readings”, from Trinidadian poet Vahni Capildeo’s collection, *Undraining Sea*, the speaker browses a museum and chances upon “PEACOCK FEATHERS” reduced to “a mucky cube” among a Viking expedition’s hoard (Capildeo 44). The situation is already highly charged. In the space of a northern European museum, presentation both of peacock feathers themselves as objects and of their potential for deeper meanings or functions remains mediated by invisible yet pervasive metropolitan powers. Subjectively enacted processes of interpretation and classification create apparently straightforward presentations of objects appearing in each “set of glass cases,” with simple labels like “Peacock feathers” omitting the many contexts in which these feathers have existed from their conception through to their plunder and eventual presentation as artefacts (44,45). Under the surface of this scene lurk roles of the museum in the context of imperial power - as showcase of conquest, as categorizer and analyser of foreign objects, as reinforcement of metropolitan superiority via the historicising of other cultures, and as nullifier of the ongoing effects of their domination and plunder. Observed by a speaker who has arrived from “England” yet is already set apart somewhat from “much of the rest of ‘western’ civilization,” these objects of plunder become potently charged (44). For Capildeo, the peacock feathers become a symbol of this raiding and its deeper cultural and psychical implications. A meditation on their origin ensues:

“See the cinematic viking, grabbing a handful from a whole roast bird served (feathers stuck back in for presentation purposes) at an imperial feast in Miklagarðr - Constantinople?

See the bawling brute in a foreign market, jerking a live bird (dull with fright and lack of grain) at the end of a string, pleased and guttural since he has struck a bargain for something so valuable, so rare.

See the trader-and-raider, sorry for bloodshed, offering a fistful of silver for a bunch of feathers already dishevelled and several rivers distant from their bird. He would have been willing to pay more than that; he does not know why, but he must have them. The look of the thing makes him glad and shy. He marvels. Dreams took shelter from the storms of steel, dreams; encamped themselves behind his idealising killer eyes. Like the modern soldier who has survived, not intact, but intense, to raise doves or mow the lawn, your Viking would defend with every cruelty this crumb, this corner, this pocket bouquet of compacted plumes, for they are long away and nevermore, they are beyond the bounds, pure, happiness.

Under the ashen museum lighting you squint through the glass. You read the label. Peacock feathers. A green glisten washes over the chewed plasticine cube” (Capildeo 44-45).

Capildeo’s feathers variously emblemize narratives of colonialists’ and metropolitan patrons’ mechanics of exploitation, idealization, and exoticization. In the absence of further information, the speaker entertains multiple narratives for the feather’s appropriation.

The first of these narratives plays to the stereotypical dynamics of both Viking raider and colonialism at large: violent domination and consumption. The ostentatiousness of an “imperial feast” plays off the “cinematic Viking” brutishly “grabbing a handful” of feathers, while usage of both the historic local and old Norse names for feast’s locale leaves complicated the balance of power between imperial roaster of peacocks and Viking feaster (44). In this first narrative, the acquisition of peacock feathers is a disinterested function of Nordic consumption of the other: that they are peacock feathers is of less consequence than the fact of their availability for plunder.

The second of these narratives humanizes the Viking somewhat, while presenting acquisition of the peacock feathers and this acquisition’s resonance with colonialism at large in a more complexly layered dynamic. The Viking believes “he has struck a bargain,” deems the “bird” already “dull with fright” and hunger both “valuable” and “rare” (45). In this second narrative, the acquisition of peacock feathers engages with metropolitan misapprehensions of value: that they are peacock feathers remains significant, but their perceived rarity and value in relation to how cheaply they were acquired are both more considered than their actual original function or value. Value here interestingly encompasses not only ideas of spiritual, immaterial, fetish, or abstract value but also ideas of value and potential financial gain in raw material and economic terms.

The third of these narratives brings economics and the psychologies of colonial domination even more to the fore. The peacock feathers’ economic value is more fixed, while the silver used to purchase them references historic Viking control of silver entering Europe – one key to the continent’s nascent capitalism. As

the feathers' economic value becomes more defined, however, their other values become more esoteric and less connected to materiality. No longer the unconflicted consumer of others presented in the first scenario, the Viking is now "sorry for bloodshed" in which he has taken part {if not so much as to eschew its benefits} (45). The Viking's acquisition of the peacock feathers via trade facilitated by violence ironically – for the feathers themselves suggest violence given their "dishevelled" appearance – functions in part to assuage his deep-seated guilt and trauma via their ownership (Capildeo 45). In the process, "his idealizing killer eyes" ascribe not only values but also meanings to the peacock feathers – "long away and nevermore { . . . } beyond the bounds { . . . } pure { . . . } happiness" – meanings that serve his own psychological needs (45). If "every cruelty" might be used to "defend" the feathers, it has as much to do with their ascribed meanings as with their real value (45). In this third narrative, the acquisition of peacock feathers engages with metropolitan misappropriation of and control over meaning and value: that they are peacock feathers is important insofar as they symbolize something to their possessor and confirm his control over not only physical objects and spaces but also their metaphoric or totemic meanings.

All three of these narratives relate to a process by which metropolitan power appropriates the tropes and trappings of those it dominates. Often disguised as recognition of beauty, this process demands certain aesthetic values from select aspects of the oppressed other, while nullifying the oppressors' guilt. Both Steven Slemon and Wilson Harris expound on the mechanics and psychology of this kind of misrepresentation and of colonial dominance over representation and discourse. Their ideas about this are discussed at length below. For now, let it be stated that

metropolitan powers handpick what is aesthetically valuable, misread their true values, obscure their origins, and offer simplified explanatory narratives.

This dynamic extends to literature and literary theories of composition and analysis, also influencing tastes in and receptions of postcolonial literature. Sarah Brouillette hones in on and critiques ideas of literary “exoticism” as “willful activity in which { . . . } exotic products are manufactured by a form of consumption characterized most notably by aestheticization and dehistoricization” in her book, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Brouillette 16). This book concisely traces the relationship between postcolonial authors’ conscious self-presentations, a global industry of postcolonial literature, and the oddly colonialist tenor of certain strands of postcolonial critical discourse. Brouillette posits one “commodity function of postcolonial texts” as producing perspectives that their consumers use to separate themselves from “postcolonial guilt { . . . } which is one correlate of the ethical challenges presented by analyses of postcolonial cultural markets” and which proves “useful as a means of explaining some of what is privileged in postcolonial literature’s production” (20, 21). Exoticism might be wilfully denied or consciously eschewed, but remains in the form of an illusory closer view or more intimate understanding of The Other.

The literature of the Anglophone Caribbean materializes in neither isolation nor vacuum; writers can become aware of metropolitan audiences’ understandings and expectations. As Brouillette notes, “a growing consensus holds that celebrated postcolonial writers are most often those who are literary in a way recognizable to cosmopolitan audiences,” while also in “accord with a broadly anti-imperialist political liberalism” that is nevertheless reactionary in its suspicion of “radical

decolonization theory” and “dismissive { . . . } attitude towards the project of national culture” (59, 60). Many literati travel to metropolitan centres for creative, educational and economic opportunity. Within the Caribbean, the centres of activity established at the University of the West Indies campuses and within the economic hubs of larger islands such as Trinidad complicate simple oppositions between cosmopolitan metropole and postcolonial outlier. However, many opportunities for study of the arts involve metropolitan structures of aesthetics, subject, meaning, and identity that are oversimplified, false, and ultimately harmful to the development of local perspectives and literary philosophies or methodologies. For those who do not travel, mainland expectations remain inescapable. However, knowledge of these expectations creates an opportunity for developing strategies of defiance and play deployed to attack these expectations. Island poets work with a diverse range of historical and cultural flotsam. While Brathwaite does acknowledge the tradition of such drift elements being dealt with by European modernists such as Eliot and Pound<sup>9</sup>, in tidalectics he seeks to make a new way of dealing with flotsam and jetsam as experienced by New World Islanders. This requires a shift in perspective, totalistic in nature.

If writers from postcolonial spaces formulate their own perspectives that take into account their position of postcoloniality without taking on the positions of mainstream postcolonial theory, they can reclaim those tropes which have been treated like the peacock feathers misappropriated by Capildeo’s Viking. A perspectival shift of this nature must encompass more than mere local imagery and setting; it must reorder the manner in which one understands reality and the

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<sup>9</sup> As examined in depth by Charles Pollard in *‘New World Modernisms: T. S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite’*.



relationships inherent to this reality. It must not be so easily given categorization by, and hence subordinate compartmentalization within, the aegis of established metropolitan perspectives. In tidalectics, and the attendant discourses which this concept has generated or played a part, one may catch glimpse of its potentiality for perspectival shift built on locally-conscious and artistically modernistic literary and cultural philosophizing. One may also apprehend its potentiality for reactionary incorporation into metropolitan models of perception and representation, such as the wide-cast net of mainstream EuroAmerican postcolonial theory. In the latter of these potentialities, tidalectics illuminates how such incorporations into metropolitan thought necessitate distortions via simplification and omission - to which the tidalectic remains inherently resistant by virtue of its multifarious complexity.

As mentioned above, the idea of tidalectics remains relatively unexamined in Brathwaite's own terms so much as in terms of that to which it is applied. This has resulted in numerous piecemeal and inaccurate reductions of its multifarious meanings. Conversely, some critics misrepresent tidalectics not to further their own agenda but due to the availability of interpretive shortcuts from other critics, particularly since the publication of Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey's *'Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures'* (2007). This creates a problematic feedback loop in which certain aspects of tidalectics are repeatedly deployed, while the bulk of Brathwaite's surrounding epistemology does not receive equal consideration. Before deeply sounding the tidalectic on wrecking dive or reconnoitre, a brief survey of the most significant and commonly utilized of these shortcuts proves timely.

DeLoughrey explicitly states that hers is an augmented tidalectics fit for the task she seeks to perform, in which analytic focus falls on both the Caribbean and the Pacific. Although succinctly acknowledging much tidalectic complexity, DeLoughrey's model of tidalectics ultimately brings to the "foreground three key ideas: how both regions share a complex history of migration patterns before and after colonization; how the island topos entails an exchange between land and sea that translates into the discourse of "ex-isles" and settlement; and finally, how these vital links between geography, history, and cultural production facilitate a reading of island literatures" (*Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* 6). While aspects of tidalectics beyond these receive mention, the focus remains on broadly physical and analytic vectors of tidalectic epistemology. There is nothing evidently 'wrong' with the manner in which DeLoughrey augmentatively interprets tidalectics, and this is in fact part of the problem with her text. As a resource it draws together many key tidalectic ideas into a single highly readable source that is easier to refer to than Brathwaite's scattered tidalectic discourses. The University of Hawaii Press make the first section, in which a sizable portion of DeLoughrey's interpretation of tidalectics takes centre stage, available free online. The result is that DeLoughrey's interpretations of tidalectics, as crafted for a specific purpose separate from Brathwaite's ideas, are now themselves widely adapted in situations where recourse to Brathwaite's original epistemology would provide opportunity for examination or deployment of tidalectic concepts not sounded so deeply by DeLoughrey.

Omission of tidalectic ideas not espoused or examined at length by DeLoughrey does not constitute the only risk associated with reliance upon her text as primary tidalectic resource. There runs an additional risk of confusion between ideas drawn from Brathwaite, ideas drawn from elsewhere, and amalgamations of the two, because her ideas of tidalectics are augmented both geographically and theoretically in manners unanticipated by Brathwaite. DeLoughrey develops her idea of tidalectics alongside “the Pacific wayfinding system of moving islands, termed “etak”” for analysis of Pacific and Caribbean “by insisting on the tidalectics between land and sea and by remapping the Caribbean and Pacific alongside each other { . . . } employing a tidalectic framework, we can highlight the transoceanic trajectories of diaspora to the Caribbean and Pacific islands, underlining their shared similarities in geo-pelagic relation rather than the limiting model of national frameworks” (3, 6, 23). According to DeLoughrey, “the etak concept of moving islands destabilizes the myth of isolation and renders the indigenous peoples of Oceania as active participants in the world historical process,” while “Both etak and tidalectics offer an interdisciplinary approach that places contemporary islands in a dialogue with each other as well as their continental counterparts” (128, 3).

Besides the concept of etak, DeLoughrey also deploys tidalectics in conjunction with the concept “Glissant builds upon Brathwaite’s vision when he adopts “submarine roots” as a model of regional history,” (17). DeLoughrey clarifies, “Like Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant reminds us that the “island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea” { . . . } This “openness” reflects a tidalectic between routes and roots, a methodology of reading island literatures that structures this book” (4). As such, the tidalectics that

DeLoughrey develops, discourses on, and deploys as an analytic tool consists of both reduction from and addition to Brathwaite's tidalectics.

There are also apparent problems as to DeLoughrey's conception of what movements tidalectic vectors of motion imply. While broadly picking up on the tidalectic "cyclical model of history" insofar as it forms a tool to "resist the teleology of a Hegelian dialectical synthesis", DeLoughrey does not emphasize the back-and-forth "ebb&flow" vectors inherent in tidalectic epistemology (52; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 226). This results in formulations such as, "Drawing upon land /sea cartography, tidalectics foreground historical trajectories of dispersal and destabilize island isolation by highlighting waves of migrant landfalls into the Caribbean," identifying complexly multivalent psychical and physical vectors of exchange and overlap within tides of arrival without considering the kinesis of simultaneous recession and procession iterated by tidalectic motion (52). A related problem arises in the occasional conflation of tidalectic motion with broader oceanic metaphor, which while not a serious issue for DeLoughrey's text could become problematic if overzealously applied without effective demonstration as to how a given oceanic trope enhances or augments tidalectics.

Ultimately, the usage of DeLoughrey's text in lieu of a number of Brathwaite's writings on tidalectics promotes a reduced and distorted version of Brathwaite's epistemology. As a resource on tidalectics it does not provide a deep dive into the formative epistemologies from which Brathwaite draws – including concepts of timehri and the linguistic fluidity of nation language – nor the vectors and characteristics of tidalectics the Brathwaite develops – such as submergence,

swimming on dry land, hurricane, and harmattan<sup>10</sup>. While a useful source for picking up on the broad themes of tidalectics, and an interesting reworking of the theory for DeLoughrey's purpose, it is not sufficient for understanding tidalectics as developed by Brathwaite. Perhaps due to its ease of access and convenience, DeLoughrey's work has quickly become a canonical text of tidalectics. An intensive look at tidalectics as developed by Brathwaite and his theoretical groundings, including but not limited to those named earlier in this paragraph, proves a necessary corrective to this situation. This is not to say that any adaptation of tidalectics is inherently incorrect, but rather that any adaptation of tidalectics should work from the original source material generated by Brathwaite. Further investigation of Brathwaite on his own terms allows using his own terms as a starting point, providing opportunity for deeper investigation of his poetics and epistemology.

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<sup>10</sup> All of which are discoursed upon during the course of this thesis

### **Avant-Garde Anxieties**

A following section will further address Slemon's aforementioned model of colonial power over discourse and its countering and complication by the ideas of Harris and Brathwaite. The artistic mode within which it is countered here demands a brief note. Harris, Brathwaite, and Capildeo all produce works that might be considered avant-garde due to their incorporation of outside sources, treatment of text as physical object, blurring of genres, and rejection of strictly realistic perspectives. These writers are avant-garde in their theory as well as in their poetry. All three link their modernistic creative/critical practices to local landscape and oceanic forces. The model of resistant scholar or poet as thief/raider, coupled with the avant-garde practices of the text-raiding and palimpsest-generating poets discussed, point to questions relating to the production of 'local' postcolonial poetics – especially to ongoing debates questioning or outright dismissing the place of the 'avant-garde' or 'modernist' poetics in postcolonial literature. While not explicitly my project here, one secondary goal is to demonstrate how what might be considered 'avant-garde' methodologies have been deployed in anti-colonial work for decades and continue to prove fertile for contemporary Caribbean poets. By espousing the potentiality of avant-garde methodologies for anti-colonial literary works, I seek to intervene in and contribute to larger ongoing debates regarding racist histories of avant-garde writing and its appropriateness for dealing with issues of colonialism, imperialism, and racism.

The Caribbean literary mainstream bequeaths similar popular currency to dismissals of avant-garde poetics. The attitude that poetics or means of literary

representation in any way classifiable as ‘avant-garde’ must inherently be dismissive of, at odds with, or unattuned to decolonial objectives and perspectives remains pervasive in even the greatest of literary minds. In a taped conversation with Christian Campbell<sup>11</sup>, Derek Walcott asserts, “I’m very glad {...} that we can be judged to be backward, because we don’t have an avant-garde. That’s great. Death to the avant-garde {...} Because it’s conceit, most of it, you know. Big countries like France and so on can afford to fool around and do nonsense. But when you need paper, when physically a piece of paper and a pen and ink are something close to your work – or a brush – these are physical, tactile objects that you need to work, that are not proliferating all over the place in some city { . . . } Even if it’s a computer, you are working close to yourself to work” (Walcott and Campbell, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott on his life and work - Youtube 46:23-47:23). Walcott goes on to assert the value of there not apparently being “a school of” any particular writer (Walcott and Campbell, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott on his life and work - Youtube 47:49-47:53). He similarly expresses gladness that there has been no “trend” for writers to join (Walcott and Campbell, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott on his life and work - Youtube 47:44-47:45). According to Walcott, this has helped writers to retain their “individuality,” freeing them to explore the still largely untapped well of cultural sources from around the world that are a part of their heritage while maintaining the “complexity” of Caribbean literature (Walcott and Campbell, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott on his life and work - Youtube 47:55, 48:00, 48:21-49:35). This ignores the existence of various trends and groups in

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<sup>11</sup> Viewable in full at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_6mgbRSUzo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_6mgbRSUzo)

From the video description: "English professor, Christian Campbell, interviews Caribbean poet and playwright, Derek Walcott { . . . } filmed at Hart House Theatre on November 23, 2010." (Walcott and Campbell).

Caribbean arts over the past century, irrespective of their avant-garde credentials; it also sweeps aside the role of avant-garde practices in the Caribbean. Indeed, writers like Harris, Brathwaite, and Capildeo have all tapped the local wells of culture and histories of local representations in their creation of works that fall outside the parameters of craft espoused by Walcott. One might go so far as to argue that Walcott, himself, has deployed avant-garde techniques such as mixed-genre, citation, pastiche and appropriation; studies charting Walcott's relationship with literary modernism and experimentation already proliferate <sup>12</sup>.

Perhaps Walcott's comments refer more directly to the formation of theorizing {or mock-theorizing} "groups" or "schools" with which the avant-garde might be associated, as distracting from the project of speaking from and of the region (Walcott and Campbell, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott on his life and work - Youtube 46:00-50:00). However, this view ignores the avant-garde character of much of the "Caribbean Artists' Movement (CAM)," a group directly engaged with representing the Caribbean, including Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, and Aubrey Williams<sup>13</sup> (Poupeye 140; Walmsley). Walcott is certainly aware of this group, having had contacts with its members and having published in their journal *Savacou*<sup>14</sup>. This puts Walcott in proximity to direct calls from members of CAM for engagement with the avant-garde. In an essay published in *Savacou 2* {an issue also featuring Walcott}, Aubrey Williams champions the artistic avant-garde, declaring

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<sup>12</sup> In 'New World Modernisms: T. S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite', Charles Pollard discusses Walcott and Brathwaite's practically divergent yet philosophically related usages of ideas from Eliot to craft their own local postcolonial modernisms.

<sup>13</sup> The Caribbean Artists Movement has been extensively documented by Anne Walmsley in a book-length history published by New Beacon Books in 1992 (*The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972 - A Literary & Cultural History*).

<sup>14</sup> See Walcott's essay, 'Meanings', in *Savacou 2*, September 1970 (45-53).



“the arts give the direction for the technology, the philosophy, the politics and the very life of the people. Art is always in the foreground; it is the true *avant-garde*.” (A. Williams 16). Williams calls for a greater contribution from “young writers”, who “should be involved in the tensions that would produce an *avant-garde* art in the Caribbean” (16). This direct call for engagement with the avant-garde from writers sets out an agenda that falls outside Walcott’s narrative of Caribbean artistic history. Perhaps his erasure is a facet of the old opposition<sup>15</sup>, however blown out of proportion, between Walcott and certain of its members {particularly Brathwaite}. Whatever the reasons, Walcott’s denial of the avant-garde’s importance to the formation of a regionally sensitive yet globally cognizant perspective lacks validity.

His comments on the avant-garde and poetic necessity ring especially hollow since they come moments after praising Aimé Césaire. Walcott refers to Césaire, along with his fellow Martiniquan writers Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant, as “genuinely brilliant writers” all “from one little rock,” in the context of the Caribbean’s “phenomenal” literary output across languages within limited space, and as evidence that a process of “becoming articulate” has transpired regionally (45:00-46:00). Thoroughly invested in the project of representing his home island, Césaire meanwhile became arguably the region’s most famous avant-gardist. Why not describe works like Césaire’s collaboration with Pablo Picasso, ‘*Corps perdu*’, or ‘*Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*’, as avant-garde? They certainly

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<sup>15</sup> Walcott is popularly typecast as the Caribbean’s Eurocentric literary traditionalist and Brathwaite as his Africanist rival. A genuine competitive rivalry and aesthetic differences between the two poets accentuates their perceived distance from one another. By the time this dichotomy was given succinct, if biased, appraisal by Patricia Ismond in her 1971 Caribbean Quarterly article “*Walcott Versus Brathwaite*”, it was already well-established to the point of “cliché” (54). The reality is that, for all their personal rivalries, their actual positions and guiding philosophies are perhaps not as divergent as has been popularly implied.

fit the dictionary definition of works produced by and expressive of techniques and forms being pushed to expand by “The pioneers or innovators in any art in a particular period,” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). An existing body of scholarship examines Césaire’s relationship to and participation in avant-garde movements, particularly surrealism. As Gregson Davis writes in his book-length study, *Aimé Césaire*, “Césaire’s work cannot be dissociated {...} from a fundamental modernist agenda {...} contacts between surrealist artists and Césaire’s circle should not be minimized” (67). Davis simultaneously notes the existence “of the special inflections that marked off the Caribbean brand of the surrealist agenda from that of the metropolitan avant-garde,” and its overlaps with Spanish Caribbean concepts of Magic Realism (72, 72-73). According to the Davis, “Césaire’s surrealism functioned as a magical instrument in his quest for his submerged cultural roots,” embodying a locally adapted creative and critical perspectival stance that performs a similar function to Brathwaite’s later idea of tidalectics (73). The avant-garde practices Walcott decries nonetheless aid in his desired objective of increased local articulateness.

The influence of Césaire is part of what allows the CAM to later formulate an avant-garde practice from within their own cultural groundings. Discussions of Césaire’s works conducted by the CAM and contacts between Césaire and CAM detailed in Walmsley’s history of the movement show considered and programmatic engagement. Indeed, one current of “the affirmative function of the postcolonial avant-garde,” running from “Césaire” through to “Brathwaite” is charted in Laura Winkiel’s contribution to the book *‘Decentring the Avant-Garde’* (111, 112, 113). The Caribbean Artists Movement has also been considered in light

of other twentieth-century avant-garde movements. Stephen Voyce situates the CAM as existing fluidly both within and outside of the contexts defining European avant-gardes in his book, *Poetic Community: Avant-garde Activism and Cold War Culture*. Voyce's analysis is particularly useful for clarification regarding questions of the political baggage commonly associated with discussions of the avant-garde, and why these concerns need not be emphasized with regards to the CAM:

“As a group undisturbed by the legacy of early twentieth-century avant-gardism in Europe (more to the point, its allegiances to fascism) { . . . } CAM never worried about rescuing a concept of literary community from its associations with the militarist rhetoric of Futurism and Vorticism” (Voyce 119).

Voyce notes that “CAM's approach to cultural synthesis is altogether more radical” than the reductive erasure of difference that it could become in certain political formulations (Voyce 117). The movement possessed a degree of self-awareness as to the negative ends of ethno-nationalistic essentialism, even though its project was explicitly regionalist.

The Caribbean Artists' Movement did not advocate the formation of a singular creolized cultural identity or practice, nor for passive formulation of heterogeneous identity in an environment created and dominated by European colonial culture. Rather, CAM actively appropriated and recombined that which its membership found useful from both the colonial cultures of Europe and from their diverse origins. Via the movement's actively considered, multivalent, and de-centred approaches to cultural synthesis, “whether an appropriation of white institutions (the university), its subversive traditions (Marxism), or its language

("nation language"), CAM not only asserts its own identity, but rather deprives the white majority of its total control over British language and culture" (Voyce 117-118). This extends to the manner in which the meaning of avant-garde might be interpreted, decoupling artistic experiment from modernity. A few paragraphs after advocating for Caribbean avant-garde artistic practice, Williams states "I do not see the necessity for art to be narrative, in that thinking about the past and man, art has never been "narrative" to any great extent. I would not call primitive art in any sense representational or figurative" (The Artist in the Caribbean 16). However, Williams rejects the labelling of such {or of his own} non-figurative work as "abstraction" (A. Williams 17). He goes on to declare, "Another much abused term is "modern art." We should see to it that this awful virus does not get a foot hold in the Caribbean – the attitude to the visual arts that automatically attaches labels to what we see when we look. Much of my work has come out of a long contemplation and a search into the pre-Columbian civilisations in the New World" and "a long immersion in the work of our South American Indians in Guyana" (A. Williams 17). By making these statements so soon after championing avant-garde arts and in the context of his own experimental and non-figurative works, Williams situates his avant-garde practice in the realm of local folk tradition. A Caribbean avant-garde therefore does not necessitate a poetics or fetishization of Euro/American historically defined modernity, while also potentiating useful investigation of alternative traditions and perspectives.

In addition to this kind of intellectual assertion of control over language and culture, the movement practiced a spatial rebalancing of critical and artistic production. Alison Donnell notes that, because "CAM and *Savacou*, its ground-

breaking publication, became almost a consciously two-part initiative based in the UK (where Andrew Salkey and John La Rose settled) and in the Caribbean, relocated back in Jamaica with Brathwaite from 1968,” they pioneered “a transnational, de-centred Caribbeanism that was not at odds or out of step with local agendas” (*Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: critical moments in Anglophone literary history* 18). It is within this de-centred yet locally-aware intellectual context that Brathwaite’s tidalectic poetics developed, fusing intellectual practice familiar to metropolitan contexts with a perspectival shift in content and methodological ethos. Indeed, Brathwaite retained forms of the name *Savacou*, or versions such as *SavacouNorth*, for his own publishing ventures, including *Barabajan Poems*.

*Savacou* also produced Anthony McNeill’s book, *Reel from the Life Movie* – a precursor to the increasingly experimental turn in McNeill’s poetry over the course of his later books, *Credences at the Altar of Cloud* and *Chinese Lanterns from the Blue Child* {and extensive unpublished oeuvre} (1972; 1979; 1998). Writings by McNeill feature in Brathwaite’s discourses on Caribbean poetics, his pointedly experimental aesthetics harmonious with the localized vision espoused in, for example, *A History of the Voice*<sup>16</sup>. Brathwaite’s support for McNeill displays the former’s acceptance of and commitment to Caribbean avant-garde literary production. It also signals more generally the existence of a consciously engaged strain of avant-garde Caribbean literary production.

The direct influence of such forbearers as Césaire and the CAM on Caribbean cultural production cannot be denied; nor can their ability to use aspects of the avant-garde to do exactly what Walcott says it cannot. Poets like Césaire and

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<sup>16</sup> See below

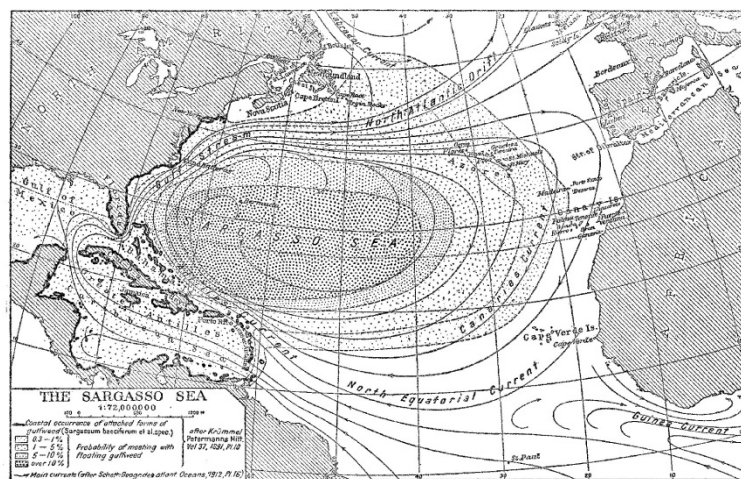
Brathwaite practice the witness-bearing Walcott describes a need for – just in less traditional forms or styles, employing tactics and methodologies from an experimental toolbox that Walcott’s more mainstream poetics claims to eschew. It is these tactics that most creatively find ways to usurp both metropolitan perspectives and vectors of control embedded in conventional realism.

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## Placing Resistance

The following section critiques a representation of colonial power over discourse developed by Professor Stephen Slemon. A former student of Helen Tiffin<sup>17</sup>, Slemon remains deeply involved and influential in the field of postcolonial studies. His model has been widely anthologized and cited as a tool for representing and considering responses to colonial power. It is the kind of universalizing model that requires – indeed, calls for – critique and resistance in the form of nuanced

localized response that unpins its structural and perceptual presuppositions. For Slemon's representation of colonial power to be meaningfully critiqued, his model and that which will replace it must be re-



conceptualized in terms of locality. A more detailed placing of the resistance herein enacted now becomes necessary. How do artists and scholars from colonized or postcolonial spaces draw a line against, or better yet a line or series of lines that can travel in a multiplicity of different directions entirely, from those defined by Slemon? What are the appropriate existing local theories that draw or allow for the drawing of these lines and how can they provide appropriate lines of inquiry and artistic practice?

One must consider the specifics of one's locality; in my case Bermuda.

Considering Bermuda in light of Caribbean literary theory requires justification, as

<sup>17</sup> Co-author of seminal postcolonial text *The Empire Writes Back*

the island's geographic, cultural, and historic locations prove incongruous with one another and resistant to simple classification. As will be mentioned in the story of the Peppercorn Ceremony below, Bermuda's history has been largely defined by water and by the overwater links to other colonial spaces of the Americas that Bermuda developed. To briefly further this point: one must consider that for most of Bermuda's history the only thing connecting it to the world was a literal journey over water, whether in a vessel or as a piece of flotsam. Secondly, one must consider that for most of our history we were sustained by various colonial trade links established and facilitated by our position within the Mid-Atlantic gyre; that maritime economies outside of or in addition to these more official trade links {such as local practices of whaling, privateering, piracy and wrecking} also sustained and significantly influenced our society and culture. Thirdly, one must consider that the tourism industry forming one pillar of our contemporary economy finds itself dominated by cruise ships, while the global insurance industry forming another pillar of our economy finds its origins partly in the need for colonial merchants to guarantee themselves against loss of ships and cargo at sea. One must reflect that this listing is partial, because a truly exhaustive and incisive extrapolation of the ocean's direct influences on Bermuda could go on ad nauseam. One must also simultaneously consider our position not only in terms of physical geography but in terms of historico-political geography and the geography of linguistic/literary tradition that one occupies.

There has been a trend in Bermuda towards the linking of our literary tradition with that of the Caribbean, which runs concurrently with larger socio-



cultural trends that see movement towards the Caribbean offset or countered by assertions of our difference to or separation from the region. In my view, the Bermudian conundrum of whether or not to consider Bermuda 'Caribbean' derives from economic snobbishness and conflation of geography, history, and colonial conditions. To imagine Bermuda as hermetically sealed-off from the spaces involved in Brathwaite and Harris's thought is to ignore the geographic facilitation of our historic links. While Bermuda does not lie within the Caribbean Sea, many of our people do have family links with the islands of the Caribbean Sea. Bermuda as a whole has many cultural and economic links with these islands, dating back to the days when Bermudian traders plied sea routes between them and the eastern seaboard.

According to Bermuda Government Folklife Officer Kim Dismont-Robinson, Bermuda occupies one of the "outer limits of [...] the Caribbean," (Dismont-Robinson 6). Dismont-Robinson argues that, despite the fact that "Bermuda is not technically considered a part of the Caribbean, it can be considered as such for all practical purposes much in the same way the South American country of Guyana is considered Caribbean: on the basis of shared cultural, historical, geographical and familial ties," (6). Robinson extends her act of locating Bermuda in the Caribbean into a framing of the Caribbean region between these two "extremes": Guyana, a Caribbean nation { . . . } technically part of the South American continent { . . . } so vast in comparison to other Antillean countries that the interior can only be imagined conceptually" and "tiny Bermuda is so far north that it is often not considered part of the Caribbean and has a narrow land mass so overpopulated that ocean shoals

become a kind of imaginary substitute for a non-existent interior” (Dismont-Robinson 6). Robinson’s positioning of Bermuda as framing a region between us and Guyana is one with which I agree conceptually; especially her casting of our oceanic territory as conceptually akin to an undeveloped interior. Dismont-Robinson’s position is strengthened by historic evidence of links between Bermuda and the Caribbean that go beyond familial or cultural, defined in part by the geography of ocean currents.

Bermuda’s links to the North Atlantic colonial and postcolonial world tend to be much better documented, but its position on a pivot between regions binds it to both spaces. In fact, due to the vagaries of ocean winds and currents, sometimes the fastest way of travelling between islands in the Caribbean or British West Indies involved sailing up to Bermuda and then back south again. Michael Jarvis explains that while the “voyage from Barbados to Jamaica { . . . } took a week or less { . . . } the same trip in the reverse direction was virtually impossible” due to “powerful” prevailing winds (*In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* 3). Jarvis notes, “the most practical course from Jamaica to Barbados for eighteenth-century ships routed them past Bermuda and took a month or more. The blank blue expanses of most Atlantic maps obscure a more complex nautical geography, where a straight line is not always the shortest sailing distance between two points” (3). Jarvis identifies oceanic winds and currents interweaving Bermuda into transatlantic trade routes. He examines Bermudian mariners’ numerous engagements with this commercial/geographic matrix, including “salt raking,” trading “dyewoods” and numerous other goods, “fishing,”

and “wrecking” (Jarvis 216, 223). Meanwhile, the last of Bermuda’s disused trains rusts in Guyana – occasionally raided to “repair{...} parts of the ferry fleet,” according to a July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 report by Simon Jones in Bermuda’s daily *Royal Gazette* newspaper (Jones). Bermudian culture and Bermudian literature have not developed in a vacuum. Prolonged contact with the Caribbean has resulted in more of an overlap than some might like to admit – certainly enough that our literary tradition finds itself located as close if not closer to that of Caribbean literature than to North American literature.

As such when I say ‘Caribbean’ I tend to include Bermuda, and when I say ‘Bermuda’ I do so with an awareness of how it relates to this regional literary and historical grouping. This is a somewhat controversial position within Bermuda itself given our close ties to the southern USA and to the UK and also given a Bermudian tendency towards prejudicially distancing ourselves from the Caribbean’s less economically successful British and formerly British territories. This has its mirror in another tendency to consume and take on and prize certain Caribbean cultural tropes over Bermudian. There exists also a perception that considering our Caribbean links might somehow compromise our uniqueness, as if Bermuda must have developed in a vacuum which must remain sealed. As if these links can somehow harm our sense of identity in ways that links with elsewhere might not, perhaps due to historic trauma. In the oceanic space between Bermuda and the more southern islands we were both victims and perpetrators of brutality, at times simultaneously. So our relationship with, say, Turks and Caicos, remains fraught with ambivalent distance despite the numerous historic and familial links between

our islands. I believe that this ambivalence is in itself evidence for our positioning as demarcated by Dismont-Robinson above.

A common thread running through all of these considerations of Bermudian locality remains the various oceanic currents and flows of people, ideas, and goods facilitating its development. These interplays find expression in Bermudian traditions such as the Peppercorn Ceremony, in which local specifics of history and



geography modulate imperial ceremonial process. Photos from Bermuda's annual Peppercorn Ceremony, held April 25<sup>th</sup> 2012 (Bernews.com):

The Peppercorn Ceremony has been held in the Town of St. George's since 1816. It stems from the relocation of Bermuda's capital from St. George's to the city of Hamilton in 1815. This event led to St. George's consequentially disused State House, where Bermuda's parliament had met from 1620-1815, being leased for the price of one peppercorn to a Masonic lodge who hold the building in trust for the Mayor and town government. The ceremony consists of the ritualized payment of a single peppercorn to the Governor by the St. George's Masonic Lodge. The State

House, constructed in 1619 using local resources such as turtle oil and lime for mortar, is one of the oldest stone buildings in Bermuda. The surrounding town of St. George emerged as capital in roughly the location of Bermuda's first settlement, near the St. Catherine's Bay landing-point reached on July 25<sup>th</sup> 1609 by lifeboats carrying Admiral Sir George Somers' hurricane-stranded crew. After battering the ship for days, storm-driven water forced its way through their keel's caulking and began to sink the *Sea Venture*, forcing Somers to ground it on the reefs that guarded and still guard Bermuda.

At this early, water-defined point in the founding of my society, processes of wrecking, raiding and retooling commenced with the crew's salvage of what they could use from their vessel for their onward journey to Virginia. The waves that bore them broke and receded and currents scattered, sending Sir George Somers back to Bermuda for more provisions. Somers died on this journey to Bermuda, and was borne onwards to England minus his heart {buried in St. George's, claimed by our limestone}. The Admiral seeking supplies becomes cargo, and the wave recedes and comes again. When capital and parliament moved to Hamilton, it was because a decision had been made to locate the capital centrally and near to a good port. Both locations of Bermuda's capital are defined by water: St. George because it was the nearest suitable location to the reefs where our first settlers were shipwrecked in a storm, literally pushed there by the water; Hamilton because its harbour is both more protected and more accessible to the ships that form our lifeline to this day.

The spectacle of this ceremony and its associated historic particularities, such as the construction of the State House from local materials, cuts to the heart

of my thesis's concerns regarding the creation of culture within post/neo/colonial spaces – both in terms of the physical/political formation and literary cultural production. In the space from which, for which, and about which I wish to write, literature and poetics' inseparability from historic and geographic pressures remains starkly evident, to say nothing of the political pressures incubated by colonialism. The Peppercorn Ceremony exists as a 'Bermudian' singularity even while its constituent elements obviously stem from elsewhere, its signifiers drawn from the colonialist institutions of a British Empire that sought to homogenise, not produce new hybrid forms. To what extent the Peppercorn Ceremony embodies forms of localized colonial oppression is debatable, at least in real political terms; in representational terms however it does form a theatrical reminder/remainder of power dynamics within the British Empire. Placement of decolonial resistance from Bermuda within the aegis of Caribbean poetics, and more specifically tidalectic epistemology, allows for a critical view removed from the perceptual predispositions perpetuated by these dynamics.

### **Power, Representation: Limits of Graphing and Beyond**

Brathwaite's idea of tidalectics focuses on local specificities as a response to the ways that postcolonial critics {and others} sometimes attempt to impose universalising forms of theoretical framework. While this thesis focuses on tidalectics, its intellectual lineages, and its potential outgrowth, we must first examine the kind of universalising models it works against. For these purposes, the aforementioned model by Stephen Slemon now requires closer examination. As mentioned above, this model has become a canonical element of postcolonial

studies. Making Slemon's model more appropriate for the purposes of examining the entrenched perspectives of theoretical convention is the fact that it attempts to chart a plurality of the analytic focuses made by conventional postcolonial theory, while acknowledging its own perspectival shortcomings.

The multivalent nature of the Peppercorn Ceremony finds a mirror in the multivalent and pluralistic nature of the sometimes-competing ideologies, theories, methodologies and lines of approach taken in analysing such cultural forms under the aegis of postcolonial theory. Similarly, the postcolonial writer of literary works such as poetry is faced with multiple potential approaches to presenting or evoking their material - all of which carry the drowned/submerged ghost of our post- (or late- or neo-) colonial condition. The submerged ghost acts as a kind of modulating instrument adding political subtext to aesthetic decisions or, conversely, aesthetic concerns to politically conscious/inspired literary works.

As Stephen Slemon notes in *'The Scramble for Post-Colonialism'*,

**"Post-colonialism', as it is now used in various fields, de-scribes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises," including postcolonialism's deployment "as a way of ordering a critique of totalising forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both post-modernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the conduit from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist**

**longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a third-world intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of ‘reading practice’; and – and this was my first encounter with the term – as the name for a category of ‘literary’ activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called ‘Commonwealth’ literary studies” (45).**

For Slemon the heterogeneous and internally discordant character of what he seems to interchangeably refer to as both “post-colonialism” and “postcolonialism” is indicative of the complexity of and disagreement inherent within the project of “securing the concept of ‘colonialism’ itself” (45).<sup>18</sup> Slemon later also attributes this discord to the possibility that post-colonialism/postcolonialism itself is in the process of being “colonised by competing academic methodologies” within academic institutions “and [...] repurposed into institutional pursuits that have no abiding interest in the specifics of either colonialist history or post-colonial agency” with the title of his essay itself mirroring Europe’s infamous ‘Scramble for Africa’ period of colonialism (50).

Slemon’s answer to the latter of these concerns rests, ultimately, in a considered deployment of locally-appropriate lines of inquiry and resistance.

However, his project focuses on defining that which must be resisted in a narrow manner ultimately limiting potential responses. Using what he identifies as primary

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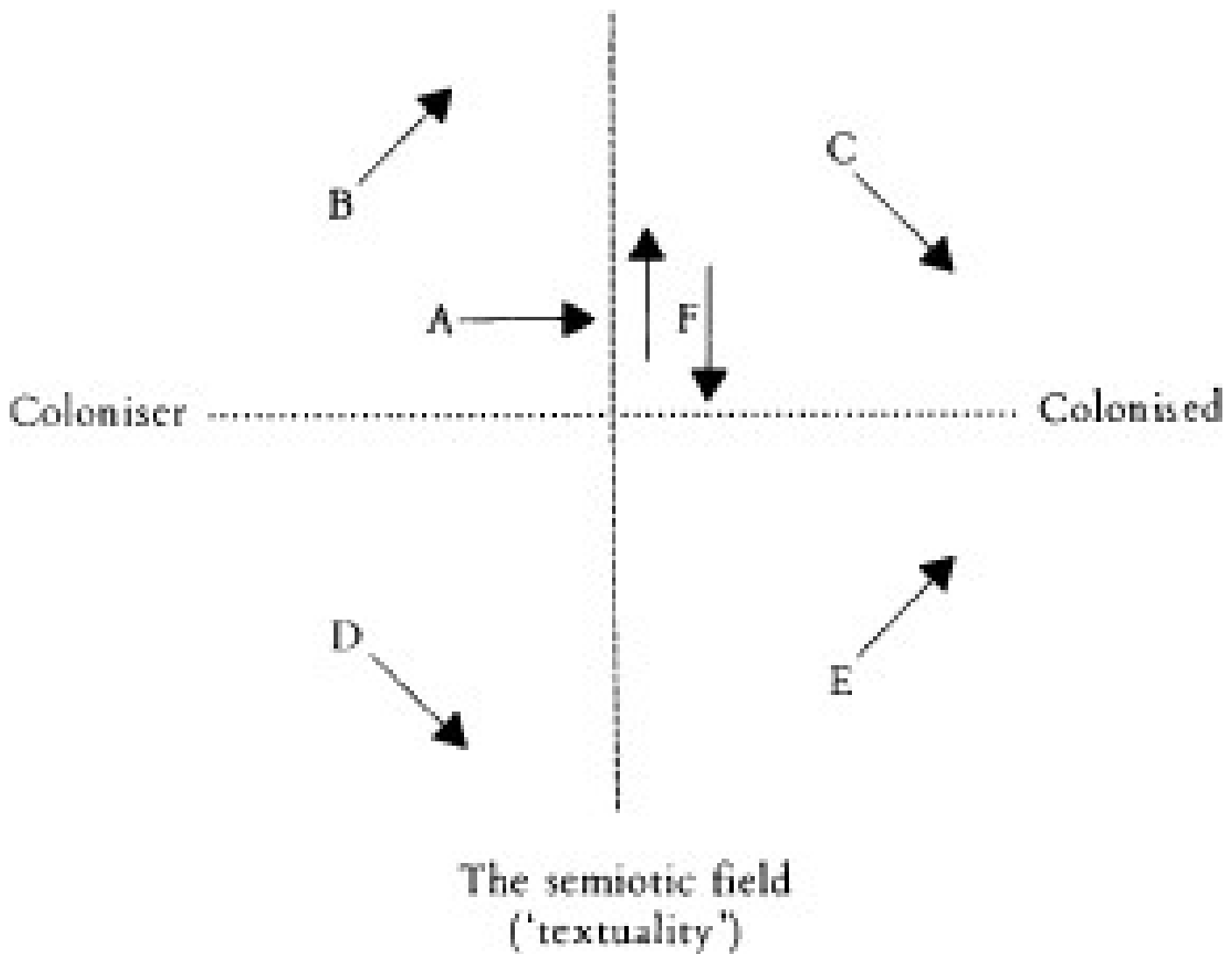
<sup>18</sup> It remains unclear as to whether Slemon deliberately deploys both hyphenated and non-hyphenated forms of post-colonialism/postcolonialism as a means of enacting or illustrating the above mentioned discord; it should be noted that the non-hyphenated version is the more widely accepted as less implicative of a temporality that would imply colonialism as having already ended.



competing academic methodologies describing colonial power, Slemon attempts to graphically model the mechanics of colonialism. According to this line of thinking, an appropriate post-colonial response - be it in the form of an academic or artistic work – would respond directly to, perhaps reversing, these mechanics (46). Slemon attempts to plot a simplified version of the various interpretations of colonialism - or lines of inquiry, or, conversely, if one assumes that the lines Slemon plots represent real things that can be observed as existent outside of the world of ideas and abstracts, of a colonial power itself - diagrammatically onto a schema resembling a common mathematical graph {opposite}. It should be noted that the goal here is not to map any single postcolonial investigative technique. In this section, Slemon appears to attempt to reveal the whole field within which various postcolonial methodologies examine colonial power.

Slemon first draws a horizontal line, and places the coloniser on the left end and colonised on the right. He then bisects this line at its midpoint with a vertical line, constructing a shape reminiscent of the vertices of a mathematical graph or a crosshairs, and places “Institutional Regulators (colonialist educational apparatuses)” at the top and “The semiotic field (textuality)” at the bottom (46). Slemon then places seven lines, lettered A-F {F has two lines}, onto this diagram. These represent various mechanisms of control enacted by colonial power and focused on by a variety of disciplines. Slemon points out some of the contradictions or limited readings that result from exclusive focus on only one of these mechanisms– and, conversely, how focus on more than one can reveal connections between said mechanisms.

Institutional regulators  
(colonialist educational apparatuses)



Line A represents direct political control in the form of “brute force”, oppression, and economic domination; although an analysis of colonial power along the line of direct control must include an awareness of colonial power structures’ strategic construction/distortion of identity within the spaces they occupy, the fact/act of occupation is privileged (46).

Line BC represents “ideological flanking for...line A” created and maintained by colonial “institutional regulators” like “education” controlling and ideologically tinting “professional fields of knowledge” and the general dissemination of information within the colonial space (46, 47). Analysis of colonial power that focuses on the line of ideological flanking examines how institutions within colonial power structures strive to create/maintain the colonial identity desired by Empire of its subjects .

Line DE represents “the semiotic field” with its subheading ““textuality”” placed either for explanation and definition, or for emphasis on Slemon’s analytic method as metaphorically reading artistic productions as texts (46). This line encompasses art and media that reinforce colonialist power structures and perspectives: literature, advertising, sculpture, travelogue, painting, maps, pornography, music, and film. This includes not only depictions of colonized peoples and spaces rife with metropolitan stereotyping, but also domination and monopolization of cultural production. Line DE thus attempts to cover any part of those media that work to create and/or maintain colonial perspectives of colonial spaces, promoting representations of and by the colonizing culture as aesthetic

ideals/norms while ensuring that the context and content of colonial spaces' representations remain defined on the Empire's terms.

Line F represents interplay between institutional regulators and the semiotic field. For example, the process by which "a scholarly educational apparatus" dealing with postcolonial space "appropriates textual representations" of postcolonial and colonial space so as "to consolidate itself as a discipline and to reproduce" colonial space "as a deployable unit of knowledge" (47). In other words, line F represents the way that institutions use texts to produce texts. At its simplest of interplays this could mean a metropolitan critic's adoption of a postcolonial cultural production, such as Walcott's *Omeros*, and subsequent extrapolation of inferences about the literary and real spaces represented by that work into an idea or theory about these spaces {specifically or in general}. Line F could therefore refer to the canonization of ideologically colonialist fictional reality as ideologically neutral reportage of actual colonial reality within a discourse that is not explicitly literary – and also to the canonization of 'postcolonial theory' as an academically recognized discipline, which enacts similar processes of conversion on the postcolonial source texts with which it engages. Because line F passes between all of Slemon's other vectors, it becomes potentially complicated in ways that betray the author's attempt at a clean act of graphing.

Slemon focuses at length on and explains the phenomena represented by line F in terms of the Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. This example is not chosen unstrategically: Said's identification of fictionalized/fetishized projection masquerading as study underpins a "*foundational* ambivalence" that line F

represents (Slemon 49). Slemon identifies ambivalence within line F between the idea that “scholarly apparatuses” use “representations created at the bottom” of line F in the semiotic field “to make up ‘knowledges’ that have an ideological function”, and the idea that the “scholarly apparatuses” at the top of line F “work in the production of a purely fantastic and entirely projected idea” of the space they purport to analyse (49). Metropolitan archetypes and fictions of colonial space become conflated with observation and reportage; the vector of line F vacillates between top-down and bottom-up. According to Slemon, an understanding of how the vectors at work along line F represent colonial power structures as inherently ambivalent inevitably leads to ambivalence in the interconnected fields of postcolonial and colonial discourse study. These fields “carry this ambivalence forward”, and this both clarifies “understanding of colonial operations” and “upsets the positivism of highly specific analysis of colonial power going on within a period,” (49). Many scholars of post-colonialism and colonial discourse conduct their study within the institutions that their field demarcates as regulators of colonial power. Awareness of their situation lends itself to anxieties: that their own texts may take on similarly negative/oppressive functions along line F; that their specific work within this field may be impossible to extricate from the processes that enacted these functions; that, like Orientalists of days gone by, an unhealthy proportion of their research consists of projection.

Slemon’s interest in “foundational ambivalence” within colonial discourse informs his idea that similar ambivalence plays out in postcolonial theories of colonial power , fostering “debate over what happens when a model of ‘colonial

discourse' is carried beyond its scattered moments of archaeological research and is taken up as a general structure of oppression" – in which case, scholars must interrogate "the question of *agency*...of who or what acts oppositionally" to the lines of domination demarcated (49, 51,). It is only when one attempts to look at the relationship between different strands of post-colonial theory on colonial power apparatuses / colonial discourse and their inherent potential for dissonance and misappropriation, that one can begin to address questions of agency within the context of a developing post-colonial discourse. This being the case, a project like Slemon's act of graphing proves useful if by definition limited due to the necessity of simplifying a topic of fractal-like complexity for the purpose of presenting the specific points that he goes on to make. However limited, Slemon's diagram can work as an instructive starting point for a discussion of work that responds to the master narratives of colonial discourse.

Some of the more interesting questions that may be asked concerning local literary production within colonial and postcolonial spaces investigate interactions between the semiotic field and the institutional regulators. In an era when much postcolonial discourse is generated in spaces traditionally considered as the regulators of colonial power, how can that discourse operate on the terms of the colonised - or at least attempt to occur on their terms? How can the semiotic field and institutional regulators have interactions that upset the power imbalance between colonial subjectivity and institutional authority? A model like Slemon's seems to deny these can exist except along the lines defined by colonial power, whether examining their contours or writing back along one of them, if only

because this diagram was designed to represent understandings of the enactment of colonial power but not to represent challenges to that power.

Indeed, while instructive, Slemon's model is far from perfect mainly because it does not go on to plot the lines of resistance taken if any degree of agency on the part of postcolonial subjects is to be assumed. That is to say, its greatest failing is that its lines do not go in enough directions. As a model of domination, Slemon's graph favours a colonialist perspective. The drive towards definitive clarification and totalising categorization it evinces show it to be the tidy product of a tidy mind - as if Slemon cannot help but attempt to find order in a situation that his own discourse implies to be inherently chaotic. Its design and structure as a graph fit neatly into Eurocentric epistemological norms, and it consequentially operates on some levels as a part of the colonial system of categorisation that it seeks to deconstruct. Reading left to right - from "Coloniser" to "Colonised" - the graph shows coloniser fire arrows into the colonial subject from various angles without a hint of reply. The only multidirectional line - problematic line F - vaguely rises from the semiotic/textual to the institutional without a line countering line DE {semiotic/textual representation generated by the coloniser} with that produced by the colonised. Instead, the field of textuality apparently comes both out of nowhere and from the discourse of the coloniser. This model favours the metropolitan colonial power with the idea that the entirety of colonial space may be defined and described by the metropolitan. Consequentially, it fails to address the ways that the colonized react/counteract/respond to each of these lines of domination, or how these can be reinscribed as lines of resistance.

To his credit, Slemon provides a strong rationale for his not attempting to chart vectors of resistance, this being that local specificities must define the nature of oppression and resistance enacted in various colonial spaces. These local specificities must be both intellectually and culturally appropriate in their articulation. However, Slemon's argument also contradictorily implies that there is a single unified form of colonialism, problematically failing to recognise local adaptations made by colonial powers or differences between diverse forms of national colonial power. This deflates his call for locally-specific resistances. I would add that resistance imagined by Slemon's adherence to his neatly drawn vectors remains therefore problematic. However, Slemon expresses reservation over the development for a totalizing theory that risks actualizing postcolonial theory's potential for subsumption into a "last bastion for the project of global theory and for European universalism itself," another tool of academic discourse divorced from its original anti-colonial aura and intent (51). It is almost as if Slemon's tidy mind is accounting for and asking his reader to account for the complicating untidiness that he has not plotted onto the graph, without actually imagining what these complications might imply for vectors of control and resistance alike. Insisting that "wherever a global theory of the colonial might lead us, we need to remember that resistances to colonialist power always find material presence at the level of the local" and that a failure to focus on the local results in "the work in our field [becoming] the playful operations of an academic glass-bead game" that is purely "descriptive" at best and "not a script for change," Slemon explicitly leaves the door open to a plurality of approaches and lines of inquiry into postcolonial and colonial power structures, and a plurality of approaches to writing back and enacting



resistance (52). Any irony inherent in his making this call for local and heterogeneous ideas and practices of resistance from a metropolitan physical and intellectual space associated with the homogenization and co-option of these ideas and practices remains unspoken. From Slemon's call for a focus on the local I extrapolate that the most preferable theoretical framework for aiding the postcolonial artist/scholar understanding in deciphering and representing their environment should not only be locally appropriate but so much as possible locally generated.

Let us begin by replacing Slemon's schizophrenically metropolitan call for locally generated epistemologies with one made instead by Harris. Of course, the term local becomes complicated by the facts of Harris's longstanding residence in the United Kingdom, his knighthood, and the overseas publication of the majority of his books. However, Harris's intellectual and artistic focus and loyalty remain both fixed on the Caribbean region and outside of the strictures of conventional theory and perspectival modes Harris's work as a surveyor in the deep rainforest interior of Guyana, to which he alludes throughout his criticism and creative work, deeply informs his standpoints<sup>19</sup> (237). In the context of espousing localized re-imagination of theorized historical processes {and by extension philosophic and artistic practices} away from prescribed/assumed metropolitan norms, Harris asserts that, "In a society that has been shot through by diverse inter-racial features and inter-continental thresholds, we need a philosophy of history which is original to us and yet capable of universal application" (Continuity and Discontinuity 180).

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<sup>19</sup> See Fred D'Aguiar's interview with Harris in BOMB magazine, number 82, Winter 2003. Also available in *BOMB The Author Interviews*.

This is to say that while the original strains of Caribbean culture and epistemology may be drawn from diverse sources, and are therefore not in some idealized sense 'regionally original' or unitary, it is these very diverse (re)sources which make original philosophic strains both urgently necessary and imminently possible.

Indeed, the only alternatives would be epistemological segregation along ethno-philosophic lines or the assertion of dominance by one tradition of thought over another; neither proves acceptable for Harris, or even necessarily possible. This is especially true for Harris because of the wholly inappropriate and derisive conclusions drawn from acquiescence to the historically dominant epistemology, wherein "*native consciousness* is being overlooked within deterministic projections, and criteria are invalidated which might probe into unpredictable perspectives, latent spaces we need to unravel in our age. One has the sense also that vested interests are at work to embalm the fact of exploitation. Thus a new kind of callous is enshrined which blocks perspectives" (Continuity and Discontinuity 180). Unmodified dominant epistemological frameworks will always work to reinforce dynamics of oppression and ideas of the Caribbean as exploited space, even when ostensibly writing against such exploitation – as in the case of metropolitan iterations of postcolonial theory which subscribe both to imperialist ideals of progress and development, and to established dynamics between coloniser and colonised. From cracks in the calloused dichotomies enshrined between monolithic views of metropolitan and postcolonial spaces, routes for alternative perspectives arise.

Pride or a sense of self-love and self-worth proves necessary for the achievement of Harris's call for something locally-oriented and powerful. He emphasizes that, "Caribbean man is involved in a civilisation-making process (whether he likes it or not) and until this creative authority becomes intimate to his perspectives, he will continue to find himself embalmed in his deprivations – embalmed as a derivate tool-making, fence-making animal" (Continuity and Discontinuity 180). Harris does not merely call for realization of creative authority in building civilization; he calls for a realization of authority that arises from and remains closely allied to one's own way of understanding. Failure to generate an original philosophy of history therefore implies acquiescence to such traps of metropolitan epistemologies that denigrate the narratives of self and culture erected by local subjects.

Revision via existing perspectives will not suffice; re-envisioning is in order. New vision must arise from fresh perspectives, and vice versa, but crucially must also incorporate any source material in a new manner. Harris also calls for "a narrative that helps us to sense the partiality of linear progression and brings home to us in genuine stages of creativity (rather than purely intellectual experimentation) the simultaneity of the past, the present, and the future in the unfinished genesis of the imagination," (Creoleness 254). I argue that Brathwaite's discourse on tidalectic epistemology both fits these criteria and echoes their complex call for new perspectives. This is a much more complex and far more urgent call to localized epistemologies than that made by Silemon, one which immediately accounts for complex and untidy interlinkages between historical,

political, and cultural/artistic processes and perspectives. The following section examines a model developed by Harris that works to explain some of the same questions of representation raised by Slemon's model above, but in terms that are not acquiescent to dominant postcolonial epistemologies or the urge towards tidy graphic representation.

### Theme of Expedition: Sea-Charting Ships of Civilization

If it may seem obvious that considering the transmission of cultural forms over water can play a key role in formulating a tidalectic theory of Caribbean poetics, the manner in which these forms are elementally altered in the course of their transmission bears even closer consideration. Wilson Harris provides one model for how various values and ideologies are metaphorically encoded in the physical objects and vessels that journey to the New World in his essay *'Benito Cereno'*, while Brathwaite has his own ideas about how the tidalectic motion of historical currents (both literal and metaphoric) operates, which I will go into detail about later.

In *'Benito Cereno'*, Harris creates a model that sheds light on the mechanics of how metaphors and imagery generated on the semiotic field of textual representation encode ideals and ideologies into their subjects. As discussed below, this model deploys not a static graph with fixed lines, but something resembling the vector of a ship and its wake, or the potential vectors of ships casting wake between them. This conceptually evokes the regional specifics of nautically-defined space and its formational real-world shipboard transit of ideas and peoples. While Capildeo's image of a Viking seizing and misascribing values to peacock feathers emblemizes processes of semiotic redefinition along vectors that Slemon might ascribe to line F, Harris's model presents the mechanics of how this same misascription and appropriative redefinition of the semiotic field by agents of colonial power might be subconsciously enacted. Capildeo presents an individual example of perspective misapprehending the semiotic symbolic space of the raided

object, and Slemon presents a model showing how this process enforces colonial power; Harris provides the double-mirror of example and model colonial power structure, while also presenting this power-structure itself as beholden to the misinterpretations it perpetuates – as being fooled by its own sustaining illusions.

For Harris, the epistemology generating metaphoric resonances in supposed realities inscribed on the semiotic field is not itself generated in a vacuum. The workings of this epistemology and its ties to power structures and currents of ideas beyond the individual may be devised partially by examining its metaphors. In his essay *Benito Cereno*, which quotes extensively from the Melville novella of the same title, Harris contends that, “Within each prisoner of history is an attachment, involuntary perhaps but concrete, to the very premises of his age” (Harris, *Benito Cereno* 44). Whilst appearing to be a simplistically totalising declaration on first glance, a piece of rhetoric, this statement immediately works in multiple ways. It situates Harris’s view of identity and agency (both individual and group) as built on the fluid surface of ideas, power structures, and cultures (national and institutional/professional). Melville’s fictionalization of an actual historical incident of rebellion on a slave-ship makes fertile ground for Harris’s extrapolations on history, perspective, and agency. “History,” makes “each prisoner” to the most pre-eminently dominant of these “premises of his age” even if one chooses to resist or ignore these premises, the circular irony being that if all are prisoners of history then it is from the prisoners themselves that these premises are generated and maintained (44).

This is not a reinforcement of the epistemology behind Slemon’s model of colonial domination, in which colonial power regulates its subjects along

unidirectional straight lines that only hint at the possibility of something being written back along them. Instead the apparatuses and identities represented by Slemon as agents of domination, that is the lines of domination and colonial agency themselves, are made subject to the premises upon which they are constructed. They may or may not outlast these premises in altered form or diminished relevance, and the premises underpinning the colonial power that enables these lines of domination may be addressed and subverted outside, around, or between these lines. Simply writing back along one or more lines of domination only adheres to the underlying premises that make this the expected dynamic. The ongoing history to which people become prisoners proves both fluid and extensively self-constructed even as social and cultural factors exert heavy influence, functioning like multiple feedback loops or spinning currents. The circular irony of human domination by human concepts and the implied ideational transformation or transfer from conquered to conqueror to conquered forms a tidalectic ebb&flow leading to imperfectly gyral as well as back-and-forth vectors in the historical currents that foster consciousness.

This is not explicitly a rejection of dialectics, or of scholarly inquiry into history and consciousness. However, it does cast this kind of inquiry as both inwardly individualized and socially influenced, one which, while potentially aware of a "curious relativity in the shapes of loathing and love," also perhaps misses out on some kind of larger mystery because "relativity is a predictable response to mobile conditions and feelings, depths of love, depths of hate" (44). That is to say, the tendency towards comparing and describing things relationally is so ubiquitously ingrained a human norm that productive analysis of why and how this

tendency operates proves elusive. For example: analysis of the semiotic field in Slemon's diagram above might reveal and examine the relative constructions in one or more texts (or within the semiotic field in general) insofar as they reinforce or reflect colonial power structures, but will not examine how the premises defining colonial power itself delineate the form, substance, and incidence of these relative constructions. The imagistic associations and philosophic presumptions underpinning such a model are not analysed in relation to personal social and educational background or the larger socio-cultural context of their development. However this is the kind of area on which Harris tends to focus, from a perspective removed from the semiotic field, interrogating the parameters of the field itself.

Reading from Harris complicates views of institutional regulation and appropriation of the semiotic field, although it doesn't deny that such processes may perniciously continue. Various power structures and apparatuses of cultural dissemination present homogenized interpretations of reality to individual subjects. Meanwhile, "as the response" of relativity to certain strong feelings "deepens, becomes, in fact, peculiarly concentrated, immensely concrete, an orchestration of feelings – that are intensely human and unpredictable – comes into play like an inner and outer chorus which begins to pick up echoes, voices, impulses that seem both deeper than the prisoner's age (as if sprung from the forgotten past) and deeper than the prisoner's time (as if in touch with a tide running into the future)" (Harris, Benito Cereno 44). What Harris might call the music of the living landscape<sup>20</sup> – in this case both external internal – comes to bear upon the psyche.

Echo, voice, and impulse – all conceptually attachable to a description of internal

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<sup>20</sup> See Harris, 'The Music of Living Landscapes' in 'Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination', and the section below on 'Tidalectics: Imagistic Genesis'



psychology as ‘memory’, ‘consciousness’, and ‘subconscious action’ – here also perform their acoustic roles. The tidalectic character of this process manifests itself in the multivalence of overlapping internal/external soundings and in the constant ebb&flow between the temporalities that these soundings signify.

A deep enough dive into individualized relational emotive response – or into its analysis – provides not only awareness of the premises underpinning the present but access to the collective currents running from previous ages and onwards. This dive must reach “deeper than the prisoner’s age” – literally deeper backwards or forwards than the individual’s biological age but more concerned with “age” in the sense of era, so also deeper than the dominant assumptions and perceptual modes of the era (44). This dive must also reach “deeper than the prisoner’s time”, which works similarly but with a nuance in that “time” refers more explicitly to temporality and the sense of foresight, although it also carries resonances of biological lifespan (44). Diving both of these depths becomes a highly personalized exploration of the epistemological architecture of one’s era, that concurrently involves imagining the negation of self in the depths of past and future. The tidalectic vector between self and negation works to further reveal the extent to which perception and self-perception both develop not only from personal psychology, but also from the architectonic underpinnings of social, cultural, and political arrangements. Access to the collective currents of consciousness running between ages allows for nuanced reflection on their underlying premises. But this access is in most cases not conscious: perception encompasses currents bearing the past and future’s various power structures and their discontents’ representational modes as apprehended by the beholder.

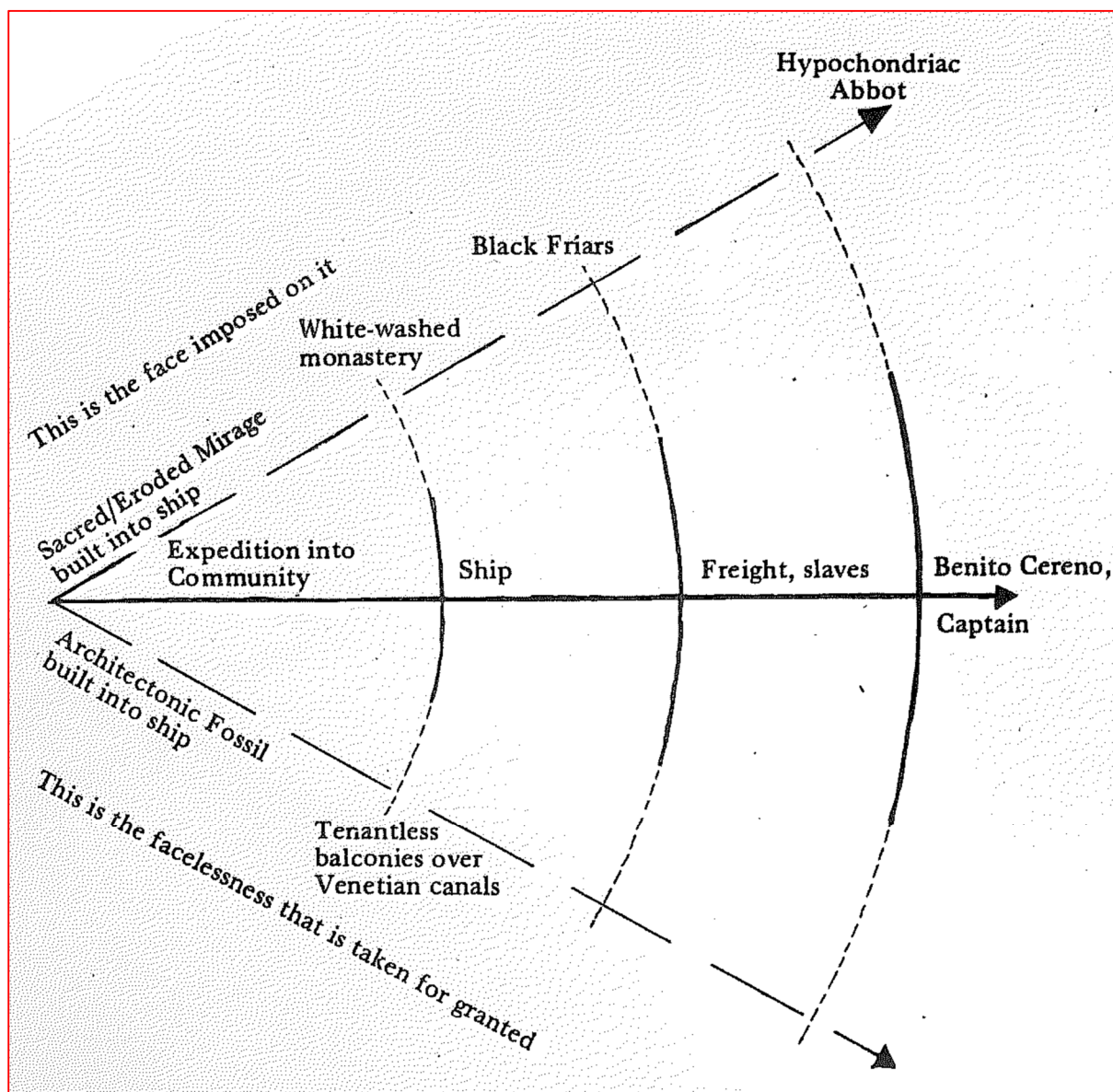
Awareness must be drawn from intuition. Harris calls “intuition” a perceptive mode that attunes itself to a perspective of relativity’s most deeply associative “echoes, voices, hints, depths”; resonance of these “echoes” and “depths” in ordinary perception inscribes the “stamp” or mark of intuition’s presence (Harris, Benito Cereno 44). Intuition’s disruption of “immediate premises, that wish to re-assert themselves” points to their underlying “hollowness,” and to the generation of associative images cultivating perspectives of relativity as a means by which these hollow premises attempt said reassertion of themselves over less epistemologically appropriate realities (45). An analytically critical examination of intuitively derived relative constructions can pick apart why and how underpinning premises mediate or distort reality and present in its place layers of archetypes. These archetypes cover the aforementioned hollowness in such a manner as to allow and normalize the perpetuation of contemporary social/political/cultural arrangements. Harris notes, “That dark recess – the innermost secret – is part and parcel of a necessity to caricature an age, as it were, within the womb of time and deepen that caricature through clowns of broken realism into a profound religious complication in which every actor in the human drama is a sacred mask/sacred animal in a ceaseless treasure of perspectives of inner/outer light, darkness” (45). The mythologizing of histories and hagiographic idealization of the historical character types and individuals responsible for shaping the contours of the idealized present order serves to justify this present order’s idealization. This conceals the “innermost secret” of “hollowness” or “recess” at the heart of the dominant assumptions and perspectives underpinning power structures (45).

Awareness of the system of relativity from which personal or societal presumptions derive allows for perceptual expansion. Casting the ship as metaphor for compounded social/cultural/power arrangements that hold together a given set of contemporary suppositions and archetypes, Harris unpacks the potential permutation and distortion of vision in which every age and civilisation engages. “New proportions (or the regeneration of spaces one takes for granted) are available,” he asserts, “to the imagination when it begins to take into account all that is implicit and concealed like fossil value codes within apparently realistic crew, cargo, ship of an age or a civilisation” (Harris, *Benito Cereno* 49). Harris borrows a meditation on the nature of ship-as-space from Melville’s story ‘*Benito Cereno*’:

“Both house and ship—the one by its walls and blinds, the other by its high bulwarks like ramparts—hoard from view their interiors till the last moment: but in the case of the ship there is this addition; that the living spectacle it contains, upon its sudden and complete disclosure, has, in contrast with the blank ocean which zones it, something of the effect of enchantment. The ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave.” (Melville 221-222, qtd in Harris, Wilson. *Benito Cereno*. 43-44)

Harris uses the story ‘*Benito Cereno*’ to show how an instance in which Melville’s protagonist fails to perceive reality might exemplify the overlaying of perception with metaphors derived from and appropriate to his era’s dominant epistemologies

. Harris then unpacks these failures of perception in terms of his preceding discourse, via a chart centred on the ship:



*Harris's 'theme of expedition' as applied to Benito Cereno, revealing the hidden premises underpinning the protagonist's perceptions.*

Harris contends that “the presence of the ship – and the cruel premises it raises into one’s view – might prove a greater shock than one wishes to bear,” and that so as to perceive the ship the mind processes it through a number of metaphoric “crutches” (46). The reader of Melville’s text might go through the similar processes to his protagonist, as “The approach to an imaginative drama launched over a hundred years ago” is not approached in the same manner in which one approaches the contemporary, but “is assisted by a kind of helpful amnesia<sup>21</sup> and manufacture of crutches of symbolic unconsciousness: crutches of Christ, crutches of familiar royalty, crutches of familiar Christ, crutches of familiar commonality in whose name one comes; crutches of ancient reflected land masses and ancient tribes of men as if they are an insensible ladder to be mounted and saved” (46).

Harris’s most significant quotation from Melville, from which he draws the points on his chart, is as follows:

“Upon gaining a less remote view, the ship, when made signally visible on the verge of the leaden-hued swells, with the shreds of fog here and there raggedly furring her, appeared like a white-washed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees. But it was no purely fanciful resemblance which now, for a moment, almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him. Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while, fitfully revealed through the open

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<sup>21</sup> Harris’s “Helpful amnesia” and its surrounding discourses predate by two decades Homi Bhabha’s similar ideas of “strange forgetting” constituting nationalist mythos - obligatory “forgetting to remember” formative “violence” contradictory to claims of ethical/moral authority (Harris 1975; Bhabha 1994).

port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters.

Upon a still nigher approach, this appearance was modified, and the true character of the vessel was plain—a Spanish merchantman of the first class, carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to another.” (Melville 219, qtd in Harris, Wilson. *Benito Cereno* 46-47).

Harris examines the manner in which the Captain’s failures of perception reinforce the premises of his era by means of images associated with order and power, while also containing an undercurrent of dissonance owing to the realities they mask.

Harris first considers the Captain’s “proportions of mirage (‘whitewashed monastery... throngs of dark cowls’) and his proportions of suppressed nightmare (‘negro slaves amongst other valuable freight’),” emphasising not only their oppositional nature, but also a correspondence between the grandiosity of the mirage and the depravity of that which it conceals (Harris, *Benito Cereno* 47).

Harris then considers mirage and nightmare in terms of their contrasting relationship to then-contemporary reality, the manner in which the nightmare relates to contemporary relations of exploitation and technology whilst the mirage sits on somehow older and purer - in this case sacred – ground: "In his realm of nightmare I am on territory that is technological and real – actual cargo freight, , etc., common-or-garden facts of Amasa’s day { . . } In his realm of mirage I am on ancient premises or hypnotic media (‘dun cliff among the Pyrenees’) (Harris, *Benito Cereno* 47). Recourse to a static and holy place in the mountains detached from temporality saves the Captain’s consciousness the shock of immediately perceiving

the moving ship and its cargos, while assimilating the ship and the processes of exploitative commerce it represents into the aura of ancient order conferred by its associated mirage.

Harris then isolates another act of perceptual metaphor on the part of the Captain, and confers a different kind of significance on this image. While monastery and mountains are a mirage generated as crutches to uphold certain premises, Harris contends that the next misperception on the part of the Captain relates more to historical resonances that underpin these premises. These resonances are in some ways built into the ship via its design – the style of the woodwork’s resemblance to certain architecture being that which spurs the Captain’s comparison. Form, therefore, may carry resonances of certain epistemological or socio-cultural codes, and certain ideas of power relations embedded within its architecture. Harris notes, “It is significant, in this context, that as I draw closer still to the San Dominick I cannot but observe in Amasa’s eyes a hint of a museum of oligarchical Venice and of sacred fossil democracy, carved upon a flux of waters, where before had existed a mirage of hierarchical church/Black Friars: ‘Toward the stern, two high-raised quarter galleries—the balustrades here and there covered with dry, tindery sea-moss—opening out from the unoccupied state-cabin, whose dead-lights, for all the mild weather, were hermetically closed and calked—these tenantless balconies hung over the sea as if it were the grand Venetian canal’” (Melville 219, qtd in; Harris, *Benito Cereno* 47). For Harris, the viewer’s encoding of values into the structure of the ship is evidence of these values’ fossilization and incorporation into the static architecture of a given cultural space, time period, or political ethos.



These encoded fossil values give a kind of epistemological physicality to the images with which the viewer replaces his real view of ship and crew. As Harris later notes, “In Benito Cereno the sacred mirage of place and time built into the ship provides a cue to pressures upon the writer’s psyche” (Benito Cereno 53). They act as a kind of support, or tectonic plate - the role of ideologies that underpin overlying structures invisibly and go unrecognized as ideologies or unnoticed altogether. While a ship provides moveable yet paradoxically fixed space, the tectonic suggests fixed yet paradoxically moveable space. The reality of that which is perceived is, like the ship, heavily mediated by various associative veils and ascriptions of meaning or value. “Thus I find myself,” Harris surmises, “sketching into the ship a subjective/objective counterpoint between self-sufficient technological masks of the day (ship, freight, etc) and sacred/eroded value-codes of community (church, democracy, etc.)” (Harris, Benito Cereno 47). This leaves, without the particulars of the example from Benito Cereno, a model that looks something like this:

mirage/crutch

ship

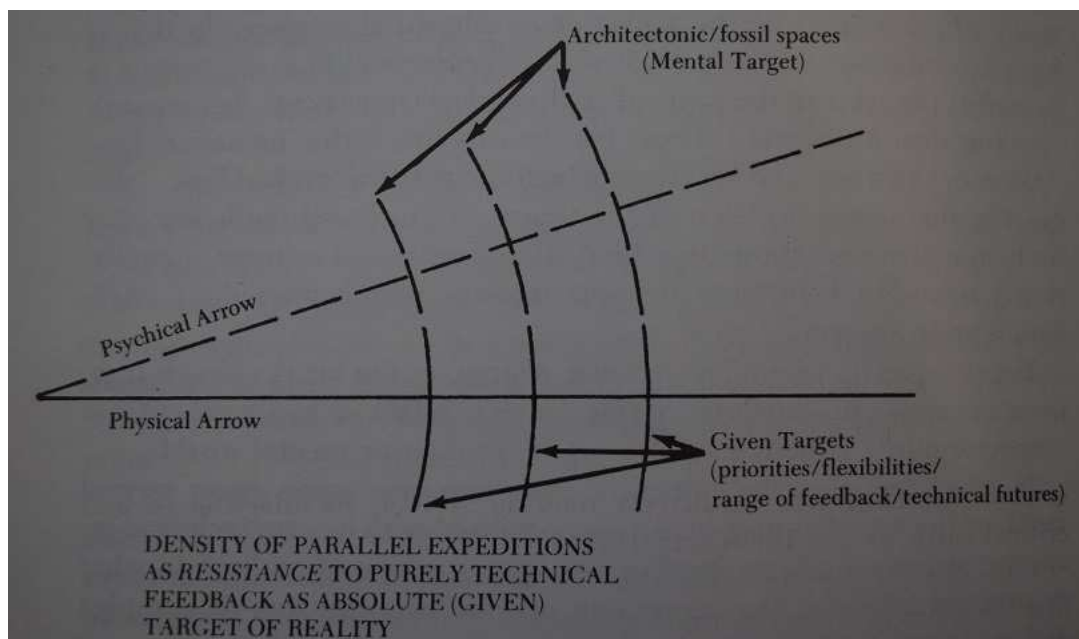
fossil/historical resonance

Indeed, something resembling this basic model with extra elucidation appears in Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford’s introduction to *‘Enigma of Value<sup>22</sup>: an introduction’* – the volume in which Harris’s piece on Benito Cereno first appears. This introduction recounts talks given by Harris and his further

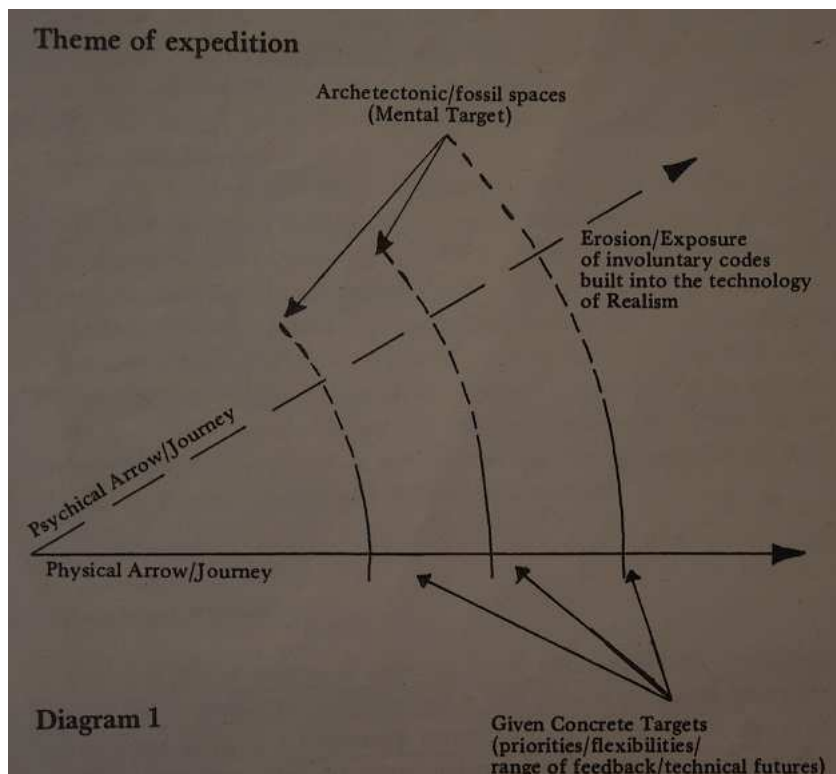
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<sup>22</sup> Note that titular congruence with V.S. Naipaul’s *Enigma of Arrival* – not published until 12 years after *Enigma of Values* – is therefore, at least on the part of Harris, purely coincidental. This bears pointing out, as other titular congruencies mentioned here are more deliberate and the similarity to Naipaul produces a tantalizing red herring.

discourses with participants at an academic conference, quoting extensively from his remarks. As such, the more generalized model that appears in the introduction can be taken to derive directly from Harris – an early version appears in his *Fossil and Psyche*<sup>23</sup>, published in another collection – and from his interactions with his audience. The model in *Fossil and Psyche* contains two lines rather than three as in *Benito Cereno*. Although the authors of the introduction to *Enigma of Values: an introduction* write with a view to explaining the discourse on *Benito Cereno* that follows, they initially reference *Fossil and Psyche* and deal with the topmost two lines of Harris’s model in isolation. This makes a good gloss for Harris’s more artful, if more opaque ship-based version of the same diagram.



<sup>23</sup> Note titular congruence with Apuleius’s *Cupid and Psyche*



In the place of the ship, there is the “Physical Arrow/Journey”; instead of the monastery there is the “Psychical Arrow/Journey” (Kirsten Holst Petersen 12). The drift or crossover between physical and psychical space is important here as it is in Braithwaite’s tidalectics. Peterson and Rutherford explain, this “diagram { . . . } shows in Harris’s words the ‘density of parallel expeditions as *resistance* to purely technical feedback as absolute (given) concrete target of reality’ { . . . } Along the physical arrow there are given concrete targets. Built into this physical journey and into these concrete targets are involuntary codes which are in fact animistic (though masked as social, religious, historical) { . . . } Deep-seated biases and prejudices were inevitably fed into a way of seeing, a method of selection and conscription of details” (12). Meanwhile, “the psychical arrow is sprung from the subjective imagination as it seeks to cohabit with the actual physical journey” and

its attendant “pressures” by “revis{ing} concrete targets” via the “self-deceptions” this arrow ostensibly seeks “to unravel” (14). The bottommost arrow of Harris’s model, dealing with architectonic fossil space, is not included in this generalized example.

The authors first discourse at length on Harris’s ideas on fossils and the architectonic. Regarding fossils: in short, Harris “agrees with Monod { . . . } each living person is a fossil” carrying “remnants of deep-seated antecedents)” (16). Regarding the architectonic, Harris claims that studied “awareness” of the architecture of “fossils” underpinning perception “enables one to construct a new scale along which one can attempt to progress” (20). While “the creative imagination embarks on a quest for new values, on the psychical journey,” the need for another line is hinted at when “the former {concrete} target is given new significance by the creative recognition of the architectonic fossil spaces” that might diverge from those images appearing involuntarily on the psychical arrow (20). Indeed, “Fossil-awareness is a specific perception of the erosion of involuntary social, cultural, and religious codes,” a perception which necessitates the plotting of a divergent psychical arrow representing architectonic dimensions of perception (20).

When the introduction reprints Harris’s ship-based 3-vectored diagram, the psychical arrow splits into an upper “Sacred/Eroded Mirage” line and lower “Architectonic Fossil” line (22). The authors explain that “the top line represents the value tone { . . . } current civilization values that have become biases, whilst the bottom line represents the structural tone { . . . } past civilization and the tyranny the white civilization has enacted on the African” (Kirsten Holst Petersen 22, 23). The

images generated involuntarily along both lines risk looping or echoing off one another forever. The authors identify “three ways in which” Harris suggests “we might combat and resist the tyranny of involuntary feedback: ‘music’, ‘colour’, and ‘the word’ as susceptible to an imagination of forms { . . . } beneath and beyond the biased modes of thought that are the products of a fixed society” (24).

The remainder of the introduction builds on each of these three approaches, while reinforcing and further explaining Harris’s ideas about time and hidden epochal presumptions. Of particular interest here is the way the authors apply Harris’s idea of a bone flute – which he dangles but does not address in his own piece – to his chart of physical and psychical expedition through time. For Harris, “*Benito Cereno* sustains { . . . } latent scope for regeneration that reminds me of a deeper primitive memory still of cannibal bone and hollow flute” (Benito Cereno 49). The introduction presents Harris’s fusion of ship and bone flute diagrammatically. Mirage and architectonic fossil extend and meet in circular lines – “skeleton walls of time { . . . } fortresses of culture { . . . } a conviction of absolute order” – which nonetheless contain “gaps” (*Enigma of Values: an introduction* 27). These gaps form “apertures” in a “flute of bone,” the sound of which “blowing down the centuries enables { . . . } a flash of insight” into the socio-historical construction of perception (28). As the authors note, “If the imagination has been successful in its attempt to cohabit with the material world as other than itself { . . . } the physical and psychical arrows coalesce into the flute of bone { . . . } a new dialogue of unsuspected proportions becomes possible” (31). If the physical arrow can be substituted for a flute of bone, for an artistic communication with past and ancestors as physical presences in the present, understanding of past and present

undergoes a shift. Note the extent to which the skeleton walls of time, represented as radial arcs between the vectors of fossil and mirage, resemble the vectors drawn by Slemon's lines B/C/D/E. One key difference, besides their obvious curvature, is that Harris's arcing lines lack directional arrows. Harris does not assume or assert a directional vector, emphasizing the circularity of time's skeleton walls and implying multidirectional motion along and across them. Note also these lines' similarity to the gyre of Atlantic currents and consider this visual kinship's drawing together middle passage over hurricane-gyre and penetration through the architectonic underpinnings of various times and spaces.

For Harris himself, "the theme of the Carib bone or flute sustains an implicit transubstantiation of implacable bodies of fate drawn out of opposing historical camps" (Harris, *Benito Cereno* 47). Linking the brutal premises of one's reality with its sustaining illusions, the flute of bone represents the potential for artistic dialogue and reimagining of the relations between various epochal images and presumptions. This allows agentive transcending of subconsciously predefined social roles. Such reimagining enables self-reflection and the building of future values. If accepted unquestioningly, "the roles that are being performed by the various actors in the tragedy of a civilisation may achieve a resounding technical triumph and climax but their content and mystery are fast running into the sand (or into the sea) as though the actors themselves have become performing robots of fate," (Harris, *Benito Cereno* 57). Rejection of dominant perspective/order as fated/fixed harkens back to Harris's discourse on the theme of expedition in *Fossil and Psyche*. Harris makes clear that by charting the theme of expedition he does "not wish to invest in an idolatry of absolutes," (*Fossil And Psyche* 80). Instead, he

provides a “sketch” of the “density of resources” present in physical and “architectonic” planes, and their “counterpoint of concrete pressures (upon the body of an age)” and “psychical dream-expedition (within the body of an age)” (80,81). Harris explains perception of these phenomena as “*signalling us towards a third perhaps nameless revolutionary dimension of sensibility* other than given material or given spiritual consensus” (81). The act of sketching the variously vectored theme of expedition implicitly involves a radical redefinition of perspective over the course of this sketch’s completion. As “the creative imagination seeks to revise its potentialities for dialogue with itself and with others,” this “potentiality for dialogue, for change for the miracle of roots, for new community {...} deepens and heightens the role of imaginative literature to wrestle with categories and to visualize the birth of community as other than the animism of fate” (Harris, *Fossil And Psyche* 71). With concrete and assumptional foundations of an age laid bare, the inevitability of socio-cultural relations proves illusive – providing opportunity for reassembly. In *Benito Cereno*, then, Harris’s real preoccupation is with the necessary unpacking of various codes and imagistic feedbacks generated by a colonialist worldview – doing so not as if these are exclusively deliberate tools of oppression, but as if they are simultaneously self-oppressive products of the very oppression that perpetuates them. As the ship embarks on its physical journey, the mirage and architectonic fossil images and fetishized physical targets it churns up in its wake provide clues to the self-justifying psychology of the power behind the ship’s journey.

Harris situates the ship as literal enactor and metaphor of colonial social development and perspectival shift, illuminatingly predating Gilroy's more widely-known but more literalist deployment of similar tropes in his later work on the Black Atlantic. Like Brathwaite's intersection of tidalectic and middlepassage, Harris's use of the ship represents an intellectual wrestling with ongoing catastrophes of historic middle passage. Placing Slemon's coloniser onto Harris's physical journey puts the coloniser on a ship loaded with cargo and baggage of empire in the form of freight and slaves. Harris's physical journey thereby factors in the slave trade that Slemon's model keeps invisible. This makes visible one of the primary erasures of Slemon's model, and signals the overarching erasures this type of a model might produce. It also places the colonised in the active role of ongoing journey, whereas for Slemon the colonised remain a destination.

Where Slemon's model implicitly favours metropolitan perspectives as consciously formulated and calculated in a manner that allows for tactical deployment, Harris reveals the manner in which metropolitan perspectives – even those produced and deployed consciously – are self-deceptively in thrall to underlying socio-cultural and institutional ideals and psychologies. These work to make the envisioned reality acceptable to metropolitan consciousness, while providing clues to the ideological structures underpinning this reality. Harris depicts the coloniser moving physically and psychically through colonial space with perception, reality, and ideology all travelling on divergent vectors before arriving at versions of the colonisers themselves.



Ideological control of knowledge draws from a psychological journey of sacred mirage feeding back into fossilized architectonic ideologies underpinning the physical journey of colonialism. In other words, Harris's diagram reveals that the semiotic field – supposedly regulated and drawn from by metropolitan institutions so as to perpetuate colonial power arrangements – is in fact part of a self-deceptive exercise in self-validation. Conflation of academic analysis with their own storytelling and projections of their own narratives betrays a lack of awareness as to their distortions of colonial reality. It reveals institutional understanding of colonial space as supported by study of limited and self-reflexive textualities. Harris's formulation reveals the ideology inherent in the semiotic field of textuality, and the textuality on which institutional ideological flanking may draw.

A degree of feedback plays into the metropolitan production of perspective – for which Slemon's model plots no vectors, assumes either that no feedback currents loop from colonial space back to metropolitan space, or that if these currents do exist they are not significant enough to chart. Feedback, however, proves too significant to ignore. Divergent values instilled in (superimposed on) the reality of colonial exploits by metropolitan perspectival mediations of reality both distort this reality and reveal some ideological underpinnings of metropolitan psychology. Travel along one or both psychological lines does not necessarily therefore 'arrive' at the metropole's intended destination/definition of colonised space – even having made the physical journey – but rather at a projection of metropolitan space covertly underpinned by ideology, and an overt projection of metropolitan ideology into space.

These projections conflate space with its representation, generalizing specificities of locale and situation in the eyes of the metropole but providing openings for resistance or counter-flow by those who see these dynamics. The entirety of this space and everything within it, meanwhile, remains kinetically on the ongoing vector of all three journeys. This process masks the reality of that which is perceived or represented, while providing clues as to the nature of the metropolitan psychologies behind the masks produced. The manner in which metropolitan perceptive modes render specific things invisible makes visible their underlying mechanics.

As stated above, self-justifying psychology forms the true power behind dominant representations of a given space or era. The face imposed on colonial space therefore remains inseparable from the facelessness taken for granted yet underpinning colonial society. In this light, Harris's and Brathwaite's intellectual project partly involves close scrutiny of this facelessness, and a valorisation of those submerged elements that upset the architectonic underpinnings of metropolitan influence over perception. However, both Harris and Brathwaite also address the imposed faces of the upper psychical journey – not to mention the metropolitan representations of physical space as perceived on the physical journey. The responses of Brathwaite and Harris to the overt and covert dynamics of both metropolitan control and the psychologies and ideologies underpinning and defining colonial power expose metropolitan self-deceptions wrapped up in the exercise of control. The living landscape of Atlantic gyre environmentally physically situates and facilitates both tidalectic and theme of expedition; the two are locally-

devised ideas that play with metropolitan tropes and use them for their own ends, created by writers whose ideas are engaged in conscious dialogue. Harris's model anticipates the feedback and potential for (post)colonial response generated by the compounding of local landscape and cultural consciousness, while Brathwaite's later conception builds this type of compounding into a larger epistemological construct.

All of these observations and analysis are working towards emphasizing the necessity for locally generated epistemologies like tidalectics that can exist outside of dominant modes of thinking. The appropriateness of avant-garde practice, the local specificities of Bermuda as Caribbean, and the limitations of mainstream postcolonial theory have now been significantly enough examined. The intellectual lineage running from Harris to Brathwaite's idea of tidalectics will develop further in following sections. A closer look at tidalectics itself is now warranted.

## 2. TIDAL SOUNDINGS

### Local Re-Visioning

Kamau Brathwaite's idea of the tidalectic, developed over years but given mythic genesis and put forward most cohesively in his collaborative hybrid-format {transcribed lecture / essay / poem / discussion transcription} *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, rushes backwards over Slemon's vectors from the colonized to the colonizer, flooding and sweeping both institutional regulators BC and the semiotic field DE, with line F stretching across a massive floodplain.

'*ConVERSations...*' does not contain Brathwaite's first mention of 'tidalectic', but it does contain the most richly mythographic account of the idea's formulation. In this book, Brathwaite sets the tidalectic's genesis in a moment during which he seeks an account of the Caribbean's historical conditions and processes that fits local perspectives.

In many ways this whole book, along with Brathwaite's similar volume of '*Barabajan Poems*', can be viewed as the act or enactment of the way that the poet experiences what Harris would call "creative authority becom{ing} intimate to his perspectives," with Brathwaite experiencing an empowering shift of perspective as enabling and challenging the definitions of creative authority (Harris, *Continuity and Discontinuity* 180). *ConVERSations...* contains an explanatory "mechanics of this document" describing Brathwaite's methodology in bringing the book from its origins as a live conversation with Nathaniel Mackey to its highly edited and amended published form (15). This immediately throws a focus onto form and

method. Similarly composed to *ConVERSations...*, *Barabajan Poems* is also a hybrid-form lecture transcription edited and amended into a larger volume. Both books are to an extent framed by procedural notes. While both notes framing *ConVERSations...* concern process, in *Barabajan Poems* the first note primarily concerns publication history and the second covers process<sup>24</sup>. *ConVERSations...* can be viewed as extending not only the ideas presented in *Barabajan Poems* but also the tidalectic methodologies of composition enacted in the earlier work.

As the epistemology Brathwaite draws around tidalectics is concerned with oceanic movements as literal and metaphoric phenomena shaping history and culture, I find his thought aptly suited both for a sounding of Bermuda's (and indeed the wider region of island cultures') above-mentioned context of oceanic influence, and for an accounting for the untidy interlinkages between historical context/process and artistic process or perspective. Its potential focus on the oceanic movements common to a heterogeneous and fluidly defined space allows, for those who would seek to work with or build on it, an array of localizations of the view of the links between them and the manner in which their shared history and present contexts interface with each other and the wider world. Its potential beyond strictly oceanic contexts, in the realm of metaphor and philosophy, inspire

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<sup>24</sup> *Barabajan Poems* originates as "the twelfth Sir Winston Scott Memorial Lecture," which "Kamau Brathwaite was invited by the Governor of the Central Bank of Barbados to deliver on 2 December 1987"; apparently scheduled for publication by the bank during the following year it failed to materialize (11). Brathwaite instead spent five years editing and adding to the "15000" word transcript until it became the "65+000 words" comprising *Barabajan Poems* by "Fri 21" of "May" 1993, a process of editing documented in a note on the penultimate page of the volume (401). Six months after Brathwaite completed *Barabajan Poems*, his initial "18<sup>th</sup> November 1993" conversation with Mackey initiated the composition of *ConVERSations...* (*ConVERSations...* 13, *Barabajan Poems* 401). However, while Brathwaite's account of editing *Barabajan Poems* ends in May 1993, a final snippet from "*Time*" magazine dated "28 Nov93" indicates that at least some form of editing or compositional work on extended into the period during which *ConVERSations...* began to take shape (*Barabajan Poems* 403).

Brathwaite to chart a poetics that plays with forms and with processes of authorship. It meanwhile serves to fulfil in many ways the criteria of an “original” locally-generated “philosophy of history” enabling “creative authority intimate to” local “perspectives” espoused by Harris in *Continuity and Discontinuity* (180).

A philosophy of history informing tidalectics and much of Brathwaite’s other work, reiterated across multiple forms and methodologies of engagement, can be described as deriving from Brathwaite’s study, experience, and interpretation of African and Afro-Caribbean spiritual tradition. One of Brathwaite’s own appraisals of these traditions deserves space here to breath:

“The African religious complex { . . . } has certain interrelated divisions or specializations: (1) "worship" - an essentially Euro-Christian word that doesn't really describe the African situation, in which the congregation is not a passive one entering into a monolithic relationship with a superior god, but an active community which celebrates in song and dance the carnation of powers/spirits (orisha/loa) into one or several of themselves. This is therefore a social (interpersonal and communal), artistic (formal/improvisatory choreography of movement/sound) and eschatological (possession) experience, which erodes the conventional definition/description of "worship"” (Brathwaite, *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 74)

This formulation of worship compounds all creative activity into a process of communion/communication between individuals, ancestors, community, divinity, depths of personal and communal memory, and psyche. The communication is involuntary and collective, the dynamic between sublimity and reality fluid.

Brathwaite next lists, "(2) rites de passage; (3) divination;" without spending any further time on either (74). The former bears obvious resemblance to the Brathwaite's first poetry collection, *Rights of Passage*, which plays on both this element of African spirituality and the forcible transport of Africans to the Americas via Middle Passage. This dual meaning enacts themes of transformation, permanence, and ancestral connection. Divination speaks to a propensity for the discernment of larger truths, frequently from observation of physical phenomena that are often but not always natural. This theme obviously relates to tidalectics insofar as oceanic phenomena help formulate its insights and model its ebb&flow dynamics. It also relates to the complex interaction between veneration of ancestor, worship, understanding of self, and location in physical and psychical space, through artistic production as investigated by both Harris and Brathwaite throughout their writings.

Brathwaite finally lists, "(4) healing; and (5) protection," before discoursing at length on Obeah:

" Obeah (the word is used in Africa and the Caribbean) is an aspect of the last two of these subdivisions, though it has come to be regarded in the New World and in colonial Africa as sorcery and "black magic." { . . . } It was not recognized, in other words, that this "magic" was (is) based on a scientific

knowledge and use of herbs, drugs, foods and symbolic/associational procedures (pejoratively termed fetishistic), as well as on a homoeopathic understanding of the material and divine nature of Man (nam) and the ways in which this could be affected.” (74-75)

This explanation elides some of the non-African influences on Obeah with which it continues to syncretize in the Americas, such as European occultism<sup>25</sup>. However it does incisively summarize the tradition of Obeah in terms of disconnect between European and African epistemologies inherent in its apprehension as either magic or science. Brathwaite’s formulation creates space for it to be simultaneously both magical and scientific – not simply that Obeah is science misapprehended, or science Obeah by another name. Rather, the “divine nature of man” points to a compounded yet unstable syncretism of values, in that if man is by nature divine then a science of spirituality akin to magic makes logical sense (75). An epistemological dimension is added by Brathwaite’s tidalectic demonstration of the word man’s counter-flow “nam”, which he defines as an African word meaning “ideas” (75). This may be read to mean that the divine nature of man is to be located in ideas and that man and ideas are congruent and mutually divine. The magical science of divinity this implies focuses on, “like medical principles everywhere, the process of healing/protection through seeking out the source { . . . } of the disease or fear” (75). Of course, this is not exactly like medical practices everywhere. The somewhat jarring tonality with which Brathwaite erases difference

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<sup>25</sup> See Ebenezer Morgan White aka Papa Ebenezer’s website, Obeah Rituals, for more information on the diverse influences on contemporary Caribbean forms of Obeah and description of living Obeah practice directly from a contemporary Obeah Man. (<http://www.obeahrituals.com>)



here speaks to a degree of play on his part with ideas of conformity conferring legitimacy. This and Brathwaite's remark on symbolic/associational procedures in the preceding text both postulate not just a psychiatric but more expansively a psychical dimension for Obeah, a healing of the body and mind through contact with ancestor<sup>26</sup>. Brathwaite concludes,

“This was debased by slave master/missionary/prospero into an assumption, inherited by most of us, that Obeah deals in evil. In this way, not only has African science been discredited, but Afro-Caribbean religion has been negatively fragmented and almost (with exceptions in Haiti and Brazil) publicly destroyed. To properly understand obeah, therefore, we shall have to restore it to its proper place in the Afr/american communion complex: kumina-custom-myal-obeah-fetish” (Brathwaite, *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 74-75).

In the context of this last remark, the project of Brathwaite's career could be viewed as one of rehabilitating the philosophies to which he above alludes within the context of artistic production and scholarship. Creative and critical convergences in Brathwaite may therefore be regarded as epistemologically related to the convergences of artistic and spiritual practice. This also speaks to the need within Caribbean space for a rehabilitation not merely of African symbols, language,

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<sup>26</sup> See also the entry on Obeah in *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* (642-646). In particular, “Africans seem to have preceded the West European workers in psychic science and its relation to mental healing and divination, precognition, and some aspects of clairvoyance, the field of the seers (lookmen) especially. They did not bring the Ifa divination techniques from Africa with them, but they have potent herbs, roots, and drugs that are gradually taking their place in modern medical science” (643).

or mythology, but also of the more encompassing psychical architectures these tropes imply. It signals a need for creative work to critically interrogate dominant perspectives of history, culture, and society through contact with a collective past that cannot be made on a purely intellectual level. Finally, it signals a need for consciousness as to the processes of cultural adaption at work in one's space, and to take ownership of tradition so as to build upon these processes.

Indeed, Harris holds Brathwaite's general {if not specifically tidalectic} epistemology and practice up as a positive example: "Brathwaite has been affected by African images but in an evolutionary way as I understand it. Evolutionary in that it { . . . } fugitively makes for areas of overlap or gateway drama between Africa and the West Indies – *between sound and sight*. Therefore there is an oral and visual coincidence in his poems which invokes a speaking oracular voice as well as an imagistic intelligence. Because of this gateway between voice and image his icon breathes and the oracle addresses us through the elements in a manner consistent with West Indian folk consciousness" (Continuity and Discontinuity 179). In other words, Harris affirms that Brathwaite has formulated a way of thinking and expressing that uses one of the region's constituent cultural sources as a starting point to formulate a locally-appropriate and original conception of ongoing historical processes and the manner in which one might respond artistically to the conditions these processes generate.

A feat of wordplay sees Harris extend "oral" to "oracular" and then contract it to "oracle" as descriptor of the poet and his work's voice (Continuity and Discontinuity 179). Thus 'oral' and 'oracular', with their resonances of folk stories and epics and days of the past, become likened to that 'oracle' which tells of the

future in verse; orality and folk-consciousness dynamically enable Brathwaite's vision not only of one history but also the scope of present times and potential futures. This appraisal affirmatively brings Brathwaite beyond the paradigm of 'Africanism', for which he has been alternately lauded and derided, without downplaying or devaluing the African strains from which his thought draws. It also recalls Brathwaite's similar praise of Harris for the latter's commentary on the internal mechanics of possession by *Iwa*<sup>27</sup> and the perspectival shifts in artistic, cultural, and personal consciousness such experiences potentiate,

"Wilson Harris, in a remarkable passage in a public lecture, demonstrates that he too (as one would expect) is fully aware of the implosive links between Vodou and the folk literature of the New World:

All conventional memory is erased and yet in this trance of overlapping spheres of reflection a primordial or deeper function of memory begins to exercise itself. . . .

That such a drama has indeed a close bearing on the language of fiction, on the language of art, seems to me incontestable. The community the writer shares with the primordial dancer is, as it were, the complementary halves of a broken stage. . . ."

(Brathwaite, *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 106; Harris, *The Writer and Society* 51-53).

In this formulation, folk consciousness manifested as possession by *Iwa* provides involuntary access to ancestors – for they are frequently compounded – and the

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<sup>27</sup> Vodou spiritual entities, compounding {to various degrees} ideas of deity, ancestor, and archetype with elemental associative values, manifested in other Afro-Caribbean syncretic spiritualities as the *orishas*. See *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* and 646-655

oracular potential of psychical links to memory beyond personal recollection or lifespan. This kind of formulation, as demonstrated throughout the epistemology developed between Brathwaite and Harris, proves essential to understanding the renovations of psychic architecture necessary for the production of localized perceptive modes and epistemologies. It indicates the two writers' shared interest in the psychical underpinnings of identity and perception, the manner in which exterior cultural, social, and natural environments interact with interiors of personal and collective memory.

Harris's appraisal indicates a simultaneously outward and inward perspective of locality, and of poetry itself, that African ideas allow in Brathwaite's thought. In parallel tidal overlaps, Africa becomes a constant presence in the islands while the oral and visual elements of poetry cross into one another. Harris perceptively highlights as integral the overlaps generated by Brathwaite between geographic locations and between physical, visual and oral poetic spaces, and between the psychical locations of poetry/epistemology and physical geographic location. These are, according to Harris, deeply tied and integral to the cultivation of the "gateway between voice and image" that animates Brathwaite's "icon" – literally, his poetic text – and allows for its "oracle" to present itself in a localized form "through the elements" (Continuity and Discontinuity 179). This recalls Harris's idea of the music of living landscape as it relates to the theme of expedition and redefinition of psychical architectures<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> See sections above on 'Theme of Expedition: Charting Sea-Charting Ships of Civilization', and below on 'Tidalectics: Imagistic Genesis'

The manner in which Brathwaite formulates and presents his idea of tidalectics bears out Harris's observations, as a brief examination of African tropes deployed by Brathwaite earlier than – yet related to – his later tidalectic formulations begins to demonstrate. The guiding imperfectly cyclical “philosophy of history” that Brathwaite instils in tidalectics has its origins in African models of history expressed by his earlier poetry, particularly in *Masks* (Harris 180; Brathwaite). Maureen Warner-Lewis's *'E Kamau Brathwaite's Masks: Essays and Annotations'* provides in-depth exposition of African religious and cultural influences, especially “the traditional values and linguistic resources in Ghanaian life to which Brathwaite was sensitive” and “the oral and scribal literary sources used in Brathwaite's poetic representation of Akan thought and ritual” (Warner-Lewis 36). It remains the most comprehensive work examining specifically identifiable African and Afro-Caribbean syncretic tropes in Brathwaite, salvaging them from depths of intertextuality inaccessible to general readers while probing beyond these tropes' surface values and broadly unspecific signifiers of generalized Africanness. Meanwhile, Monica Schuler points out the prominence of “Akan” culture carried from Africa's ‘Gold Coast’ to the Caribbean by “peoples who originated in the area of modern Ghana” in her study of *'Akan Slave Rebellions in the British Caribbean'*, published in the inaugural issue of *Savacou*, co-edited by Brathwaite (8-9). Schuler provides a statistical breakdown indicating numbers of Akan slaves arriving in Jamaica between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, while contending that, while “statistics for other territories are not as detailed,” records indicate that a plurality of slaves in Barbados were purchased “from the Royal African Company, and most of these slaves would thus have come from the

Gold Coast" (10). Indeed, numbers of Akan were significant enough for the authorities to prohibit their farther importation (10). This indicates the veracity of Brathwaite's recourse to, and critics such as Warner-Lewis's identification within his works of, tropes and subjects that are both authentically African (as opposed to imagined) and verifiably linked to specific African cultural presences in the Caribbean.

*'E Kamau Brathwaite's Masks: Essays and Annotations'* first appeared some years before Brathwaite published writings on tidalectics. However, Warner-Lewis's observations reveal connections between Brathwaite's poetics and his understanding of African religion that inform his later tidalectic formulations. Warner-Lewis foregrounds Brathwaite's conceptualization of history as cyclical as a major theme, a perspective that "enables Brathwaite" to formulate his particularly nuanced discourse of historic processes (10-11). Warner-Lewis points out this conceptualization's longstanding presence in Brathwaite's published oeuvre, noting that "The motif of time's circularity, of life's eternal cycle, is not a new one in Brathwaite's work" (36). She traces and briefly comments on motifs of temporal circularity throughout Brathwaite's publications up to the subject of her study – from "Shadow Suite, published in Bim in 1950" through "*Rights of Passage*" and "*Islands*" – before claiming that, "In *Masks*," these motifs incorporate a "distinctly African dimension" (36). Brathwaite's ideas of cyclicity and circularity, later associated with tidalectics, are therefore partly grounded in and prefigured by the African philosophic standpoints and cultural tropes deployed in *Masks*.

Warner-Lewis refers to “the Akan sankofa bird,” an “exhortation to value tradition { . . . } symbol of the cyclic flow between present time and past,” and to “The serpent consuming its tail – symbol of eternity and the recurrence of event { . . . } of continuity and renewal of life” as tropes expressing Brathwaite’s understanding of cyclicity in African terms (17, 34, 37). The meanings ascribed to these images by Warner-Lewis – a call for conscious valuation of tradition, and a call to realize the recurrent nature of history – coupled with the cyclical visions of temporal interchange and cosmic rebirth they each infer, prove foundational to later tidalectic epistemology.

Warner-Lewis also identifies an Akan religious strain in language Brathwaite deploys to express “cyclical { . . . } recurrence” (39). When Brathwaite incants, “the year has come round / again,” his “Prelude” to *Masks* incorporates part of an Akan prayer documented by anthropologist R.S. Rattray, “Kwesi Bosomtwe, today the year has come round,” extracted and “modified” by means of the poet’s “lineation” and rephrasing of the original ethnographic material (Warner-Lewis 39, 43, 44; Brathwaite, *Masks* 4, 5; Rattray, *Ashanti*, 61). The quality of constancy that Brathwaite later ascribes to tidalectics is prefigured here by Warner-Lewis’s observation that various events and processes “occur again and again,” suggesting that “Since history is a cycle, the sequence of migrations, for instance, will never cease” (11). Ideas of linear progress are upset by how this “cyclic concept of history tends to lay stress on the rise and fall of nations, so that good times are seen as following on bad ones,” in a manner that prefigures the tidalectic nonlinear back-and-forth or “ebb&flow concept” of history “instead of ‘successful

destination/progress” suggested in ‘*ConVERSations...*’ (Warner-Lewis 12; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 226). Moreover, Warner-Lewis draws connections between Brathwaite’s concepts of temporal cyclicity and the movements of both water and people. In doing so, she arrives at a formulation very similar to tidalectics:

“For the rhythm of life is allied to the concept of the cycle – movement forwards (change) accompanied by recurrence { . . . } the symbol of cyclic change is central to Brathwaite’s thesis of history. In *Masks*, the cycle of existence is symbolised in the unceasing movement of water: river water which flows into the sea becomes rain which becomes river water again, or rain waters the earth to eventually become sap circulating through the plant (I, I 83-85) and evaporating again. Another cycle is expressed in terms of human movement: people are constantly leaving and arriving, so that the place of arrival is also the point of departure. Thus time is “coiled” like a serpent (V.IV.22), which in many traditional works of art is shown with its tail in its mouth, symbolising eternity.” 17

All of the above elements figure in the imagistic genesis and philosophic conceptualization of tidalectic epistemology, as examined below. They fulfil the evolutionary function identified by Harris as a motive for Brathwaite’s deployment of African tropes.

The cycles of water and human movement interweave, and found text blends into Brathwaite’s poetry. Even the coiled serpent appears, transformed into



Quetzalcoatl and Leviathan<sup>29</sup>. Most immediately important to tidalectics, however, is the concept of historic cyclicity and potential spatializations of time implied by Brathwaite's adoption of these African perspectival modes.

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<sup>29</sup> See sections on 'Tidalectics: Deeper Meanings, Multiple Genesis', 'Resurgence to Watershed', and 'Wordsworthian Ocean, Timehri Ocean' below

## Tidalectics: Imagistic Genesis

In *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, Brathwaite's process of naming and defining the tidalectic begins in the midst of an answer to a question about local self-representation and how language can bear historic trauma: "What is Caribbean/the Caribbean? What is this – this archipelago, these beautiful islands – yes – which are contrasted in their beauty with extreme poverty and a sense – a memory – of catastrophe What is the origin of this...this paradoxical and pluraradial situation?" (Brathwaite 29). He identifies this to be the central question and topic expounded on in his poetry. Brathwaite twice declares the image of an old woman sweeping sand to contain "the answer, the on-going answer [...] the answer to my quest/ion", and it is from this image that he extrapolates the idea of the tidalectic (29, 33).

*This is a ole yard, okay? and this old woman is sweeping, sweeping the sand of her yard away from her house. Traditional early morning old woman of Caribbean history. She's going on like this every morning, sweeping this sand - of all things! - away from. . . sand from sand, seen? . . . And I say Now what 's she doing?*

One thing to keep in mind is that, for all that it may on surface lend itself to purely oceanic geo-mythography, the tidalectic's imagistic genesis initially comes in Brathwaite's observation of the (inter)action of wind and human agency on sand – implying that it refers to points beyond the limits of oceanic space and making explicit its extension to the landmasses and human subjects contained within these spaces. This imagistic genesis occurs at a clifftop home on the North Coast of Jamaica, where Brathwaite describes watching an "old woman...sweeping, sweeping the sand of her yard away from her house. Traditional old woman of Caribbean history...going on like this, every morning, sweeping this sand – of all things! – away from... sand from sand, seen? And I say Now what's she doing?"

(30). At first, the answer to this last question appears to be wholly disempowering. The woman and her action remind Brathwaite of Walcott's early poem, 'The Testament of Poverty' and its depiction of an old woman's repetitious habits and tasks necessary for survival while at the same time futile in their capitulation to imprisonment in perpetual poverty. Within this imprisonment and lack of potential for advancement, the woman "considers futurity's arson > than her poverty's unending future" her "children sisyphing in this same tradition" (32). This perspective of the Caribbean condition as Sisyphean falls into the trap bemoaned by Harris of acquiescence to metropolitan epistemologies and ideals of progress. From this perspective, "*native consciousness* is { . . . } overlooked within deterministic projections, and criteria are invalidated which might probe into unpredictable perspectives, latent spaces we need to unravel in our age," and "vested interests { . . . } embalm the fact of exploitation," leaving the Caribbean subject "embalmed in { . . . } deprivations" (Continuity and Discontinuity 180).

Brathwaite, however, does not remain ensnared in this trap. In his process of remembering, he takes issue with the defeatist tone of this way of reading the dynamics of the local situation, and then shifts his focus back to watching the old woman. Brathwaite then notes the manner in which an effect of "the sparking light that hits the Caribbean at...early dawn" makes the old woman appear to be "walking on the water...constantly coming from where she had come from – in this case Africa – to this spot in North Coast Jamaica where she now lives," (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 32, 33). Brathwaite's description conflates the spaces of land and ocean, and by extension (or logical conclusion as to the

woman's journey) between Africa and the Caribbean; the woman simultaneously occupies her location in "this spot" while also completing her transoceanic act of water walking (33).

In line with this imagistic conflation of spaces, Brathwaite deploys the image in terms that create layers of uncertainty and further conflation by framing his vision of the woman's water walk in conditionals. His statement that it "*seems* as if her feet, which all along I *thought were* walking on sand...were *really* walking on water" not only conflates spaces but leaves open the possibility that she in fact walks on neither sand nor water, or either one, or both (33). By conflating oceanic and terrestrial space, Brathwaite asserts and extends them into one another, inviting the reader to consider their interactions and overlaps. This need not be some kind of esoteric statement. The waves on the coast literally become waves of sand, the woman sweeping sand and walking on sand and living on sand at the coastal clifftop therefore perpetually journeys over the waves, "constantly coming from where she had come from," while perpetually also brushing or sweeping those same waves back when they take the form of unwanted sand (33). Her sweeping motion answers and also emulates/echoes the action of the waves themselves.

Brathwaite then makes another intellectual leap and declares, "That was the answer to my quest/ion. The 'meaning' of the Caribbean was in that humble repetitive ritual actio(n) which this peasant woman was performing. And she was always on this journey, walking on steps built of sunlit water" (33). The role of light once again surfaces in the image of "sunlit water" that replaces the earlier image of "sand" transformed into "water" by "sparkling light", only for Brathwaite to

displace or reverse the exclusion of sand and more directly and literally conflate the spaces of water, sand, and light by describing a few pages later, “the sunlight under her feet - she walk on water and in light, the sand between her toes” (32, 33, 35).

The woman’s repeated actions of simultaneously sweeping and walking at once on sand and water and light constitute a mythological formulation by which Brathwaite represents the ongoing history and historical processes unfolding in the islands and a literal example of this history and its processes in action.

Brathwaite’s breaking of the word ‘action’ into “actio(n)” resonates with the concept of “actio in distans” or “actio ad distans,” which appropriately has applications in both physics and philosophy: the idea of one thing acting on another from afar without intermediaries, or the idea of something working “toward a distant goal” (Oxford English Disctionary; Brathwaite 33). Both shades of this concept are inherent in the woman’s constant water--and-wind-defined movement as she walks on the windblown water and sand and, even, sunlight, that have all come directly from Africa to act on her and her coast as she endlessly journeys. Brathwaite’s breaking of the word also creates a formulation in which ‘actio’, or “action” is iterated ‘n’ number of times or to ‘n’ degrees, or in which the action is applied to a certain object or value to which (n) refers. This visual formula emphasizes that the woman’s actions are of a repeated nature, while perhaps also implying subtle variation by slight degrees spread over fractal-like reiteration. In this case, the formulation “actio(n)” becomes directly evocative of oceanic wave motion as it might be represented on a mathematical level (Brathwaite 33). The woman’s repeated action and constant performance of this action in a space

composed of water, light, and sand, provide Brathwaite with the vision he needs to open up the creative authority of his own perspectives, as advocated by Harris. He is able to then use his creative authority over this vision to build from it into a new epistemology.

Brathwaite's vision of the woman walking in sand water light spurs him to begin re-asking part of his earlier series of questions using almost the same words – a rhetorical action that mimics the woman's imperfectly reiterated motions. "What is the origin of the Caribbean?" he asks, then adds to this line of inquiry evocations of the movement of the woman, which by now has become conflated with the movement of the ocean itself in its co-comparison: "Why are we so leaderless, so fragmented, so perpetually caught up with the notion of hope and still at the same time Sisyphean? Why is our psychology not dialectical – successfully dialectical – in the way that Western philosophy has assumed people's lives should be – but tidalectic, like our grandmother's – our nanna's – action, like the movement of the ocean she's walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding ('reading') from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future. . ." (34). By referring to the grandmother figure as 'nanna', Brathwaite draws out a resonance with an Akan "title of respect given to chiefs, spiritual leaders, and respected elders," and with Jamaican Maroon leader "Queen Nanny" (Brathwaite 34; Blay 336). The tidalectic concept springs from complex imagistic and intellectual cross-currents that defy easy navigation. The strategy of defining the term 'tidalectic' by using it as a word to describe something else before describing it and that other thing with another set of terms is one that Brathwaite

deploys throughout the book, providing fruitfully complicated definitions. Brathwaite's "tidalectic" at first refers to a particular "psychology" rather than explicitly situating itself in the physical world, and then in turn itself is first described by Brathwaite as "like" both the woman's repeated "action" of sweeping and/or water-walking and the "movement of the ocean she's walking on" – a simulative formula that becomes more complicated and engaged with real physical spaces of the ocean (and beyond the ocean when one considers that, as noted above, by the poet's own design "she" may "be walking on" (and may also herself be conflated with) a number of things other than the ocean in the image to which Brathwaite refers) (34). The location of the tidalectic proves multifarious and fluidly shifting between the psychological and physical, the historical and the mythical/literary, the human and the environmental, with each element of its construction referring back and forward to another across these boundaries.

Brathwaite proposes a model of history, identity, and process that blends both the literal oceanic migrations which peopled our islands and the metaphorically cyclical way in which fluctuant bodies of water transport ideas, peoples, and identities to new or repeated spaces and then pull aspects or totalities of them back away from the spaces they approached or briefly touched. In the meantime, other aspects or totalities of these things are carried inland on the waves and "the harmattan [the seasonal wind blowing out of the Sahara and across the stethoscope of the MiddlePass-age Atlantic – *trade winds* – *slave trade winds*" and their continuation/sibling wind-waves like the old woman's yard of sand (303). Other things get strafed along coasts as various forms of drift, liminal, waiting for

ebb-tide transport back out to sea or inland or farther along the coast, ripe for deliberate wrecking or elementally randomized reconfiguration. He deliberately conflates this movement with historical processes themselves, all the while building on the oceanic metaphor by using terms like “erosion” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 54). This linking of historic processes with oceanic movements and metaphors using a poetics and aesthetic sense informed by the same set of movements and metaphors acts to continually expose both the politics of the local and the interlinkages between locale and locality, region and global context. In the global context of post/neocolonial contemporaneity, Brathwaite’s oceanic metaphors allow for a local perspective and iconography that, while specific to his region, accounts for – in fact, remains always somewhat fixed upon – vectors of colonial dominance over this region and its further linkages with the wider world. Conflation of oceanic movement with history is proven by oceanic theme, metaphor, and perspective (that is, a constant return of attention to the sea’s role) to be on some levels not in fact conflation at all but rather literal synonymization or inseparable combination.

In doing so, Brathwaite attempts to find a means of representing the “kinesis” of the Caribbean (37). He also seeks to counter plus complicate what he views as a problematically still-popular narrative presented in the region’s literature which forms a conception of its particular “cosmos as coming out of a plantation; a migration out of a plantation and moving from countryside into the city and soon/later metropole [...] a perpetual tide of migration – a nigration in many cases, from ‘native’ to Other,” by creating a new cosmology (or at least new narrative of



its origination) (37, 37-38). In *'Barabajan Poems'* Brathwaite similarly laments that "To get out, get away, escape has been so much the theme of much Caribbean writing in English . . . that it wd seem that we really believed that we cd only become 'real writers' abroad – rather than 'aboard'- the Caribbean," (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 60-61).

Brathwaite's assertions give pause for reconsideration. They could read as a broad critique of the literature and reality of emigration, but it should be noted that Brathwaite does not criticise the act of plantation-city-overseas emigration itself, or the representation of this vector in literature, so much as call for refocusing in light of its overuse's limitation of perspective and self-perspective. However, this call for refocusing proves problematic if read as advocating refocusing to exclude these vectors – especially to look away from the plantation. By stressing the need to look beyond the plantation, Brathwaite problematically appears to erase or devalue the histories of more recent immigrants to the Caribbean, for whom the plantation-to-city narrative may be less historically distant. This ignores hundreds of thousands of "Chinese" and "East Indians" who arrived in the Caribbean from the at least the early nineteenth century onward, formed "the mainstay of the sugar industry in Cuba, Trinidad, and Guiana," and established communities throughout the region<sup>30</sup>, partially enumerated by historian Franklin W. Knight in his historical study *'The Caribbean'* (186-187). In doing so, Brathwaite misses the opportunity to tidalectically examine these population inflows – which would entail revising the vectors he finds problematic.

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<sup>30</sup> Knight also lists a number of other immigrant groups from Asia, Europe, and Africa – including Madeiran, German, and Japanese migrants.

The perilous passage over water to arrival at hard plantation labour, the “draconian” laws governing movement, and deliberate isolation of, in particular, South Asian free labourers, constitute a recent and bloody history that Brathwaite appears to erase from his theorizations of Caribbean identity (Gibson, *Empire’s Crossroads* 212-220, Knight 184-189). Brathwaite’s book on creolisation, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, temporally excludes the majority of East Indians and others who arrived in the Caribbean post-emancipation. In a parenthetical note justifying this exclusion in terms other than this work’s historic focus, Brathwaite declares, “(The ‘East Indian’ problem, since it introduces new complexities, and does not (yet) significantly relate to Jamaica, will not be unrolled here.)” (310). This erasure repeats itself throughout Brathwaite’s works. Brathwaite’s call in *ConVERSations..* to focus away from the plantation therefore plays into a pattern of erasure, even though tidalectic epistemology and methodologies could prove instructive in understanding and documenting the histories of these groups, their contributions to shared aspects of Caribbean identity, and their cultural role in the development of local artistic and intellectual perspectival standpoints. Viranjini Munasinghe asserts that “Brathwaite’s astute remarks on creolization take on a different veneer in his discussion of East Indians,” and critiques Brathwaite’s brand of creolization as “a curious mix of ideology { . . . } and theoretical abstraction,” that excludes East Indians from narratives of creole Caribbean culture (*Theorizing World Culture through the New World: East Indians and Creolization* 556). Munasinghe points out the absence of East Indians from Brathwaite’s earlier theories of creolisation, and critiques the mechanics of

creolisation in Brathwaite's "Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean" as inaccurate and exclusivist:

"Brathwaite does situate East Indians vis-a-vis creolization, but, significantly, the entry of East Indians after emancipation, in his view, changes the trajectory of Creole society into a plural one. { . . . } That Brathwaite, a staunch proponent of the creolization model should associate the advent of plural society with the arrival of East Indians is revealing { . . . } why should the centre of gravity have shifted from creolization to fragmentation with the entry of East Indians? { . . . } During the colonial period, he argues { . . . } the East Indian looked to India whereas the Afro-Caribbean looked to Europe, thereby becoming an Afro-Saxon. { . . . } East Indians' orientation toward India only reinscribes their exclusiveness { . . . } East Indians are not a part of the processes of interculturalisation { . . . } in contrast, it is the Afro-Saxon who epitomizes interculturalisation and emerges as the cultural innovator par excellence. If the dialectic between acculturation and interculturalisation is what produces the cultural ambivalence that attests to the creative capacity to indigenize, then Brathwaite's refusal to encompass East Indians within the interculturalisation process not only strips this group of its potential for creative generation of indigenous forms but also positions it outside creolization proper" (555-556)

Although some historical justifications for Brathwaite's distinction of nuances between the form and degree of indigenization undergone by African and East

Indian Caribbean groups do exist, such as the later arrival of East Indians and their deliberate isolation by the authorities, Munasinghe points out that this distinction itself ultimately rests upon assumption rather than observation – which points towards East Indian creolization. In *'Race, Tradition, and the Construction of the Caribbean Aesthetic'*, Belinda Edmondson similarly critiques Brathwaite's pronouncements on East Indian creolization in light of his own and the larger field of Caribbean scholarship's wider racial politics, noting a degree of self-conscious contradiction in his "critique" of "black nationalist" writers and "praise" for V.S. Naipaul's *'A House for Mr. Biswas'* (117).

Readings of Brathwaite's views on East Indian indigenization as problematically biased and exclusivist jar with the inclusive spirit of tidalectic epistemology – but his implied rejection of the plantation-to-city narrative does seem to further his elisions. Without a doubt, the lack of exploration of Asian and more specifically East Indian cultural tropes in Brathwaite's tidalectic epistemological soundings remains problematic. However, the idea tidalectics does not perfectly mirror Brathwaite's idea of creolization. Moreover, unlike in the process of creolization discussed above, Brathwaite does not explicitly exclude any Caribbean ethnicity from tidalectic epistemology. The potential for tidalectic readings of South Asian histories and augmentation of tidalectic epistemology via South Asian cultural and philosophic standpoints remains open. Ideas of tidalectic multivalence and cyclicity allow for the "perpetual tide" of movement Brathwaite deemphasises to exist, only not in isolation from a view that encompasses numerous other tidal flows (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 37-38). As such,

one could read Brathwaite's pronouncement not as a call for the erasure of a dynamic that remains relevant for a large sector of the Caribbean, so much as a call for a step back to examine the wider system of movements at work. Paradoxically, this allows for a perspective encompassing tidalectic analysis of the wider migrations and cultural transformations undergone by the groups Brathwaite deemphasizes or excludes - not only East Indian Caribbean peoples, but also Afro Caribbean emigrants within the Caribbean and the wider world. It should be recalled that Brathwaite makes his statement in opposition to the devaluation of the local and canonization of movement away from locality as vector of Caribbean progress. Although Brathwaite acknowledges the "very real sense" in which a lack of opportunities forces writers, artists, and scholars to leave the islands, he maintains the problematic nature of the standpoints embedded in this dynamic or vector of movement's overrepresentation (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 60-61). By contrast, Brathwaite's tidalectic conceptualizations privilege an understanding of the region's origins and ongoing history in terms of multiply-vectored tidal forces, rather than a cosmological chart mapping exits and exiles. As such, tidalectic epistemology need not exclude any group – ethnic or regional – whose vectors of motion and cultural dissemination cross Caribbean space and beyond.

A potential corrective to Brathwaite's omissions of both plantation narratives and South Asians, situated within a broadly-focused epistemology centred on oceanic vectors of movement and cultural transformation, may be found in Brinda J Mehta's poetics of the "*kala pani*" – the black waters of passage

from South Asia to the Caribbean – developed in her book, *‘Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani’*,

“The *kala pani* is a discourse of rupture that initiates transgressive boundary crossings through creative (self-)assertions in literary production. *Kala pani* innovations endorse the act of naming a culturally specific woman-centred Indo-Caribbean experience through the discursive claiming of literary and cultural space. The spatial transgressions by early immigrant women provided later generations of Indo-Caribbean women writers with the necessary point of motivation to initiate their own literary transgressions through orality and the written word as powerful media of self-representation. The *kala pani* supplied them with the necessary language and framework of reference to position Indo-Caribbean female subjectivity as an autonomous self-reflecting Caribbean experience by equating writing and pre-discursive modes of communication with a public declaration of one’s identity and right to claim creative agency” (4-5).

Mehta develops this idea further in subsequent deployments, crafting a perspectival mode aligned with multivalent vectors of oceanic transformation, psychical and physical, and explicitly engaged with underrepresented narratives.

In *Engendering History: A Poetics of the Kala Pani in Ramabai Espinet’s The Swinging Bridge*, Mehta simultaneously locates *kala pani* poetics within Espinet’s “feminist epistemology of cane” { . . . } as an important “reading of cane,” and locates this epistemology of cane within *kala pani* poetics, describing cane’s

deployment in the work considered as “an enduring *kala pani* poetics that exposes the imperialist project of Indian indenture” (Mehta 21-36, 21; Ramabai Espinet, “The Absent Voice: Unearthing the Female Epistemology of Cane”). This explicitly brings the plantation into the oceanic vectors of the *kala pani* in a similar blending of terrestrial and oceanic space to that developed in tidalectic epistemology.

Another correlation to tidalectic epistemology in the *kala pani* poetics developed by Mehta in light of Espinet is the upsetting of linear perspectives as deployed by master narratives in favour of “nonlinear liminality” partially inspired by Édouard Glissant (24). The link to Glissant creates a multivalent link to Brathwaite via the former’s usage of “The unity is submarine”<sup>31</sup> as an epigraph for his *Poetics of Relation*<sup>32</sup>, and via Brathwaite and Mackey’s pre- *ConVERSations...* interview<sup>33</sup> in which they discuss Glissant’s comments on Brathwaite in *Caribbean Discourse*<sup>34</sup>. In addition to nonlinearity, Mehta specifies this liminality as female, Indo-Caribbean, and generative of overlap between physical and psychological interstices:

“As a female-authored narrative created by the tensions and ambiguities inherent in a migrating historicity of cane, the *kala pani* poetics critically

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<sup>31</sup> See Brathwaite’s *Caribbean Man in Space and Time* in *Savacou* 11/12 (1975).

<sup>32</sup> See Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* translated by Betsy Wing (1997).

<sup>33</sup> See Mackey’s *An Interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite* from Mackey’s magazine *Hambone*, issue 9 (1991), reprinted in Stewart Brown’s *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite* (Stewart Brown 13-32).

<sup>34</sup> See Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse* translated by J. Michael Dash (1989).

For a fuller commentary on Brathwaite and Glissant, see Kelly Baker Josephs’ *Versions of X/Self: Kamau Brathwaite’s Caribbean Discourse* (Anthurium vol.1 iss.1, 2003). This analysis proves useful, but problematically describes Brathwaite’s strategies of repetition, nation language, and Sycorax video style in terms of Glissant’s idea of “opacity” (Anthurium vol.1 iss.1, 2003). This leads to some erroneous conclusions - such as that, because nation language “has lost its shock value { . . . } In order to avoid losing any opacity gained with “nation language,” Brathwaite adds the Sycorax video style as a new layer, an additional veil” (Anthurium vol.1 iss.1, 2003). The purpose of repetition, nation language and Sycorax video style is not ‘opacity’; these are concepts of emergence and revelation rather than veiling. Shock value does not appear to be a primary motive. This misses their greater complexities in service to wedding Brathwaite too closely to Glissant

evaluates prior disavowals of Indo-Caribbean female subjectivity by locating these interstitial spaces of self-inscription within the expansiveness of “the black waters that lie between India and the Caribbean” (4)<sup>35</sup>. As a fragmented genealogy, the *kala pani* engenders a process of “coming into being” amid spatial dislocations.” (24-25)

The feminist slant of the epistemology developed here works as a corrective to tidalectic epistemology’s treatment of gender, while maintaining yet refocusing a similar trope of historic migration represented by the movement of women. As “a gendered discourse of exilic beginnings that simultaneously reclaims and contests otherness by highlighting the traditional invisibility of female historical subjectivity in androcentric colonial and nationalist narratives,” the *kala pani* poetics espoused here exhibits characteristics of ongoing psychological tidalectic ebb&flow and overlap between reclamation and contestation, and ongoing physical tidalectic back-and-forth movements between points of migration (Mehta 24). Both of these tidalectic vectors complicate without rejecting the plantation-city-metropole vectors Brathwaite seeks to de-emphasize in his formulation of tidalectics. The appropriateness of ideas in *kala pani* poetics as correctives to potential spatial, historical, gender, and racial elisions in tidalectic epistemology as proposed by Brathwaite therefore proves not merely geographically cosmetic but epistemologically appropriate with regard to ideas of time, space, and perception.

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<sup>35</sup> Mehta quotes from her own book, *Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani*



While calling for a perceptual rebalancing or broadening of the human historical vectors observed, tidalectics also spatializes understanding of these vectors in a manner that favors extrahuman agency over human perception. Tidalectic epistemology replaces the empty fixed axes and white spaces acquiescent to the straight vectors of a graphing project like Slemon's with the real dynamics of shifting coast/land and a kinetic oceanic space creating its own vectors of motion while modulating others. Brathwaite's formulation rebalances concepts of human agency over passive or pacified nature, and deemphasizes traditionally anthropocentric tendencies in philosophies of historical and cultural phenomenology.

The idea of nature's agency as overlooked yet epistemologically necessary for the consideration of locally-conscious perspectival modes appears in Harris's discourse on *'The Music of Living Landscapes'*. Here Harris asserts that, although "for a long time, landscapes and riverscapes have been perceived as passive {...} as areas to be manipulated," this popular perception proves false (40). Harris contends that nature holds both "resonance" and potentially dangerous agency, for "Nature is not passive. Nature erupts into orchestras of Nemesis" (40, 43). Harris points out the unpredictability and potential danger of a nature that might at any minute "erupt", and also personifies nature/nature's eruptions somewhat via the capitalized word "Nemesis". To use the lowercase form of the word 'nemesis' alone adds emotional resonance to nature's eruptions. To use the word's capitalized form draws associations with the mythological Nemesis, daughter of the ocean and bearer of misfortune. This is potentially a much more malevolent construal of

nature and its potential for outburst or eruption than a non-personified assertion of nature's agency via unemotive or unnamed (but vaguely emblemized) elemental force would allow.

Nature possesses not just resonance and agency, but also a kind of sentience and named emotive charge personified in a manner evocative of angrily storming ocean. This sentient emotive charge "erupts into orchestras," the perils and destructive force of maelstrom played as music by and on the natural landscape (Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 43). But if nature for Harris possesses great destructive potential, intimacy between human and nature bears potential for opening up human perception. Nature "*knows* our peril for we are in nature, of nature's chorus in response to hurricane or waterfall," and if we become conscious of our place in nature we will find better means of singing our responses and honing our perspectives in relation to these natural forces (43). Perspectival shift occurs when "Nature arouses us to speculate on orchestrations of inner eye beyond every void of the senses, beyond every grave of the senses," meaning that an intimate relationship with landscape and nature fosters the imaginative formulation of epistemological concepts derived from this intimacy with the music and power of living landscape (43).

The music of living landscapes therefore partly facilitates the perceptual shifts described in *Benito Cereno*, as facilitated by "orchestration of feelings { . . . } an inner and outer chorus which begins to pick up echoes, voices, impulses { . . . } deeper than the prisoner's age (as if sprung from the forgotten past) and deeper than the prisoner's time (as if in touch with a tide running into the future)" (Harris,

Benito Cereno 44).<sup>36</sup> The compounding of these two ideas resonates with the Haitian Vodou concept of “egregore”, in which “deep emotional states { . . . } experienced repeated by a group of individuals at a specific locale” instil in this location “a spiritual power that lingers for anyone to experience” (Scheu 200-201). This also resonates with the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson’s concept of the oversoul, “a divine spiritual unity of things” (Scheu 200-201).<sup>37</sup> These resonances are worth pointing out, in that they signal the persistence in two of the Americas’ major cultural forces similar, if not perfectly congruent, overlaps between landscape and collective consciousness. In the case of Brathwaite’s tidalectic, formulated within an epistemology that seeks conscious reconnection to African philosophy in the context of the Americas, the sea thus becomes nexus of culture, ideology, and identity, in which new identities, ideologies, and cultures can form. The sea also becomes enactor of a repeating or back-and-forth motion via imperfectly cyclic ebb&flow that both literally brings these things to and from the islands and metaphorically represents the repeated resurfacing of historical, cultural, and ideological tropes within the islands.

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<sup>36</sup> See discourse on Harris’s ‘theme of expedition’, developed in the papers ‘*Fossil and Psyche*’ and ‘*Benito Cereno*’, as discoursed on in the section above entitled ‘Theme of Expedition: Sea-Charting Ships of Civilization’

<sup>37</sup> See Patricia Scheu’s ‘*Oversouls and Egregores in Vodou*’ in ‘*Vodou in the Haitian Experience: a Black Atlantic Perspective* (193-208)

### Sounding the Tidalectic

Before going any further in to Brathwaite's tidalectic extrapolations presented in *'ConVERsations...'* and elsewhere or moving on to look at how others have understood and worked with the tidalectic, a responsible artist/scholar must ask more thoroughly: what does 'tidalectic' mean? Specifically, what does it mean to Brathwaite? While the manner in which Brathwaite metaphorizes and leaves the tidalectic somewhat open-ended in definition and potential application is part of its attraction, I believe that in order to build on it or look at what anyone else has derived from the idea one must first attempt to tease out the meanings that Brathwaite himself instils in the concept. A comprehensive investigation of tidalectics must note that this is not the beginning of Brathwaite's exercises in oceanic metaphorization, and that as defined in *'Conversations...'* the concept of the tidalectic refers explicitly back to many of his own earlier works as well as to the works of others.

A prehistory of the concept can be found in Brathwaite's earlier transcribed lecture, *'History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry'*, a volume expounding on Brathwaite's famous theory of nation language. Along with other acts of oceanic metaphorization deployed in *'History...'* which I will return to later, this volume includes the term "tidal" in its final section when Brathwaite closes out his discourse on the parameters of nation language with a simultaneously inclusive and exclusive gesture (49). Brathwaite describes the usage of nation language in Caribbean literature as having "become not the exception but almost the rule, except that because of its organic, its person-

centred, fluid/tidal rather than ideal/structured nature, that word wouldn't really be appropriate in this context," (49). On surface this simply means that in the time between "carifesta 76" when *'History...'* was first conceived and presented" and late 1983 when Brathwaite finished reworking its 1979 Harvard transcription into the form in which it was published, the primacy of the voice in contemporary poetry had brought nation language to the forefront while demonstrating its resistance to codification both by and of itself (49).

However, the charged meanings inherent in Brathwaite's dichotomy of "fluid/tidal rather than ideal/structured" are multiflorous and point to more than simply a phenomenon that does not lend itself to becoming a "rule" (Brathwaite 49). "Fluid[']s]" opposition to "ideal" conflates/compounds literal and metaphoric, nounal and verbal meanings of a "fluid" – as denotive of openness to or constant engagement in a state of mutability, as a body constituted of free moving "particles" in the manner of a gas or liquid, as an adverb describing movement or also a degree of fluency or comfort with expressing oneself by means of a particular language, mode of discourse, or speech in a manner that is not halting or laboured (Brathwaite 49; *Oxford English Dictionary*). These are opposed to compounded meanings of the "ideal" – the archetypical, the "perfect" and fixed, the "idea" centred, the "solid", the "standard", that which is best (*Oxford English Dictionary*). "Tidal[']s]" opposition to "structured" opposes that which literally pertains to tides and elemental forces while also meaning the literal and adjectivally metaphoric motions of tidal ebb and flow and such motions' associated states of periodicity, intermittency, alternation, and variability with that which literally refers to

structures and the “constructed” rather than elemental, the fixed and “composed”, the “distinct” and discrete, the “organized” and “planned”, the codified and codifiable (Brathwaite 49; *Oxford English Dictionary*). Brathwaite’s compounding of meanings into “fluid/tidal” therefore makes the terms work both as descriptors of the phenomenon Brathwaite calls nation language and as a coda for his personal aesthetic preferences for the delivery of nation language in a natural and fluid manner, a topic that he spends quite some time discussing in his comparisons and critiques of various poets’ usages of dialect (49).

The other terms deployed by Brathwaite to describe nation language relate to and qualify the idea of the “tidal”, bring the word’s deployment in ‘*History...*’ closer to its later tidalectic manifestation (49). Before using the word ‘tidal’ Brathwaite deploys oceanic language that functions in similarly compounded literal and metaphoric terms. In the first and second chapters, the word “submerged” is deployed both to describe nation language as “the submerged, surrealist experienced sensibility....coming to the surface...the submerged area of [a] dialect which is more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean” and to describe the “submerged language that the slaves had brought” to the islands which would then go on to influence and change dominant linguistic forms in spite of and because of their “submergence” (7, 13). The “coming to the surface” of nation language could be viewed as Brathwaite’s first iteration of a tidalectic event in Caribbean poetics, and illustrative of the manner in which nation language is tidal in that it rises up from and surfaces within a language (7). A more direct metaphoric linkage of nation language to ocean comes when Brathwaite describes

it as “often...an English which is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun<sup>38</sup> or the wind or a wave,” which despite its multiplicity of terms appears to grasp for some form of repetitive yet imperfectly regular sound-system (13). Moreover, the context of Brathwaite’s discursive emphasis on the idea of submerged language resurfacing privileges ocean as extrahuman modulator of human language.

Brathwaite’s terms “organic” and “person-centred” further qualify and add to the meanings inherent in the heavily-loaded “tidal” by bringing dimensions of physicality and historical-geographic specificity into play (49). Nation language develops in an “organic” manner in that it develops from a milieu of constituent languages and creoles without the superimposition of strict institutionally guarded and maintained regulators; a dictionary of Caribbean English albeit noted for its significance, or any other variety of dictionary, would fail to encompass or regulate or wholly represent its forms; the development of nation language occurs in the realm of the physical rather than the realm of ideas, echoing Brathwaite’s dichotomic classification of nation language as non-ideal (49). Nation language also individuates itself from island to island, region to region, and person to person according to the particular articulation of nation language’s constituent elements within that person’s individual and communal ways of speaking, making it “person-centred” (49). These twin concepts help Brathwaite’s description of nation language as tidal to jump from the world of linguistic abstractions describing nation language itself to the physical milieu of languages brought together into a space of tidal

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<sup>38</sup> See section on Submergence and Drowning

convergence literally described as the space within which nation language develops. As such the term 'tidal' itself functions tidally.

Coupled with the notions of organic development and of person-centeredness, the idea that nation language is 'tidal' upsets any type view that takes nation language as a term referring to any fixed linguistic form or attempt to represent any singular identifiable dialect<sup>39</sup>. It also points to Brathwaite's idea behind the meaning of 'tidal' in the context of literature and culture: source and state of differentiation and flux, descriptor of regulated irregularity and agent responsible for shaping that which it describes<sup>40</sup>. Both the fluid and unstructured character of nation language as described above, and the origination of its structural irrigidity in the literal dispersion and re-dispersion of constituent languages and creoles over the region in multiple combinations, result in varying personal/local iterations of nation language. These iterations are not just metaphorically fluid/tidal in their mutability and differential range but also doubly literally tidal in their formation and metaphorically tidal in a manner that takes into account flows and fluxes of meaning, both past and ongoing, in their interactions/contacts between languages and between areas. The idea of nation language as 'tidal' in *'History...'* therefore simultaneously describes its literal formation from a physically and metaphorically tidal gathering of linguistic forms

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<sup>39</sup> Especially in light of Brathwaite's usage of Anthony McNeill's 'dialect' free, if still conversational, 'Catherine Letter' as his closing example (Brathwaite 50). *'The Catherine Letter'* is a mixed form – letter/poem – and it exemplifies the tidal nature of language and poetics that KB advocates throughout his discourses. Brathwaite is not trying to define McNeill's poem as a representation of any accent or patois, but asserting that more avant-garde poetics and voices can be considered nation language if executed correctly.

<sup>40</sup> In describing and expounding upon an idea of language as tidal, Brathwaite pre-empts a later work by eminent British linguist David Crystal 'Swimming with the tide in a sea of language change', which makes a similar point about linguistic fluidity while deploying an oceanic metaphor worthy of KB's more explicitly tidalectic utterances (Crystal).



across island spaces and points to tidal forces as the generative energy bringing together and causing these forms to develop (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 49).

Brathwaite's act of finding a tidal language to speak from and to describe – and in some ways give voice to – his space resonates with Harris's earlier-mentioned placement of humans within "nature's chorus in response to hurricane or waterfall," in that it seeks to make a perspectival alignment between human voice, poetic voice, and the voice of local environment similar to that for which Harris advocates (Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 43). These resonant currents running between Brathwaite's idea of nation language and Harris's discourse in *'The Music of Living Landscapes'* deepen oceanographically when Brathwaite calls for "perceptual models" and "syllabic intelligence" able to both voice the "roar" and describe "the force of the hurricanes" and "hurricane" of Atlantic gyre (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 8, 10). Nation language comes infused with something similar to what Harris would term local landscape's music; like nation language itself the language and music of the "chorus" singing in Brathwaite's "hurricane" inflected (and inflicted) landscape is "tidal" (Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 43; Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 10, 49). In *'Barabajan Poems'*, Brathwaite describes his desire for such perceptual modes autobiographically while making similar linkages between the music or language of landscape, the language in which he speaks and writes, and tidalectic wave movement:

“growing up here and dreaming of how to write someth

ing that wd catch the gleam the word of water clink & pebble where

th

(e) wave folds on/to the sand, the fans of sunlight in the water, its

var-

ious colours & histories, coralline grains settling/ xploding// fish crab

sails empty shells whorls worlds of sea-floor sea-flour sea-flower sea-

moss moses boats deeper more morose colours holiest grails . how

ev-

vathing flows underwater & slowly un/curls this island my island &

the other other islands there just beyond horizon/ ships fishermen

ga

ulin frigatebirds passing . I see them I feel how they curve away into

their own space(s) their own shape(s) out of their own histories . the

waves comin in/ comin in/ tidelect tidelect tidelectic con/nect/ing th-

mTime w/ their Clocks/ Sound w/ their Silence their Quiet/ And h-

ow to write this to write this to write thisWhat trigger of wonder

What wonder of song?” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 114) .

As the speaker yearns for a language more attuned to the “word of water” – to the language, music and sounds of his local landscape as described by Harris – his speech becomes both fluid and tidal in the sense in which Nation Language in *‘History of the Voice’* might be deemed “fluid/tidal” (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 49; Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 114). Line breaks create a choppy, wave-mediated discursal delivery splitting words and thoughts and visually representing tidal word spilling over line. Words themselves are inexactlly reiterated as they drift or wash into one another via assonance, consonance, visual resemblance between words, or the replacement of a few letters: “sails” to “shells”, “word” to “whorls” to “worlds”, and the current of long e and variously stressed o sounds that draws through the permutations of “sea-floor sea-flour sea-flower sea-moss moses boats deeper more morose” (114). Besides its variant spelling of tidalectic, this meditation and the text that follows also provide an intimate psychological portrait of the artist who realizes what he wishes to accomplish – who skips stones and desires to recount a genesis in which “God set out to create the islands” and “skidded a duck-and-drakes-stone” – without knowing precisely how, his recognition of tidalectic motion and the inherent sameness of “pebble & sand” and “underwater bone of the world” being a start but not sufficient in of itself for building a song or re-enacting a genesis (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 116, 117, 118). Brathwaite contends, as in *‘History...’*, “that like the hurricane, our seas don’t usually speak in pentameters,” channelling via paraphrase the earlier work’s contention with the insufficient tools provided by traditional English prosody for the representation of island environment and its attendant psychologies

(Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 115). The song Brathwaite seeks must suit the sea's song as well as its appearance, "the gleam the word of water" which is "polytone & complex . . . clinked with light and perhaps dactyl," sea image and sea song inextricably linked to each other and to the land/seascapes they touch and describe (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 114). Brathwaite's decides that "the kaiso" is the music that accompanies the islands' genesis because of its "on-rolling syncopation, the rhythmic tidalectics: and" because "it was the islands' own sound, not taken or borrowed from no where else or if borrowed so creatively it becomes our own," (119). His description of how he comes to hear the kaiso in the island leaves open the possibility that Brathwaite interprets natural oceanic sounds associated with tidal motion as a kaiso, rather than closing off the possibility that other forms of music might suffice (which indeed would not be congruous with Brathwaite's own appreciation for and frequent professions of his indebtedness to Jazz) (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 119). Beyond Brathwaite's relationship with music, the way this passage implies that that which is "tidalectic" and locally distinct might be composed of something "borrowed so creatively" that it becomes original links to Harris's ideas about appropriation and the music of living landscapes (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 119). This is precisely what allows Brathwaite to later refer back to 'History of the Voice in 'ConVersations...', linking nation language and the oral tradition to tidalectics' genesis-image of the woman walking on water. Brathwaite makes this link by declaring that the former (nation language) is a necessary tool or conditional presence for his development of the latter (the woman whose water-walking defines tidalectics) (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 213-220). This line of thinking recalls Harris's insistence on mastery of local

perspective, and his play between “oral”, “oracular”, and “oracle” as keys to poetic and epistemological power in his appraisal of Brathwaite’s work (Continuity and Discontinuity 179). To this end, Brathwaite explains:

“In my  
 case I know that I wi  
 ll not have discover  
 what I discover about  
 Africa – and how to  
 write about it – make  
 that certain SOUNN  
 about that nanna walk  
 ing on the water –  
 { . . . }  
 wi  
 thout this OT CHOICE  
 without this OT VOICE  
 – this native – natio

(n)-language – nation

language culture – vo

ice,”

a formulation that somewhat turns on its head the one laid out in ‘*History...*’ in that in order to see and build a representation of the tidal forces at work creating nation language one must describe and build that representation using nation language: a tidalectic paradigm washing back-and-forth between books, ideas and planes of physicality, a paradigm in which real-world tidalectic motion creates nation language and in which nation language functions in a metaphorically tidalectic manner while providing the perceptual framework necessary for the recognition and definition of tidalectic motion (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 49; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 219-221).

Brathwaite then resurrects the term ‘tidal’ and refers back to ‘*History...*’ once again by claiming that “the gap, the tidal differences between,” the oral and non-oral traditions of literature, “are not so crucial drake-ness anymore,” implying that – like nation language – the idea of what constitutes a literature or literary subgenre also functions tidally, with literary forms and traditions washing into one another (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 222-223). Brathwaite’s tidalectic play with nation language and his linking of it with the origination of tidalectics

creates continuity between his current (at that time of *ConVERSations...*) and past creative and critical work, despite talk of a “new pathway” which itself may not have survived multiple personal tragedies – in short, talk of intellectual and artistic discontinuity (24). Tidalectic is not, despite its sounding play, equitable to tidal dialect – rather, the tidal nature of nation language points to its tidalectic formation. The tidalectic and nation language remain intertwined constants as Brathwaite charts his poetic movement from writing to create/define the Caribbean space, to populating it and commemorating ancestors, to writing more personally-tinged pieces; with both concepts shaping the form of this development.

### Tidalectics: Deeper Definitions, Multiple Geneses

After its mythic genesis in *ConVERSations...*, a second explicitly stated definition of tidalectics appears 192 pages after its first mention (Brathwaite 226). Its formulation as a bracketed note interrupting a block of text explicitly demarked as Brathwaite speaking by a play or interview-script style character name and colon, “KB:”, casts doubt on whether or not it was written by Brathwaite as opposed to Mackey (Brathwaite 226). This uncertainty is heightened because the note adopts a third person perspective to gloss Brathwaite’s

“tidalectic [KB’s ‘natural’ discursive alternative (alter/nativ (e)) to the Hegelian dialectic: instead of an ‘inevitable’, ‘Euromissilic’ tripartite *synthesis*, KB posits a tidal ebb&flow concept instead of ‘successful destination/progr ess’ for colonial ‘circle’ cultures, where equilibrium’, as in the **X/Self** discussion above, is the ideal; the dialectical (materialism) model setting up irresponsible xpec tations in ‘underdeveloping’ colonial people,” (Brathwaite 226).

Although the “mechanics of this document” laid out initially indicate that “all material within square brackets [...] is KB’s post PoetsHouse + some huge new sections, many of which are mark in boxes or w/line or liners down the side or slides tho not always!” it remains difficult not to ascribe this definition to a voice



other than Brathwaite's and to read it as Mackey's interpretation and extrapolation on the meaning of "tidalectic" (15, 226). However, this different perspective is not named as Mackey. This recurs in some manner as a norm throughout the book whenever Mackey speaks. If one considers that the methodology laid out in "mechanics of this document" ends with, "KB undertakes the palimpsest & eventual return to Chris for precious process publication," with Brathwaite editing and finishing the final copy of his and Mackey's discourse into something of his own, it follows that nothing should remain in the volume other than that which Brathwaite wishes to keep and claim, and it further follows that no matter who speaks in the text of '*ConVERSations...*' it is Brathwaite who shapes and directs their discourse (15). A further note at the end of the book lists Brathwaite's revisions by month, year, and location, with the final revision undertaken in "CowPastor Jan 99" (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 314). By either writing or editing this second definition to his approval, Brathwaite extends the tidalectic to the realm of philosophic epistemology and opens the possibility of a tidalectic formulation constructed in succinct opposition to European dialectic tradition.

However, for all that it complexly refutes "the Hegelian dialectic" view of history and "the dialectical (materialism) model" – which due to the brackets may or may not refer to 'dialectical materialism' or to the 'dialectical' as 'materialism' – that to which the second definition refers contains little explicit argument about the concept of dialectics (226). Definition of tidalectics in opposition to "tripartite *synthesis*" most closely resembles Brathwaite's more sustained discourse on tidalectics and dialectics in a piece entitled 'New Gods of the Middle Passages'

which uses similar language to describe tidalectics in opposition to concepts of “synthesis” as realizable via a “tripartite” natured dialectics (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 226; Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 45-50).

‘*New Gods of the Middle Passages*’ was published a year after ‘*ConVERSations...*’ but based on “The 1995 Sir Philip Sherlock Celebration Lecture Reading {...} UWI, Mona, 24 feb {sic} 1995” and then published in *Caribbean Quarterly* after “*CowPastor & NewYork millennium november 2000 revision,*” which places its time of composition and compositional methods close to those of ‘*ConVERSations...*’ (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 12). In this piece, Brathwaite speaks about how the “old’ middlepassage is being over-layered by a second ‘postmodern’ middlepassage and we are living in the interweave & haunting of these two & twin xperiences. And we’ve tried to break out of it thru *synthesis* when we should be < breakin out of it thru acceptance, thru what Keats celebrated as negative capability, Gandhi as *satya & ahisma*, Christ as love, spiritual subsistence & community; all breathing into & w/ this movement of the ocean” (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 43-44). This call for something resembling negative capability that incorporates ideals of fellowship and community sees its fruition in Brathwaite’s formulation of tidalectic epistemology, and affirms the importance of collaborative methodologies.

The idea that the ostensibly historic Middle Passage on some level continues to exist while also “over-layered” with a new iteration of itself implicitly challenges dialectic ideas of progress and traces the legacies of historic trauma

(Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 43). Brathwaite significantly answers dialectical thought and its expectations of synthesis with a response totally outside of dialectics, floated on oceanic mystery and divine love. This constitutes not so much an opposition to dialectics as an attempt at disengagement from dialectics and engagement with tidalectic perspectives. Brathwaite then explains his linking of old and new middle passage – of slave trade and, among other things, of refugee journey - as overlapping tidalectically. “So” he says to the audience, “you begin see what happenin to this talk: the repetition the overlapping of xperiences the concept at last of what I call tidalectics” (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 45). While the idea noted above of a historic Middle Passage “over-layered” by a new iteration of itself implicitly challenges dialectics, here “the repetition the overlapping” tied explicitly to “tidalectics” sets up the tidalectic as a key driver of Brathwaite’s alternative to dialectic models (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 43, 45).

Overlapping suggests a continuous and continuously modulating tidal flow between and within ideas and experiences, which accounts for greater nuance and sustained contradiction within tidalectic than orthodox dialectic models. Indeed, he asserts that “tidalectics {...} plays an increasingly important part in how I perceive of my metaphors” and goes on to contrast it with “dialectics...in which we assume these will always be a synthesis: the victorious leviathan” (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 45, 46). Constant overlap generated as part of tidalectic back-and-forth movements between and within ideas and experiences could be read as either never generating a synthesis or as deemphasizing the noul character of

synthesis in favour of the word's verbal traits, implying ongoing process without a fixed result.

It is notable that Brathwaite names the problematic "synthesis" assumed by dialectic thought "leviathan" (46). The Biblical and political associations of this name translate into many associated values. This name plays on ideas of unstoppable force and "huge, monstrous" character, weaving "enormous" sea-monsters and animals or "huge" vessels around "the organism of political society, the commonwealth" dubbed 'Leviathan' in the likewise-named work of philosophy by Thomas Hobbes (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

The Leviathan of Judeo-Christian tradition is a huge sea monster that also correlates to the pre-Judaic Canaanite pantheon. Resident in "chaos waters" of contested meaning, Biblical Leviathan and pre-Judaic Leviathan are both a "twisting serpent", which the Bible says Yahweh "will punish" and the "Ugartic Baal epic" describes the deity Baal as having already "smote"<sup>41</sup> (*Yawehe and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* 105). Leviathan also recalls the serpent image identified in Maureen Warner-Lewis's analysis of *Masks*<sup>42</sup>, significantly not coiled and so now not suggestive of the same values of cyclicity (*E. Kamau Brathwaite's Masks: Essays and Annotations* 34). Reading Leviathan tidalectically allows for an understanding that it represents {among other things} constant overlap between epistemologies, and signals ancient processes of syncretisation as ongoing within the psychical architecture of dominant Judeo-Christian paradigms. This reading

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<sup>41</sup> See comparison of the two Leviathans and discourse on the Leviathan and the pre-Judaic / Judaic tradition of 'chaos waters' in '*Yawehe and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*' (Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> See section above on 'Tidalectics: Local Revisioning'

complicates the purely negative values of Leviathan deployed as symbol of problematic “synthesis” – unless Brathwaite’s synthesis/Leviathan is “victorious” in having vanquished its previous, paradigmatically inappropriate incarnation (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 46).

The Biblical Leviathan is described at length in The Book of Job in terms of its might in comparison to human feeblity and to God’s greater might (*The Holy Bible Job 41. 1-34*). The naming of large aquatic animals derives from this Leviathan, but the biblical beast boasts characteristics beyond size and ferocity. The leviathan cannot {at least by humans} be drawn from the water by “hook” or “bore”, and its mouth spews “burning lamps” and “sparks” in a demonstration of power beyond its aquatic home (Job 41, 1, 2, 19). In doing so, Leviathan “maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment” (Job 41, 31). As mentioned above, fixed synthesis is incompatible with ongoing tidalectic movement. If for Brathwaite the Biblical Leviathan represents problematically fixed synthesis as opposed to the unfixed ebb&flow of tidalectics represented by oceanic movement, then synthesis in light of Job 41 means the altering of tidalectics’ governing geographic metaphor as if by supernatural force – rendering a viscous sea lacking the vigour of tidalectic motion, or boiling it away completely. The victorious leviathan attempts to prevent paradigmatic shifts by destroying or incapacitating the processes – epistemological, social, and even geographic – that might entail change.

Leviathan meaning ship derives from the idea of a leviathan as a generalised sea monster inspired by the Biblical leviathan. In both cases, the metaphor ensures that ideas of size and power are deployed in a manner that implies control over

oceanic space. Literary association between leviathan, ship, and sea monster resonates strongly with Herman Melville's *MobyDick*, a text in which all three figure in both literal and allegorical forms<sup>43</sup> (Young). Leviathan ship and leviathan whale as synthesis thereby encompass the canonical texts of English literature and the psychological cargo they bear. This cannot ignore the physical history of huge ships, and the physical cargos of goods and of human beings these floating monoliths hauled across the Middle Passage. Leviathan as ship as synthesis therefore refers to the debasement of the human spirit and body by power structures manifested in the militarization and economization of oceanic space.

Leviathan of course carries resonances of Thomas Hobbes's 1651 treatise, *'Leviathan; or, the matter, form, and power of a common-wealth ecclesiastical and civil'*, a foundational text for the political architecture of the contemporary global matrix of nation-states (Hobbes). The titular *Leviathan* constructs a Biblically derived metaphor representing Hobbes's ideal commonwealth as a monolithic nation state in which power is voluntarily concentrated in an absolute monarch. Although not the origination of the word 'commonwealth', its deployment here does resonate with its contemporary popular referral to a loose affiliation of nation states of the former British Empire. The Leviathan in this sense refers not only to the physical manifestations of the nation-state or conflagration of nation-states, but to the underlying ideology so psychically engrained that the existence of the state appears inevitable and not the result of its constant maintenance by its populace.

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<sup>43</sup> See William A. Young's *'Leviathan in the Book of Job and Moby Dick'* in *'Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal'* 65.4 (1982)

Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes a response to Hobbes's idea of leviathan in general in the stance of Brathwaite's contemporary, Barbadian author George Lamming. This response identifies a conflict inherent between Hobbesian ideals of social contract and the underpinnings of colonial society and decolonial epistemology. Thiong'o points out that ideal Hobbesian subjects "surrender their sovereignty to the state and its ruler { . . . } from whom the surrendered sovereignty can never be recalled { . . . } surrendering their agency to the safekeeping of the sovereign, resident in the state or a central political power," while in colonial contexts people do not volunteer their sovereignty because it is not theirs to relinquish (*Freeing the Imagination* 165-166). Thiong'o considers Lamming's response to the ideas of Hobbes ultimately proposing, "to be subject to another, an oppressing other - be he a foreigner or a national - is to have one's capacity for imagining a different future limited," (166). In the context of Brathwaite's discourse, synthesis as Hobbesian Leviathan therefore performs multiple functions. It represents the dominant tidalectic of colonial domination and political power. But it also represents the allegiance of physical power to an epistemological framework in which synthesis becomes dominant paradigm and a matter of inevitability. This factor, a combination of physical and psychical dominance, is what prevents imagination of self and of future divorced from dominant paradigm.

However, this conception also carries the potential for transcendence in that it requires the willing and self-interested acquiescence of subject to leviathan. Thiong'o claims that Lamming reverts the ideas of Hobbes into a strategy for doing the opposite to that which Hobbes advocates, in which "sovereignty lies with

the subject freed from his subjection to an oppressing other, free to regain his own subjectivity as an agent of his being” (166). Opposition to Brathwaite’s construction of leviathan as synthesis therefore may involve the subject freeing the ability to self-imagine from synthesis manifested as physically and psychically dominant colonial paradigms. More significantly, it also involves freeing perception from the idea of synthesis itself. Tidalectic epistemology develops to accommodate this form of imagination, because without an alternative to the structures of thought from which ideas of synthesis develop the drive to escape from any given synthesis proves ineffectual.

Brathwaite contrasts ideas of totality and unstoppable force personified as sea monster, ship, or dominant state with a different kind of oceanic metaphor. Instead of inexorable destructive linear advance, “the tide comes lapping to the door of my room and then it goes back again & over time this happens over & over,” and the leviathan is not a dominant expression of totalistic synthesis but just another monster in the tides (46). The irregular yet regulated movement of the tide towards and away from Brathwaite’s door embodies a force more potent than any human construction that shapes history into different patterns than those drawn by traditional dialectics. In the realm of ideas and understanding of history, synthesis gives way to syntheses and cohabiting dissonances.

Brathwaite later concludes that the dialectic mode of understanding as formulated in European and North American mainstream thought is unsuited and inadequate for his local context, a limited perspective that itself limits agency:



“And so it seems to me that as long as we continue to harbour the tripartite – shall I add EuroAmerican? – notion of thesis antithesis success {...} we’ll never be getting close enough to a close analysis of our own reality to make good sense

of it; we’ll always be into imitation alienation/alien nation > chimera, false hope, somebody else’s success model. We’ll >> nvr be beginning to hear the sound of the sea w/in our psyche like Philip Sherlock hears the mountains in ‘Long Mountain rise’ which rise, like a wave or Pyramid(s), to be grounded again, as I say, in the ground” (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 48).

Escape from EuroAmerican mainstream thought does not just entail the proliferation of non-western tropes or narratives – it requires perspectival shift away from ideas of progression so engrained in these epistemologies’ psychical architecture they seem natural.

Seeking influences outside of these epistemologies requires a look at alternative traditions, such as avant-garde poetics and perspectival modes attuned to locality in terms of both landscape and culture. This resonates with both Harris’s concepts of ‘theme of expedition’ and ‘music of living landscapes’. It also recalls the situation of Brathwaite’s poetics vis-à-vis the European and American

contemporary mainstreams, with which it bears less in common than alternative, avant-garde or so-called postmodern<sup>44</sup> poetics. The Eurocentric labels ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ themselves must receive additional scrutiny insofar as related to the art produced from a position like that taken by Brathwaite. An instructive reminder of this can be found in Aubrey Williams’s aforementioned decoupling of ideas of the avant-garde from western conceptions of the modern and postmodern. Like Harris and Brathwaite, Williams locates a creative rationale in traditional artistic production, and deprivileges associations between modernity and experimental practice.

As Brathwaite argues in *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature*, ideas of what constitutes Caribbean “culture” itself must be “re-examined in terms of its totality, not simply its Europeanity,” so that “a literature of negritude and with it, a literature of local authenticity” can be formulated . The key element here is a striving towards totality – just as simple acceptance of European modes of thought proves insufficient, so do simple combinations or dual deployments of variant or non-European ideas within its established psychical architectures. The literature of local authenticity Brathwaite describes is neither European or African but defined by negritude, the term here deployed as a widely cast net encompassing an African oriented but at the same time creolised, localised Caribbean avant-garde.

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<sup>44</sup> Or as Brathwaite might construct it, “postmodem.” For more on Brathwaite’s ideas on technology and poetics, particularly the link between the computer and orality, see Stewart Brown’s “Interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite” in *Kyk-over-al* 40 (December 1989), and “‘Writin in Light’: Orality-thru-typography, Kamau Brathwaite’s Sycorax Video Style” in *The Pressures of the Text: Orality, Texts, and the Telling of Tales* (1995). See Raphael Dalleo’s ‘Another “Our America”...’ in *Anthurium* 2.2 (2004) for discourse on how these ideas relate to Caribbean modernity/postmodernity.

The line of thought here calls for a project reminiscent of Brathwaite and CAM's avant-garde forbearers in the Negritude movement. It also resonates with CAM's project of generating common currents of Caribbean focused artistic and scholarly inquiry, and the intellectual work undertaken in assessing and deploying ideas from each other and the wider world in service to this project<sup>45</sup>. As Brathwaite contends in *'Caribbean Man in Space and Time'*, "it is essential that our concepts and models { . . . } should be applied not only to the outer field of reality but to our inscapes equally { . . . } and that in the final analysis the model/system must contain *or live with people*" (4). Recourse to the living landscape of the sea provides space for inquiry into overlap between internal and external experience via oceanic tropes that already live with, that is to say actively form a major if perhaps invisible cohabitive influence on, Caribbean people.

Tidalectic epistemology develops from a mode of thought attuned to the "sound of the sea w/in our psyche" – from psychical interiorization of the sea's motion and appearance and sound, coupled with knowledge of oceanic influence – exteriorized poetically as a localized yet globally-conscious worldview and expressive form encompassing philosophic, socio-political, and poetic dimensions (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 48). Themes of conflation between land and water meanwhile continue to follow tidalectic discourse with Brathwaite's comparison of Sherlock's "mountains" to "a wave", his description of the mountainous wave as "grounded" pregnant with the sentence's earlier ideas of

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<sup>45</sup>See *Savacou* 11/12, themed around Caribbean studies, for a snapshot of what this process looked like in the mid-1970s.

grounding oneself in sea-attuned psyche (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 48).

While Brathwaite's discourse here and in *'ConVERSations...'* makes reference to ideas in his earlier work on *'World Order Models'* with its derisions of Mount Blanc's supposed embodiment of destructively missilic viewpoints, this folding of mountains into waves appears to make amends with, and claim for or incorporate into a tidalectic perspective, mountainous spaces in general. For all that Mt. Blanc imagistically opposes tidal/water, it also presents land as unfixed. As it unfixes ideas of land, it prefigures Brathwaite's ideas of 'erosion', 'drift', and 'swimming on dry land' discussed below.

Tellingly, there is much in this discourse with dialectics that is not directly about dialectics at all but rather about landscape, perspective, and dimensions of dream. Those living both historically and geographically in an overlap between two eras' middle passages require complex and locally-attuned modes of thinking to account for their situations beyond the kind of viewpoint conferred by "tripartite" models of linear progression implied by a basically dialectic philosophy (*New Gods of the Middle Passages* 48). Natural and other environmental phenomena absorbed via sensory perception exercise powerful yet invisible influence over the capacity to critique, to imagine, to plan, and to envision both self and society. The parameters of dream expand with deeper engagement between psyche and living landscape. Once physically observed, visible and visibly powerful/influential tidal forces assume a metaphoric role that still accounts for the metaphorized tidal force and motions' real-world equivalents. By making reference in *'ConVERSations...'* to this

set of ideas via the aside/definition-note, Brathwaite keeps his dialogue concerning tidalectic and dialectic within the nexus of ideas presented whilst leaving the nuances and potential scholarly usage of, or debate over the so-called success or failure of, his arguments regarding dialectics to one side. It is enough for Brathwaite here to declare tidalectics' difference from dialectics and move onwards.

Without the definition note, the passage in '*ConVERSations...*' that it interrupts reads smoothly along the lines that Brathwaite has already established for defining the tidalectic – using the word to describe something else and then defining or extrapolating on both it and that thing at once in other terms. The note also feels out of place because it is not glossing the first instance in which Brathwaite describes something as tidalectic after its genesis in the woman's walk on water, and because there are earlier instances of the term's usage in the text that deal more explicitly with history and development. It is telling that the context of this definition of "tidalectic" is its deployment to describe the "call-and-response kinesis" between Brathwaite and his audience (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 222). Speaker and audience's collaborative experience of the ongoing oral presentation are said to possess "riddim ... Structure and shape and hopefully destination Because it's tidalectic," after which the above-discussed definition interjects (226). A voice that is again explicitly Brathwaite's asserts,

"The truth of the moment comes not only in the song, the poem,

the utterance, but in the *interaction*. It must involve the in

teraction. It's not that it is – or it should not be! – a mono-  
 lithic statement from me to you, and you absorb it – so that  
 it don't reflect/bounce back/echo *anything* And then you go ho  
 me from this with nothing. For whatever comes [out] must be  
 echo back" (226, 227).

The interjection manufactured by Brathwaite works to shape his discourse in a  
 manner consistent with this dynamic, compounding ideas of multiple voices,  
 reference to and echo of other works and ideas, and exhortation of the audience to  
 engage with his ideas beyond the contextual bounds of this particular talk/text. This  
 statement illuminates Brathwaite's earlier mention of "call-and-response kinesis" -  
 conspicuous because the word 'kinesis' marks associations to Brathwaite's even  
 earlier description of "trying to express that way of seeing {...} the kinesis of" his  
 environment - by means of elaboration and exemplary enactment (222, 37). So,  
 while in 'New Gods of the Middle Passages' it is the overlap or overlay of  
 experience and history that is defined as tidalectic while Brathwaite directly  
 addresses his audience, in this section of '*ConVERSations...*' it is the interplay  
 between speaker and audience itself and potential overlap of voices and

resonances that is tidalectic (New Gods of the Middle Passages 45; ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey 226-227).

Interaction between Brathwaite and his audience as a tidalectically vectored compositional practice of discourse generation points to the significance of a localized and a non-monolithic epistemology that allows for – even fosters and thrives on – contradictory dissonance to produce a diversely multi-tonal yet simultaneously collective voice. The presentation of this collective voice creates a tidalectic relationship between the bodied oral delivery and aural reception of Brathwaite’s words, and the disembodied textual delivery and visual reception of Brathwaite’s words. A tidalectic between reception and delivery also therefore remains implicit. A compounded non-monolithic local could in this context also be understood as playing on tidalectic movement between the ephemerality and fixity, A multivalent and constant ebb&flow between seemingly divergent elements thereby proves inherent to these constructions of tidalectic kinesis. It represents a markedly different dynamic between disseminator of knowledge and recipient than that of the typical lecture, thereby transcending dynamics of institutional control, a process compounded by the inclusion of the audience as a constant presence in the publication derived from the lecture rather than their relegation to a brief note or appendice Q&A section. As mentioned above, these dynamics generate a form of collective voice that works to upset ideas of individual authorship. This collective voice most obviously compounds Brathwaite, Mackey, and audience; it also compounds various mediums of delivery and transmission at work including speech, transcription, and palimpsest. This collective voice and its ability to

discourse discursively and dissonantly, moving tidally – tidalectically – back and forth over its subject while at the same time running into the same discursal current – is a key element of the oppositional stance produced and/or enabled by tidalectics. Brathwaite's note and transcribed speech interact similarly to the manner in which Brathwaite's audience interacts with him, tidalectically responding to one another, with both note and audience adrift in his discourse.

Interaction between Brathwaite and the lecture audience in the content of the text signals and mirrors interaction between Brathwaite and the reader via rhetorical style and encouragement of certain interactions between reader and book as object. As mentioned above, this dynamic entails tidalectic movement between speech's disembodied yet fixed physicality as book, and text's bodied yet ephemeral delivery as speech. A interstice in this dynamic exists in the suspension of disbelief necessary for the reader to accept textual representation of speech as both accurate recounting of and imaginatively convertible to the speech it represents within the reader's imagination. Interaction between Brathwaite and audience and between Brathwaite and reader - not to mention the collaborative nature of both initial lecture and resulting text - works to deemphasize and complicate the idea of any single authorial voice, a process that continues throughout '*Conversations...*' even as the content itself becomes intensely personal to Brathwaite. Interactivity, multiplicity of voice, and non-linear/non-sequential movement through the text compound and form a critical part of the tidalectics differing epistemological vectors from those of the mainstream. This carries implications of tidalectic shift between mode and form. Brathwaite's continual



reworking of his outputs across genres into new forms and formats and incorporation of various degrees of collaboration facilitates tidalectic movement within and between texts.

This may account for why the second definition of tidalectics offered in *'Conversations...'* comes in such a less straightforward narrative format than the first. By casting the second definition of tidalectic in a perspective that jars the reader's sense of who is speaking, embedding echoes of his previous points, referring the reader backwards in the text, and sandwiching it between espousals of "interaction" rejecting "monolithic statement", Brathwaite textually enacts both the tidalectic movements and the call for interaction about which he speaks (226, 227). To this end, he delivers multiple definitions of the word "tidalectic" in both the note explicitly defining it and the things surrounding the note that it is used to speak about, while also providing an exemplary enactment of tidalectic dynamics in the manner in which this discourse is constructed (227). With the text mentioning and referring to both of its authors by name throughout and tidally washing from approximating one of their voices into another, it almost takes on a third voice of its own. The cultivation of this third autonomous sounding voice, not explicitly ascribed to Mackey or Brathwaite but in the end shaped by Brathwaite, allows Brathwaite to step outside of himself as a character in the recorded discourse and define "tidalectic" in a less personal/poetic and more detached/academic tenor than in his first definition (226). While at first glance sounding more academic and focused, his second definition still resists redefining concisely, limiting the fields covered by, or closing off other possible interpretations of "tidalectic," in that it

refers the reader back to his first definition and the more open-ended and poetically charged “tidalectic” aspects of the 192 pages of discourse between the two definitions (226). The act of reading between the two definitions (and possibly beyond and back) is in itself tidal, and between the two (and beyond) the reader finds scattered numerous flotsam and jetsam that both elucidate and complicate definitions of Brathwaite’s tidalectic concept.

### **Resurgence to Watershed: Geography, Iconography [graphing the icon]**

The depth of tidalectic metaphor finds its expression not solely in explicitly termed definitions but also in a number of gestures that function within the framework of tidal motion and metaphor. In *'ConVERSations...'* the first explicitly tidalectic gesture made by Brathwaite after watching the woman walk on water comes in the next section of the manuscript (marked III), during a discussion of his second trilogy. This section deliberately moves the concept onward from his earliest work and its themes of diasporic spread to one that remains applicable to material less overtly concerned with migration and arrival. Rather, arrival and departure fit as part of larger ongoing tidalectic movements that shape families and lives of/on islands. Brathwaite deploys a form of the term 'tidalectic' in a digression on colonialism placed between two sections of a discourse concerned with ancestry as it relates to his poetic motives and methodologies. Overlap between topics occurs, but the digression reads separately enough to be regarded as a distinct break in the discourse.

The linking of colonialism and ancestry through this arrangement sets colonialism within ancestry as something that contradictorily exerts "downpressure" resistant to ancestral consciousness or localized identity formation even as it forms a part of localized identity and ancestral consciousness (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 51). This linking occurs in a textual space that Brathwaite populates with familial, communal, and ancestral figures, Iwa, orisha, and various Afro-Caribbean spiritualities, naming "parents,

sisters, godparents, au{line break in original}nts, sons, uncles, santería { . . . } Rastafari { . . . } Iwa (Oya, Oshun, Yemanjá etc)” (45, 49, 51).

Oya refers to “Oyá { . . . } mistress of the Niger River in Nigeria, then in Cuba { . . . } guardian the cemetery and mistress of the whirlwinds” (Santería, Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions 918). This brings the realm of the ancestors firmly into the framework Brathwaite develops, while also accommodating cyclic wind elements reminiscent of both hurricane and Atlantic gyre. In Santería, Oya is both “owner of whirlpools and flash of lightening”, deepening her associations with the hurricane (Santería, Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions 920). Channelling Oya could therefore be read as Brathwaite’s play on the idea of a language that can voice the “hurricanes” and “hurrican” of Atlantic gyre, and on Harris’s environmentally-voiced “chorus in response to hurricane,” (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 8, 10; Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 43).

Oshun refers to an originally Yoruba deity, “Oshun/Ochún (orisha of sweet water, love, and giving)”, syncretised in various Caribbean traditions, but especially the Orisha Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago and the Santería tradition in Cuba (Orisha Tradition, Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions 647).<sup>46</sup> Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert define “Ochún—A Santería goddess { . . . } mistress of the river, fresh water” as a spirit embodying traditionally feminine ideals, characteristically less unpredictable or dangerous than her “sister” Yemayá” (*Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean* 286; *Creole*

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<sup>46</sup> See ‘Orisha Tradition’, and ‘Santeria’, in *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions*.

*Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* 52). In Yoruba tradition, “Oshun governs” the practice of “divination,” associating flow of river with access to the passage of time (*Encyclopedia of African Religion* 294).

Deploying the name Oshun in this latter sense while elsewhere discoursing on the mechanics of his constant revision of old material, Brathwaite envisions both space and time as “linked often by fluid corridors of water (Oshun) poems such is 'South' which appears first early in *Rights of Passage* & is present again towards the end of *Masks* (though not yet in the trilogy 'text') preparing the way for *Islands*, *Mother Poem* & *Sun Poem*. The way the verse moves in its accumulations of sound/sense (the way Oshun expresses herself here in essences, countering the ing sounds of the riverbank & the dark ripple of rapids ('wreck', 'arrest', 'hatred', 'flats')) mark this for me as another of the special libations or signposts or stele - radar stations of a certain kind of tidalectic time/space” (Brathwaite, *Newstead to Neustadt* 657). These tidalectic corridors open “wider architectonic structure of the trilogies,” connecting these mechanics to Brathwaite’s epistemological soundings in Harris, but it is within a tidalectic poetics expressed on the sonic level that Brathwaite illustrates his point rather than the denotative level (Brathwaite 657). The tidal accumulation and dissemination invoked proves just as physical and temporal as it is psychological, leads to an ethos that rejects poem as fixed product or isolated piece of art. Oshun’s placement in tidalectic epistemology points to multiple overlaps of temporality, spatiality, sound and sense.

Yemanjá refers to “Yemoja/Yemaja/Yemaya/Yemanjá/ Emanjá (orisha of the sea and fertility)” of the Orisha Tradition and associated syncretic traditions (Orisha Tradition, *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 647). In *‘Sacred Possessions’*, Margarite Fernández Olmos describes, “Yemayá” – In Santería, the universal mother, queen of the sea and of salt water, the goddess of intelligence, of rationality; sometimes tempestuous and wild, sometimes calm and sensual, as when she appears in the avatar of Asesú. A harmonious personality characterizes her children” (Margarite Fernández Olmos, *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean* 288). In *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, Olmos recounts that “Yemayá { . . . } deity of maternity, the sea, and of salt water { . . . } gave birth to all the orishas as well as to the sun and the moon, with which she is associated” (Margarite Fernández Olmos, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* 52). Yemayá is “portrayed occasionally as a dark-skinned mermaid,” sometimes as “adopted mother of Changó”, and at others as “Yemayá Olokun who is found at the bottom of the ocean” (52). Yemayá is also referred to as “sister of Ochún” (52). As queen of salt water, Yemanjá’s placement in tidalectic epistemology appears inevitable – but her associated values go beyond the oceanic. As the mother located in the ocean, Yemanjá cognates with the woman walking on water of tidalectic genesis, the “nanna” who’s action inspired Brathwaite’s line of enquiry (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 34). The most complicating factor in this dynamic is Yemaya’s portrayal as a mermaid with a lower body more akin to a snake than a fish, which resonates with the other serpents of tidalectic epistemology: Leviathan, Quetzalcoatl, and the coiled serpent of eternity. The

gendering of Yemanjá/Yemaja with overwhelmingly feminine and maternal archetypic qualities complicates the male gendering of Quetzalcoatl and Leviathan. However this is further complicated by the ambiguous gendering of her deep-sea incarnation, Olokun<sup>47</sup>. As the sister of Oshun, Yemaya also plays a role in divination from the waters of time and memory, signalling the potential for insight derived from deep connection to landscape and communal consciousness.

The Orishas/lwa are not invoked here for mere cosmetic purposes. They signal a particular form of consciousness with relation to ancestry, identity, and perception for which Brathwaite advocates. Their proximity to the epistemology of tidalectics is far from coincidental. As Joan Dayan points out in *'Vodoun, or the Voice of the Gods'*, "The loa live *en bas de l'eau*, under the waters, in an unlocatable place called "Guinée"," and travel between their inaccessible home and the human world "by way of *the chemin de l'eau*, or water road" (Dayan 17). This recalls the "fluid corridors of water (Oshun)" that Brathwaite describes as linking psychical, temporal and physical spaces between his poems (Brathwaite, Newstead to Neustadt 657). Taken together, these compoundings of the sacred into tidalectic space speak to a higher spiritual relationship sought by Brathwaite than mere inspiration from local environment or consciousness of ancestor and tradition. What Brathwaite advocates for must be spiritually encompassing, pushing at the edges of selfhood.

Brathwaite's linking of family, community, historical figures, and ancestors recalls aspects of cosmology in Haitian Vodou:

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<sup>47</sup> See commentary on Olokun from the Santería Church of the Orishas (<http://santeriachurch.org/the-orishas/>)

“lwa are personifications and archetypal expansions, projections of modes of behaviour and traits of civilization of the various ethnic groups in Haiti into the realm of the sacred; they are the different categories of ancestor from which the Haitian people descend. { . . . } They appear as parts of the collective memory, as sedimentations left by the different situations and responses made in the course of the history of the ancestors; they constitute a treasure of additional virtual identities that are at the disposal of each generation { . . . } the lwa are not to be taken as mere reproductions of individual concrete ancestral comportments, but rather as concentrated, magnified, sum totals of behaviour { . . . } Initiation is a means of making the ancestors live again in the individual who is progressively transformed into an ancestor.” (Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions, 1059, 1060, 1073)

This points to the relationships between perception of self and environment, access to deep personal and communal memory, and contact with ancestor in the context of worship via creative activity. Ancestry and colonialism remain inexorably linked as both complementary and oppositional forces, each one seeking to encompass or to subsume the other. Does colonialist epistemology sweep away and define an individual’s identity, or can identity form a kind of counter-flow encompassing an awareness of dominant (post)/(neo)/colonialist epistemologies while reaching beyond – and how? A tidalectic dynamic allows for both aforementioned currents of power relations between colonialism and ancestry to simultaneously work on the psyche. This may manifest as or more simply resemble the mechanics of involuntary possession in the context of lwa/orisha/ancestor veneration, leading to renovation



of psychic architecture. This leaves no space for individual choice but to follow and balance both currents as best possible, continually overwhelmed but seeking a tidalectic balance or *balanse*<sup>48</sup> within which the surrounding environment may facilitate a deep dive into collective memory.

Ancestral possession in this context recalls both Harris's 'theme of expedition' and 'music of living landscapes' in terms of how it involves reworking of psychical architectures. and also recalls Brathwaite's citation of Harris in *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature*, "All conventional memory is erased and yet in this trance of overlapping spheres of reflection a primordial or deeper function of memory begins to exercise itself { . . . } The community the writer shares with the primordial dancer is, as it were, the complementary halves of a broken stage. . . ." (Harris, *The Writer and Society* 51-53, qtd in Brathwaite 106). Iwa provide involuntary access to ancestors, and involuntary yet corrective renovation of internal psychical architectures as their act of possession provides access to depths of memory beyond the individual subject. The way this fits into a poetics of conscious self-redefinition is that the element of individual choice rests in accepting the worldview by which involuntary possession might be recognized and productively interrogated. This formulation involves a tidalectic ebb&flow between self, ancestor, and community.

Brathwaite's invocation of Rastafari two pages after referencing "Santería" and one page before similarly referencing three Orishas, "Oya, Oshun, Yemanja," by Haitian Vodou title, "Iwa", appears to present a somewhat contradictory belief

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<sup>48</sup> Vodou concept of balance in which there is not an equilibrium between but rather a coexistence of disparate elements. See discussion below on Toni Pressley-Sanon's *Istwa Across the Water* (11)

system to these other Afro-Caribbean traditions – especially in the wider context of his call for positive reevaluation of these and related traditions such as “Obeah” (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 45, 49, 51; *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 74-75; J. D. Elder 642-646). Rastafari, while diverse and in some cases internally discordant, is most popularly viewed as a syncretic faith derived from the preaching of Leonard Howell, drawing together the influences of revivalist Christianity, the Pan-Africanism of Marcus Garvey, and the doctrine of Ethiopianism espoused in Robert Athlyi Roger’s *Holy Piby*<sup>49</sup>.

This interpretation implicitly asserts the Judeo-Christian character of Rastafarian epistemology over the African. In summary, “The prevailing view { . . . } holds that following the coronation of Ras Tafari as the emperor of Ethiopia in 1930, the founders of the Rastafari movement, armed with an alleged prophecy by Marcus Garvey, turned to the Bible for verification that {Selassie} was indeed the returned Messiah { . . . } Selassie’s divine status was thus a function of a Judeo-Christian hermeneutics ” (*Rastafari, The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religion* 765). Discursing on Rastafari in relation to Jamaican practices of Obeah<sup>50</sup>, Kofi Boukman Barima similarly asserts, “Obeah and Rastafari theologically directed attention to different sources, the former manipulated immaterial forces, objects and plants to

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<sup>49</sup> For two major texts on Rastafari, see Horace Campbell’s book, *Rasta and Resistance*’ (1987), and contributor to the entry on Rastafari from *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions*’ Barry Chevannes’s book, *Rastafari: roots and ideology*’ (1994).

<sup>50</sup> Broadly speaking: African beliefs transposed to the Caribbean and expressed in terms of “black magic” in opposition or complement to the “white magic” of “Myal”, described by the *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* (in their Jamaican contexts) as developing when, “in the slave- plantation villages, the slaves created a Pan- African, then a “Creole” or African Caribbean religion. This religious transformation (which was consolidated by the mid- eighteenth century) remoulded African beliefs in supernatural causation, medicine, ancestral worship, and a pantheon of gods and spirits, and crystallized in Obeah and Myalism” (643). See also Brathwaite’s discourse on Obeah, quoted at length with commentary in the section above on ‘Local Revisioning: Tidalectics’.

influence people and events whereas Rastafari's mysticism rejects magical rites and retools Judeo Christianity's messianic emphasis to articulate a version of Ethiopianism where Haile Selassie is the godhead" (Barima 163). According to Barima, "Obeah symbolizes the struggles to root Africa in the "New World"" while "Rastafari" questions "Christianity's usefulness in the voyage to reclaim African ideals { . . . } borrowing the Bible and other ideologies obtained as oppressed people to write redemption stories" (Barima 164). Such narratives of Rasta accentuate its Judeo-Christian characteristics, while obscuring some elements that do not fit the narrative of simple transposition of Judeo-Christian deity onto African Christian monarch.

Rasta articulations of originally colonial prejudices against Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices paradoxically and contradictorily assert the primacy of their own version of syncretized Afro-Caribbean spirituality. This does not appear compatible with other syncretic faiths of the region; in fact, the hostility of Rasta mainstream thought to Obeah is popular knowledge even if the full implication or meaning of this opposition is less well known. Barima contends that "Rastas underrate Obeah's value as it symbolizes the ways ancestors navigated their universe and its functionality as a guide to read how many African people still negotiate for place and power," and that this devaluation threatens to undermine their spiritual goals of connection to Africa and ancestral culture (Barima 164). Although "redemption for Rastas is linked either to physical repatriation or psychological alignment to Africa" a tendency to "shun Obeah and the dismissive attitudes towards Obeah causes us to question what Africa Rastas hope to spiritually reconnect to as Obeah

like activities intersect with everyday life throughout the African continent” (Barima 164). As such, Rastafari could be interpreted as highly divergent from other Afro-Caribbean religions – characterized by popular Rastafarian rejections of Obeah and apparent assimilation of colonial prejudice against this and other traditional African religious practices with which Brathwaite engages (Barima; Brathwaite, *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 74-75).

This view is complicated by research noted in *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions*’ asserting the hostility of Garveyites toward Athlyi Roger’s Ethiopianism, and the influence of Kumina, “the ancestral religion of a Bakongo people { . . . } a religion of communication with the ancestors through drums and dance” on Rastafari (Rastafari 767, 766). In response to Leonard Howell’s preaching the advent of an Ethiopian King, it was “Kumina followers,” not Garveyites or Christian Ethiopianists, who first “converted the symbol of Haile Selassie I to the figure of Zambiempungu (Nzambi Mpungo) { . . . } a supreme deity” unconnected to Judeo-Christianity, from which Christian proponents of Ethiopanism adopted and adapted the idea that Selassie was “not only king but also God” (Rastafari 766). In this formulation, when “Rasta converted Selassie into the revived Jesus Christus in the 1930s” this was “not an African idea,” but rather “black Christianity at work converting an African deity into Christian terms” signalling “movement away from certain African ancestral categories of cognition to a Christian translation” (768). Movement away from these categories, it should be recalled, need not necessarily be cast as movement away from African faith itself – the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity to which Rastafari correlates is African. However, it is very different in

its epistemological and theological architectures from the nature and ancestor attuned traditions of the Iwa/Orisha based spiritualities. It tends towards androcentric arrangements of religious practice and theology, notwithstanding the counter-flows within Rastafari that attempt to reclaim Empress Menen from a mere supplementary role to Selassie. Finally, there is an implicit difference in degrees of choice and self-fashioning of identity between Rastafari and Iwa/Orisha and Obeah traditions, with Rastafari involving a process of group reasoning as opposed to involuntary possession<sup>51</sup>.

The presence of Kumina, in which “leading figures { . . . } are women” who “play the leading role in communicating between the ancestors and the living,” embeds within Rastafari’s patriarchy and ambivalence to spiritualities such as Obeah and ancestor worship a potential for renegotiation (768). It also provides a submerged connection to the other African traditions invoked by Brathwaite – including “Kumina” itself – to which a Rastafarian perspective appears less readily aligned (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 220). Another interstice in Rastafari provides further tidalectic corrective to Brathwaite’s omissions of South Asian Caribbean tropes, thinkers, and spiritualities from his considerations of indigenized epistemologies. While “Kumina influences” and “remnants of Bakongo (Kongo) belief” complicate the patriarchal Judeo-Christian-African view of Rastafari, “other influences on the early formation of Rastafari { . . . } including Hinduism” also add productive dimensions of ethnic and theological complication (765). The impact of Hinduism on Rastafari does not typically surface within popular discourses, in

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<sup>51</sup> Of course contradictions and exceptions to these dynamics exist, but not on such a large scale

spite of well documented early contact between Hindu gurus and the first Rastafarians gathered around Leonard Howell, including his “spiritual advisor” Laloo (767). The influence may have become less evident quite early in the movement’s history, but evidence of the South Asian presence in the Caribbean – including the smoking of Cannabis, which arrived in the region as an Indian custom and is now one of the most popularly known practices associated with Rastafari – continue to hold currency within the movement.

The early back-and-forth crossing of influences between Christian, Kumina, and Hindu theologies, the degree to which various influences were themselves syncretized in the racial and socio-political contexts of the Americas, and the physical migrations of its early founders through to its current followers<sup>52</sup> all point to ongoing tidalectic shifts at the core of Rastafari. As such, Brathwaite’s invocation of Rastafari does not generate oppositional contradiction so much as add complementary nuance to the orisha and Iwa venerating traditions he also invokes as positive tidalectic resurgences. As his elisions and rendering of Rastafari as epistemologically closer than it may be to the other spiritualities invoked attests, this may be unintentional if not unwelcomed. These spiritually vectored resurgences work to establish multiple modes of connection with both ancestor and present situation, working across disparate understandings in an effort to locate utilizable commonalities. This carries over into considerations of ancestry that Brathwaite makes from a more historic standpoint.

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<sup>52</sup>From colonial rural space to urban metropole to colonial rural space to colonial urban conglomeration to global iteration and further syncretisation. See Richard C. Salter’s article, ‘Sources and Chronology in Rastafari Origins’ in ‘Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions’, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Salter)

The first section of discourse concerning ancestry and the composition of Brathwaite's second trilogy stresses the need "To look into the mirror of your thoughts . . . the mirror of your metaphor . . . the mirror of yourself" and not respond with a self-image formulated of/by the literature and media of the metropole, the need to celebrate "our mothers and fathers" regardless of whether they have "been written about elsewhere" (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 44-49). The second, much briefer post-digression section of this discourse speaks about *Mother Poem* as the beginning of Brathwaite's attempt to enact this need in "a poem about my mother and increasingly the social world that she created – slowly slowly ever so slowly – like a polyp – and at the same time ?therefore, a poem about the island, the coral limestone colour from which she comes" (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 51). Biological mother and mother-island build "social" communitarian and "limestone" physical spaces via metaphorically linked processes operating under dynamics of submerged collective growth on underwater reefs (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 51). This is a discourse that is already in tune with ideas of resistance to colonial ikon or iconography and the need for locally generated iconographic mirror celebrating ones' own ancestors and ghosts. The digression on colonialism framed by this discourse channels oceanic language to propose that a tidal shift is currently drawing out a more and more local non-colonial or colonially-biased/complicit iconography. "Our watershed," Brathwaite declares, evoking structures that channel and capture water - including what the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls "the whole gathering ground of a river system," often leading to sea or ocean - and the word's common metaphoric denotation of a transitional moment,

“is mark by the arr of the Ja reggae film, *The harder they come* (1972) w/  
Jimmy Cliff & a host of real-life Ja ikons. This + the pres of Bob Marley, the  
Wailers, the I-Trees, Michael Manley, Walter Rodney, Ca

rifesta Guyana, Black Power & the resurgence of Rastafari,” (*Oxford English  
Dictionary*; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 49).

The watershed moment, then, is in some senses the moment at which Brathwaite  
feels truly local cultural currents begin significantly emanating into oceanic  
crosscurrents of global culture. By listing these “ikons”, Brathwaite charts a sea-  
change in favour of localized forms within music, mainstream and radical politics,  
film, theatre, intellectual discourse and religion – identifies currents bearing the  
elements required for creation of local rather than “colonial ikon{s}” transmitted  
thorough metropolitan channels (Brathwaite 49). Meanwhile, Brathwaite’s  
conceptualization of “Rastafari” regaining and increasing popularity and cultural  
influence as its making a “resurgence” echoes and offers a counter-flow to his  
earlier concept of nation language’s “submergence” (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel  
Mackey* 49; *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in  
Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 17). Brathwaite cites the developing

“{...}alterNative icono-



graphy w/partial but significantly positive – or rather positively TI

DALECTICAL nativist ‘results’{...}”

notably keeping the word ‘tidalectical’ line-broken and the word ‘iconography’ both hyphenated and line-broken (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 49). The breaking of ‘tidalectical’ into “TI” and “DALECTICAL” while valuing it as positive performs multiple functions of referentiality (49). Most obviously, it enacts the tidal ebb&flow of linguistic meaning by separating the suffix from the prefix. Suffix and prefix are shown to be contingent rather than fixed, the tide’s attachment to the dialectic emphasized yet simultaneously removed. The suffix “ti” also brings multilinguistic dimensions into play. In Spanish “ti” means “you” in the sense of referring to you – the TI/DALECTIC is positive because it is for you, directed to you, your situation, your particularity<sup>53</sup>. In French, “ti” carries resonances of “Ti-Jean”, personification of the downpressed classes in both popular imagination and in Derek Walcott’s play *Ti-Jean and his Children*<sup>54</sup> - the TI/DALECTIC is positive because it is the vector favouring this class. Hyphenation and line breaking of ‘iconography’ divides “icon” – “image {...} representation {...} person or thing regarded as a representative symbol {...} of a culture” – from “graphy” – “processes or styles of writing, drawing, or graphic representation” – freeing icon and

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<sup>53</sup> See Collins Spanish Dictionary (English translation of ti)

<sup>54</sup> See Derek Walcott’s *Ti-Jean and His Childrel*, see also S. Joseph’s dissertation on “*Imaging the Homeland: The Search for Identity and the Conflict of Cultures in Derek Walcott’s Poetry*”, “Chapter II: Derek Walcott: Poet as ‘Schizophrenic’ (55)

representational process from their predefined relationships<sup>55</sup> (Brathwaite 49; *Oxford English Dictionary*). Combining hyphenation with line break presents Brathwaite's "alterNative icono-" as available to join with yet not automatically attached to the representational processes denoted by the suffix "graphy" – instead, both terms sweep into the same current without fixed synthesis (Brathwaite 49). By flagging "icono-/graphy" as a compound word more obviously than if it were presented conventionally, Brathwaite draws attention to its linked concepts of image and writing. In its postcolonial discursive context, this break also generates resonance with cartography, geology, and geography. Brathwaite's lineation and splitting of compound words is revealing in the manner of a split rock or coastal cliff surface displaying the land's variously lineated layers of earth, such as the red "African dust" visibly packed between some islands' swathes of limestone or rouging their fields (Main).

It is tempting to argue that Brathwaite's division of 'tidalectical' into "TI / DALECTICAL" effects a similar splitting of the term into something approximating a compound word derived from 'tide' and 'dialectical' (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 49). In keeping with Brathwaite's thoughts on the matter, however, full synthesis between tide and dialectical remains unrealized. Lack of a hyphen accentuates the break between suffix and prefix. Tidalectic is not, despite its sounding play, equitable to tidal dialectic. The word drifts apart and reforms as the reader's eye moves from right to left margin, functioning to expose its implied resonances. Hyphenation and line-breaking in this section suggests a sense of these

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<sup>55</sup> See section on 'Comparing Models...' above

localized iconographies' and tidalectically vectored processes' - and their related variable range of potential results' – unfixed yet constant unity (Brathwaite 49). This works to deemphasize any sense of their permanence or hierarchical position atop any completed cycle or process of change.

Brathwaite's breaking of words with lineation (or, it could be argued, Brathwaite's breaking of lineation with words) in this instance also visually and conceptually implies the growing tidal rush of alterNative epistemological currents by running over the traditional boundaries of the page (Brathwaite 49). Brathwaite lists these "positively TIDALECTICAL nativist 'results'," at the same time also listing the contradictory elements, submersions, and counter-flows rushing back against and caught up in the positive currents (49). A wave or current of positively tidalectical results,

"the nativisation of most of our public bi

llboards, the widening acceptance of nation-language [see KB , His-

tory of the voice (1984),"

is then broken and joined by a semicolon ":" to an opposing current, "despite continuing Estab resistance," which is then linked and broken by another semicolon ":" to another positively tidalectical current,

“the pub (1995) of Richard Allsopp’s (**Oxford**) **Dict of Caribb Eng u**  
**sage**, the declaration > ‘bastardy’ by the govt of Guyana in the 70s,  
the declaration – at last – by Ja and Bdos in 1997 that the **1<sup>st</sup> of August**  
will once again be observe as (**Slave**) **Emancipation Day**, follow in  
(g) (in Bdos) the re-acceptance, since the 80s, of the CropOver Fes  
tival” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 49).

The penultimate positively tidalectical result is opposed by Brathwaite’s  
observation that immediately after,

“the Bdos Prime Minister declares Emancipation Day, he announces the  
‘Shiprider’ agreement w/the US under which US security (‘anti-drug’)  
forces are given permission{...}  
to intervene & interdict in the Caribbean waters & on Caribbean  
territory in the ‘war’ on drugs,”

juxtaposing positive cultural expression of historic iconography and de-colonial ideology with neo-colonial realpolitik that serves as its counter-flow and shares the same political space (49). This opposition deflates and plays with the idealism of many of the positive currents while also valuing them and their idealism as vital oppositional currents to the tide of empire. As Brathwaite contends in 'New Gods of the Middle Passages', in the face of such setbacks,

“our responsibility is not to lament it but to start again” (47).

Awareness of negatively tidalectic events and processes does not devalue the idealistic pursuit of positively tidalectic outcomes.

Another “note on colonialism” appears in a box beginning on the same page of *ConVERSations...* as Brathwaite’s list of tidalectically positive results (Brathwaite 49). This note contends with Dangarembga’s idea “of colonialism as a ‘nervous condition’” afflicting self-definition (49). Brathwaite concedes,

“this Conversations is really my first (& unexpected, unintentioned) effort to deal

w/my personal relationship to this ”

before charting a series of ebbs and flows in the process of political and cultural resistance and self-affirmation similar to but more systemized/generalized and less

specific than the prior list quoted above (49). This charting also begins with waves of culturally affirmative gestures and ends on a negatively tidalectic political current

“of RECOLONIZATION as result of SuperPower military, political, & certainly econ

(neomercantalist) needs/pressures/priorities/greeds” (49).

Brathwaite’s foregrounding of maritime power’s influence on colonial/postcolonial/neo-colonial relations in this tidalectic construction of currents and counter-flows demonstrates how the physical can ebb or flow against the metaphoric. A tidalectic perspective therefore encompasses physical oceanic movements and the interrelations between various powers for which the ocean serves as vector. The tidalectic offers a poetics that addresses real-world tidal forces via aesthetic synthesis of content, process, and form, while simultaneously positing and describing metaphoric tidal forces derived from its apprehension of the real. Meanwhile, metaphoric language of water and formally tidal constructions of syntax and argument enact the ebb-and-flow motion Brathwaite sees at work in the content that this language represents.

### Wordsworthian Ocean / Timehri Ocean

Wilson Harris describes Timehri as “markings on ancient rocks in the interior of the Guyanas,” so ancient that these markings seem eternal and authorless (Harris Aubrey Williams 222). These marked rocks come to emblemize the spatial manifestation of time making its impression on consciousness and consciousness making its impression on time. This tidalectic dynamic between time, consciousness, and landscape, potentially manifested through artistic production, is where a pivot between the tidalectic ideas of Brathwaite and timehri related discourses of Harris may be located.

Brathwaite links Harris’s concept of timehri to his own tidalectic poetics. Ideas of timehri inform the function of ocean in tidalectic epistemology as authorial forces of nature and their attendant inscriptions. The ocean becomes a constant, given equally solid consistency to “rock” and “granite,” in spite of its constant motion, in the cosmology of Brathwaite’s poetic space; its transcendence of and centrality to the ongoing genesis of this space affirmed in the compounded descriptor “eternal/?maternal ?Wordsworthian” (54). The ocean is both eternal in that it represents unending tidal cycles, and maternal in that it births the islands and carries the matriarchal nanna over itself in the process of populating the islands. The inclusion of a question mark graphically introduces elements of uncertainty and instability into this formulation. A second question mark performs a similar function in its position at the beginning of the term ‘Wordsworthian,’ as if the best term remains elusive and “Wordsworthian” has been arrived at in a questioning, uncertainly affirmative gesture (54). The question mark helps to set the tone for

this seemingly incongruous adjectival usage of Wordsworth's name. Brathwaite explains that he "use{s} 'Wordsworthian' here to make a ?helpful connexion since i/we don't yet have critical references in this area of our own," and speaks of his desire to respond to a need for tropes that function "as specific & unique & universal – all these things together - & diff (=us) from what we mean/understand by 'Wordsworth' & other cultures' ocean/'jungles'" (54-55). Note the question mark qualifying the word 'helpful', as if the author remains unsure as to whether this link to Wordsworth is actually illuminating or obfuscating his intended meaning.

To address this uncertainty and affirm his intended characterisation of the ocean, he decides to both initiate tidal movement through the book and draw a connection to a more locally appropriate poet and set of ideas. Brathwaite tidalectically refers the reader forward in the text of *ConVERSations...* to his discussion of Wilson Harris beginning on page 203 for further elucidation (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 54, 203). To get the context of what Brathwaite is referring forwards to, one in fact must begin reading a few pages earlier. Discussing on these pages the significance of Guyanese "timehri { . . . } petroglyphs" to his work and thought, Brathwaite eventually cites Harris's poem 'Vision at the Well' as a work by a Caribbean author that accomplishes with the landscape of river and jungle that which Brathwaite attempts to accomplish with the ocean as timehri (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 200-208). He also cites this poem as signalling a crossover between or transcension of poetry and prose genres produced in the same spirit as Harris's later cross-generic prose



(much as the introduction to the original edition notes Harris's incorporation of philosophic and dramatic elements in his poetry). This poem was first published in the journal *Kyk-over-Al* in 1952 as part of a long poem entitled '*The Fabulous Well*', a piece fully reprinted in Harris's first version of his collection *Eternity to Season* in 1955 and then re-worked for the collection's 1977 version (Harris, *The Fabulous Well* 51; Harris, *Eternity to Season* 61-62). It is from the 1978 version of '*Eternity to Season*' that Brathwaite quotes '*The Fabulous Well*'. Harris prefaces this volume with quotes from Homer, Goethe, Shelly, and Jacques Monod:

"In the daytime I would weave the mighty web  
and in the night unravel the same

The Odyssey of Homer

At the whirring loom of time unawed  
I work the living mantle of god

Goethe

Nature's vast frame, the web of human things . . .

Shelly

Every living being is also a fossil

Jacques Monod" (Harris, *Eternity to*

*Season* 7)

Taken together, these epigraphs read like a unified lyric declaration of poetic practice functioning as an *ars poetica* for the collection that follows and providing intellectual context for their epistemological bases. The first three of these are mentioned in A. J. Seymour's introduction to the original 1954 version of the book, the entirety of which is included as an appendix to the 1978 version, but the fourth must be a later addition. This fourth quotation relates most directly to Harris's idea of the fossil in 'The Taste of the Well', an earlier part of 'The Fabulous Well', as it appears in the 1978 version - in which "the procession of empty water-carriers / to and from the deep well of time / seeks the fossil senses of the earth," as opposed to the "*never-to-be-forgotten* senses"[emphasis in original] of the 1954 version (Harris, *Eternity to Season* 22, 62). This may be the most significant of Harris's revisions of the original text. The importance of "fossil senses" is both explicitly flagged by the insertion of the Monod epigraph and implicitly felt in how it imagistically and intellectually modulates the metaphoric web spun by the 'THE FABULOUS WELL' sequence's interplay of "stone...flesh", "water", "light", "space" and "time" (22, 19-23). Gone is the vagueness of "*never-to-be-forgotten*," but for all its imagistic specificity the "fossil" manages at the same time to embody and thereby vaguely evoke a similarly unforgettable aura as the original phrasing (22, 62). The idea of the "fossil" fits with its echo in Harris's contemporaneous work on Benito Cereno, in which this term is widely deployed (Benito Cereno 48). In fact, the quote from Monod on fossil appears in the introduction to the book in which Harris's '*Benito Cereno*' first appears, '*Enigma of Values: An Introduction*', published three years before the reissue of '*Eternity to Season*'.

Brathwaite's quotation from Harris in '*ConVERSations...*' relating '*Eternity to Season*' to concepts of timehri does not contain the part of '*The Fabulous Well*' sequence that includes the word fossil. However, Brathwaite's referral of the reader to both '*Eternity to Season*' as a whole and to a part of this sequence in particular doubly places the reader within close proximity of the fossil and within its epistemological sphere of influence. The fossil in '*Eternity to Season*' via Harris's quote from Monod and in the introduction to '*Enigma of Values*' due to its illumination of Harris's work on '*Benito Cereno*', thereby interlinks the epistemological lineages of Harris's ideas in *Benito Cereno* to Brathwaite's theoretical framework of timehri and tidalectic. Like Brathwaite, Harris expresses philosophic and epistemological ideas in both essays and poetry; both writers also radically revise and update their poetic texts via palimpsestic methods supposedly in accordance with their current epistemological pursuits. From the outset of Brathwaite's allusion to them, the palimpsestic and philosophically-conscious (or consciously philosophical) qualities of Harris's 1978 edition of *Eternity to Season* are thus flagged, as is the book's mandate for revision, quotation and tactical redeployment of both the author's old texts and content from outside sources. Brathwaite's familiarity with this work and his citation of it in *ConnVERSations...* suggest that in some ways Harris's methodologies in reworking his old poems inspired Brathwaite's later tidalectic redefinitions both procedurally and philosophically (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 201).

I reproduce here as it appears in '*ConVERSations...*', along with Brathwaite's commentary:

“

---

Eyes  
 once blind  
 now open to the beauty of life. Life achieves contours  
 of vision. The raw material takes shape  
 and creation: pure sensation of vision  
 wells into light, a new yet intoxicating fullness  
 which comprehends the world. Earth blossoms into a planet.  
 Green tenderness changes into a deep promise of seeing life

*[which is the most miraculous 'description' of vegetation  
 have i ever lived]*

The sun is a cruel yet intoxicating paradise. The fresh  
 rainfall is light, spendthrift of pleasure or fullness.

*- and now the transition/continuation -  
 from Mariella (see Palace) of landscape to Mariella of the woman form and 'role' -*

So beauty is sustained at the well of time. Her arms  
 part of pleasure, the enigmatic  
 role of woman. Her feet bare, hardly seeing the ground  
 yet leaving indelible impressions. The cast of her features

{page break in original}

simple and profound, responsive to feeling, deeply moved  
to offer signs of composed innocence and passion.

And now the third transition, integrating the two Mariellas into the 'creation' of civilization, itself/themselves  
aspect(s) of time/space

Touched by vision  
the light fingertips of rain pass softly  
to change the stone and burden of her perfection  
into rapt walls that house joy and pain and living imperfection.  
Her cheeks are the dark glow of blood  
beneath the frail temper of space and eternity, the history  
of her flesh and blood is strange and new.

[Wilson Harris, 'The Vision of the Well, Eternity to season' (1954); New Beacon ed 1978: 61-62. In his revised version of  
these poems - the entire collection (pp11-51) Harris' transition from poem to prose is practically complete]

When I 'apply' - try to apply - the 'concept' - the possibil-  
ity of *video* to *timehri*, we receive even further movement -  
like *quetzalcoatl* flying? -

" (Brathwaite 104-105; Harris 61-62).

Notable in light of Brathwaite's emerging tidalectic methodologies is his emphasis on Harris having revised the "entire collection" and altered its form, upon Harris's synthesis between an archetypical female figure's repeated interaction with an ancient local landscape and ideas of time, and upon the importance of implied constant movement to the success of this *timehri*/poem as an appropriate link to Brathwaite's more overtly kinetic metaphoric and representational systems such as "video" style (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 204, 205). The second and third of these points reveal a hinge or pivot between the tidalectic and the *timehri* in their mutual dealing with time and landscape, and a disconnect in

that the tidalectic is more explicitly concerned with motion. An archetypical female figure's repeated interaction with an ancient local landscape also forms the exhibitory enactor and subject of tidalectic motion in 'New Gods of the Middle Passages' shortly after discourse on ideas of timehri {discussed below} in a formulation that seems to combine the concepts. Brathwaite refers to "Rwanda" and to a "woman ancient & ageless" who mirrors the woman in the tidalectic genesis-moment described in 'ConVERSations' and who functions as,

"reflection of the lake of self / reflection from the lake of self – (re)'born' . . .

still movingly tidalectic even as she reach

es the eye of the desert of yr camera, her violated body to be shown to

imperial millions all over CNN & the internet like garbage but still also

coming back travelling towards & into th

(e) green Lake Chad of our spirit/our spirits, the oshun waters of her birth &

our be.ginning" (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 51).

The stick she carries allows Brathwaite to draw associations with concepts of "limbo crossing" over Middle Passage (52). Brathwaite mentions having published his poem entitled 'Limbo'; it is tempting to read the image of the woman and the passage above as gloss or commentary on this older work. However it appears that reference to past works is not the main purpose of the term's deployment. The

perspective does not widen to encompass the poem as a poem, rather vessel,  
crossing and limbo “stick” become

“the *lembe* or *vessel* not vassal of memory . . . the middlepassage of another

x-

perience, of our second millennium into these trans/actions. It is the  
connection between this stark woman’s life,”

and

“all these moments of our cho-

reohistory. . . that need to be taken from their demoraliz

ation into memorialization and atonement” (52).

Brathwaite’s tidalectic compounding-via-splitting of choreography and history into  
“cho / reohistory” provides access to the multiple commentaries enacted by  
deployment of the word ‘limbo’ (52). The term ‘limbo’ resonates deeply with  
themes of trauma, self-imagination, and the commodification of culture. As the  
back cover of Guyanese-born poet John Agard’s collection *‘Limbo Dancer in Dark  
Glasses’* succinctly explains, “The limbo dance, usually associated with tourist  
entertainment of the Caribbean, is believed to have been born in the slaveships –  
chained slaves, lying on their backs below deck, having to find some way to keep fit

– a kind of survival dance” (Agard). In this sense, Brathwaite is referencing not his older poetry but the impulse and psychological apparatuses that inspired and permitted him – and other poets such as Agard, and the slaves of original limbo crossing – to create art within such dire conditions. Creativity in this situation is not a frivolous exercise or waste of valuable energy, but rather a necessary tool for physical and psychological survival. The creation of art in tidalectically vectored communion with the ancestors must work towards “memorialization and atonement”, because the alternatives are amnesia and indebtedness to ones’ own deprivation (52).

But how can a society or an individual poet move toward spiritual recompense when layers of meaning have been slathered over what Kim Dismont-Robinson describes “as a kind of “meta-metaphor” of Caribbean trauma” (*Probin the Wound...* 19)? Something inherent in the woman’s movement therefore, once again, provides the answer to this conundrum. Whether repeated sweeping transformed into water-walking, repeated drawing from a well of history, or repeated ocean crossing via broadcast while carrying emblematic stick, eternalized female figures’ movements form a basis of Brathwaite’s tidalectic and Harris’s timehri (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*; Harris, *The Fabulous Well*; Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages*). Meanwhile the visual potentiality of text may be exploited both for generating results embodying both timehri and tidalectic. This potentiality for text as timehri is where the hinge between ideas becomes dually and somewhat paradoxically a disconnect, especially when ideas of motion come into play. It is of notable significance that Brathwaite



builds from ideas of poem as timehri in terms of poetic content to an idea of text itself as potential timehri whether via application of something like sycoraxian video-style typography in the context of poetry or via other modes such as graffiti in other contexts. It signals a crossover or washing back and forth between sound and vision, between author and signifier and signified, implicit in a tidalectically informed poetics. While Brathwaite goes on in these later pages to discourse on ideas of timehri and video combined in various kinetic modes such as “graffiti”, it is Harris’s poem/timehri applied back to the much earlier “Wordsworthian” ocean which concerns us here (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 54, 207).

In linking the idea of timehri to Harris’s poem and to his own ‘Wordsworthian’ ocean, Brathwaite alludes to Harris both directly and indirectly via a somewhat subtle linking of epistemologies. Before mentioning Harris’s poem, Brathwaite references the painter Aubrey Williams – like Harris and Brathwaite, a founding member of the London-based Caribbean Artists Movement – as an artist who has “re-enacted” timehri in his works (Brathwaite 200). On the same page, Brathwaite gives a translation of ‘timehri’ as “‘the mark of the hand in the rock’,” (Brathwaite 200).

Nearly thirty years prior to publishing ‘*ConVERSations...*’, Brathwaite mentions both Williams and Harris in a brief piece itself entitled ‘*Timehri*’, published in the second issue of *Savacou* in September 1970. This piece does not specifically mention the timehri rock, however it does hone in on a concept that informs Brathwaite’s later timehri-related formulations:

“the recognition of an ancestral relationship with the folk or aboriginal culture involves the artist and participant in a journey into the past and hinterland which is at the same time a movement of possession into present and future. Through this movement of possession { . . . } we become ourselves, truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the Word” (Brathwaite, Timehri 44).

Most basically put, recognition of cultural history informs and personalizes both current perspectives and modes of envisioning the future. Inner journeys of consciousness wash the artist tidalectically forwards and backwards in time with movement in one direction inextricable from the other.

Control or agency over this process comes via a visioning that appropriately represents these movements, the unnamed “word for object, image for the word” with which Brathwaite concludes his *‘Timehri’* (Brathwaite, Timehri 44). Meanwhile, Harris himself discourses on timehri at length in a transcribed “seminar” entitled “Aubrey Williams”, delivered in “London in January 1996 and published” in “*Third Text*” later the same year<sup>56</sup> (*Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination* viii). In this piece, Harris also offers one translation of the word “timehri” as “the mark of the hand,” indicating the possibility that in ‘*ConVERSations...*’ Brathwaite might be using his own interpretation of Harris’s idea to speak about and draw connections between his own and Harris’s poesies (Harris, Aubrey Williams 222). Maybe Brathwaite draws this translation directly from

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<sup>56</sup> Not to be confused with Harris’s article, also entitled ‘Aubrey Williams’, published in the *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2/3 (Spring 2000) pp. 26-30. To be clear, the article referred to here is that which originally appears in *Third Text* volume 10 number 34, 1996, pages 79-82 and reprinted in his *Selected Essays*.

Harris's discourse on Williams, or maybe both Harris and Brathwaite draw this phrasing from Williams. Either way, in the section of '*ConVERSations...*' referencing Williams and timehri, allusion to Harris's work inevitably connects with this discourse and brings Harris's idea of timehri into play with tidalectic epistemology. Brathwaite claims '*Vision at the Well*' as a precursory example of multifaceted crossover - between poetry and prose, art and philosophy, global and local, physicality and psychology, stasis and kinesis – pivoting on the poem (or poetic moment) that functions as timehri.

As noted, Brathwaite bases this claim on the intellectual discourse engaged by Harris in his essay on the painter Aubrey Williams. In this essay, Harris meditates on the subject of the "Timehri," that inspired Williams, describing these as "markings on ancient rocks in the interior of the Guyanas" (Harris Aubrey Williams 222). Harris confers a significance on these markings greater than that of mere painting-subjects for Williams, ancient artefacts, or cultural antecedents. The timehri markings' content runs secondary to the mythographic significance of their seemingly eternal and authorless existence, and the web of descriptors and stories used to explain their existence. According to Harris, "Timehri may be translated not only as 'the mark of the hand' but as 'the mark of God'" (Harris, Aubrey Williams). The idea of divine sources implies elemental authorship over the landscape and a connection with that which is part of and yet also beyond human existence. Harris plays on the "odd humour in the word 'Timehri' which is obviously the Anglecized version of an Amerindian root word. As though one were involved in a secret or unwitting pun on TIME" (Harris, Aubrey Williams). Discerning the true etymology of

the word proves difficult, except to say that various sources provide various versions its meaning painted rocks in Guyana. Although debate over the origins of the timehri persists, there is tenuous agreement as to their authors' Amerindian identity, a "Carib" origin postulated for the word "timehri" itself, and a theory that timehri creators may have migrated north to the islands (*Encyclopaedia of the Guyanese Amerindians* 141; *South American and Caribbean petroglyphs* 6; *Rock Art of the Caribbean* 14). Beyond these facts or augmentations of them that basically convey the same truth of limited information, the timehri's origins and original meanings remain unexplained.

Renamed via mispronunciation, Harris's timehri somehow yet appear to transmit an aspect of meaning across languages. Harris then reins the pun-derived English word's normative meaning back to accommodate the timehri's spatial and environmental aspects: "What is time? Time is identified with space in Einsteinian mathematics. But space, in the phenomenology of consciousness, has many objects within it, many draperies, many variable garments and shapes" (Harris, Aubrey Williams). Harris's comment implies that the manner in which time is defined by science, although inclusive of space, does not accommodate the variant perceptual, psychological, and metaphorical understanding or deciphering of time constantly made by humans; rather it is via space, via physical existence, that time makes its impression on consciousness and then becomes an understandable concept. Harris uses the timehri rocks to make a new impression of time on consciousness – as Brathwaite wishes to accomplish using the ocean.

Harris contends that the timehri engaged in making a mark on consciousness is itself a marking made on time via time's manifestation as rock on the spatial plane, "occup{ying} space as a garment in nature, or creation, *upon living time*" (Harris, Aubrey Williams 222). The timehri rock and its surrounding environment, and by extension the entire physical plane, are animated manifestations of time itself. Timehri may not be the fabric of time itself, but they do both clothe and expose time in a particular manner. Their being created through a chipping or stripping away of the rock face contributes an aura of paradox to the thrice-stated formulation by which "Timehri rock is a garment upon living time" (222). Composed of the rock as a whole rather than merely referring to its patterned inscriptions, this garment donned via an act of removal or exposure both clothes and reveals time.

Having thoroughly cultivated these pun-derived meditations on time, Harris returns to literally translated meanings of 'timehri' now fortified by his play with punning, "The mark of the hand, therefore, the hand of God upon rock, is a confirmation of our intercourse with living nature" (222). Human intercourse with the environment enables an apprehension of the cosmos. Meanwhile the desire to see a text in the timehri's imagery performs similar functions to the desire to hear the word 'time' in its pronunciation. Harris foregrounds the mysteriousness of the timehri as an attribute that enables it to engage with human perception and convey meaning when he notes that, "The mark is mysterious. It hints at a language or text that existed before human discourse. Yet it engages with human discourse to enrich the language of the imagination" (222).

A language or text that predates human discourse provides an interestingly charged space that resists conception. However, it also runs very close to being a vague romanticization of the past and of unknown artefacts that hint at having had great significance for their makers - while they may have been the prehistoric equivalent of billboards or propaganda posters. The key to preventing this from becoming dreamy backward-projection or fetishization of idealized or mythic past lies in the usage of the terms 'language' and 'discourse'. Harris does not posit the rock markings as either a supernatural or pre-linguistic caveman 'discourse' existing before 'language', but rather a linguistic expression that is now lost to the currents of human discourse due to its incomprehensibility. Throwing out signifiers of implied linguistic value, the marked rocks fail to project these implied linguistic values into discursal currents. Instead, the values they transmit hint at a nexus of communication now lost.

This concept is reminiscent of the somewhat rhetorical (as it is implicitly affirmed) question posed by Harris in his essay *The Music of Living Landscapes*, "Is there a language akin to music threaded into space and time which is prior to human discourse?" (Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 40). While the timehri may be manmade, their medium remains living rock/living time – living landscape. Hence they convey the sense of a particular language or text with lost meaning - or something else suggestive of or re-interpreted as a language or text – which in either case exists for all appearances as a part of the natural environment. Like Harris and Brathwaite, Aubrey Williams expresses a belief in the role of landscape in the formation of consciousness and perception. Referring to timehri, he declares,

“such art should be automatically appreciated by people from the Caribbean and from Guyana because they share the same environment,” which “compared with the ordered environments of the much of the rest of the world, appears naturally abstract” (A. Williams 17). For Williams, the form of the landscape influences the form of perception to which people become attuned.

There is, for both Harris and Brathwaite, something of an overlap between the timehri rocks of the Guyanese heartland and the timehri paintings made by Williams. Both appear to have been exposed to the rocks as modes of artistic metaphorization via their personal association with Williams. For Brathwaite, it does not matter that the timehri - ancient or in Williams’s paintings - spring from Amerindian rather than African sources. Writing in *‘Timehri’*, Brathwaite asserts that, “Williams’s choice of the Amerindian motif does not exclude the African { . . . } distinction between African and Amerindian in this context is for the most part irrelevant. What is important is the primordial nature of the two cultures and the potent spiritual and artistic connections between them and the present” (Brathwaite, *Timehri* 43-44). Let us assume that Brathwaite is referring to cultures of the past as ‘primordial’ rather than any contemporary African or Amerindian society, as a cursory reading of this quotation may misconstrue. Even still, his rendering of extremely different and internally diverse ancient societies as similar and similarly positive due to their primordality reads jarringly, and inspires questions as to the extent which Brathwaite himself has internalized – at least in this instance – the objectifying fetishization of the comparatively primitive that afflicts contemporary societies. In deploying this argument in terms of the

primordial, he risks setting up the kind of false equivalencies of value he seeks to transcend. Of primary importance to Brathwaite is not the subject but the function of Williams's paintings as timehri compounding "potent spiritual and artistic" essences into their forms and thereby making links *to the idea of* a cultural past (51). It follows that the functionality of these paintings as timehri themselves is not automatically enabled by their timehri subject-matter. Rather, it is their style that allows them to engage with consciousness in similar manner to the petroglyphs by which they are inspired.

Style is of similar importance to Harris, quoted elsewhere as saying, "Aubrey Williams is not a painter of landscapes, but his brush dips into landscapes to become a filter of associations into abstract reverie and moods" (*Caribbean Art* 152). For Harris, tonal vibrancy allows Williams' timehri paintings to transcend "{a}ll this {historic brutality in the Caribbean}" with its "ripe content for tragedy in the accepted classical sense" and reach for "something else beyond the absolutes of tragic art" that "invokes an instinct for celebration in a dreadful world" (Harris, Aubrey Williams 223). Harris finds in the timehri a link to local history and culture that does not hinge upon meditations on past brutalities while retaining assertive consciousness of local perspectives. This is possible because, "Vibrancy of tone possesses an insistent, inner beat and tidal pulse that is not content in its instinct for radiance with any single garment upon living time or consciousness" (Harris, Aubrey Williams 223). The tidal – fluid, changing, unfixed, multifaceted, variant – pulse of vibrancy encompasses numerous garments on living time that extend beyond the human confines of tragedy and celebration. Time manifests itself in an



elemental language unconcerned with such distinctions. The tidal pulse of vibrancy beats in a somewhat arrhythmical yet steady pattern, and in this tidal pulse, “the absolutes of tragic art, the stoic unswerving mould and unyielding fates {...} give way to other draperies, other curtains, *through* which something else, something uncanny and nameless, something unfathomably redemptive or renascent, is glimpsed” (Harris, Aubrey Williams 223). Enriched by the timehri rocks, Harris’s imagination and perception gain a new apprehension of the real. Thus the timehri rocks offer a metaphoric gateway through which “creative authority becomes intimate to” local “perspectives” (Harris, *Continuity and Discontinuity* 180). The “garment { . . . } *upon living time*” provides “confirmation of our intercourse with living nature,” revealing time’s spatiality and the kinesis inherent in a living landscape (Harris, Aubrey Williams).

Brathwaite is similarly concerned with what Harris might call the music of living landscapes, the “language akin to music threaded into space and time which is prior to human discourse” (Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 40). Brathwaite’s own concept of

“poetry itself as a kind of *timehri*:

a human imprint with all that’s recorded in and by that impr-

int, into a kind of enduring enigmatic silence

{ . . . }

encoded with that ancient memory – the sound of the fir-

st (forest) trees and rivers, slant of sunlight on the slopes

of mountains, anima of dream and nightmare, the voices of all

those voiceless generations” accordingly incorporates landscape, memory,

and speech (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 201).

Poetry as timehri encompasses and transcends human discourse via charged silence. Within this silence, an idea of sound and vision forms and presents itself to the reader. In an earlier piece that appears in *World Literature Today*, entitled ‘*Newstead to Neustadt*’, Brathwaite also explicitly links timehri to poetry and tidalectics. This time he does not formulate poetry as timehri so much as discuss how timehri factor into a process of revealing and inspiring poetic insight into a landscape or space – in this case in terms of the cross-genre dreamstories: “

A radical shift from riddim as ‘xternal’ or ear (air) drum or rain/drop (Coltrane/Elvin Jones **Impressions + After the rain**), to spirit-riddims (pipirits or pipirites) based on the tension of timehri/icons that re/come (the xperience can often be more like ‘wreckom’) to life off the wall(s) of their memory into *mkissi*, allowing, at last, a free flowing of tidalectics & crossboundary ‘dreaming’, permitting mwe, as I have hinted, into the familiar landscape ” (Brathwaite, *Newstead to Neustadt* 658).

Recognition of the oceanic timehri enables the perception of tidalectics; tidalectics allows for crossing boundaries of space, form, consciousness (reality/dream), and also real borders and oceans - in fact the familiar landscape Brathwaite lists here is first “Oklahoma”, from where he speaks, before he returns to “the Caribbean” of which he speaks (658). This in itself is a tidalectic gesture revealing the psychical passage or movement made by Brathwaite’s own discourse and by his audience / readers. In this same piece, Brathwaite makes another philosophic link to Harris’s

ideas of “fossil” and enigma of values by referring to the “river as bone flute of the sea,” an allusion to Harris’s “bone flute” that can “break through the walls of time” and cultural space (Brathwaite, *Newstead to Neustadt* 657; Harris, *Benito Cereno* 49).

Brathwaite discourses in ‘*New Gods of the Middle Passage*’ on “*mkissi* (spiritual gifts) & *timehri*”, explicitly tying poetry to *timehri* by stating “that poetry begins even before the advent of vegetable fire w/ the imprint (*timehri*) of the mind on the wall of the imagination of the small ie close (not closed) community” (50).

Poetry embodies both result and enactment of

“the attempt, then, to capture *electricity* (*ellegua-ogou-xang*) out of the *inscription* (*nommo*) of this very << *lembe mind* which imprints itself upon the *nanse memory*, an-

(d) that these then *mkissi* create *konnu, okre, icons*” (50).

Brathwaite associatively respells ‘electricity’ with three the names of three Orishas. *Ellegua* refers to the primary Orisha within *Santería*, “*Eleguá*” master and revealer of “paths and { . . . } crossroads” – who could be said to function tidalectically in that he “favors order and disorder; that is, he provides dynamism to vital spaces” through the embodiment of disparate values (*Santería*, *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 918). Toni Pressley Sanon notes that within pantheon of Haitian *Vodou*, *Ellegua* manifests as “*Iwa Legba* { . . . } Guardian of the crossroads”, and at times as the forms of “*Ogun* { . . . } *Ogou Baryè* (barrier, gateway) and *Ogou Panama* (straw hat), another gate-guardian” (*Istwa Across the Water: Hatian history*,

*memory, and the cultural imagination* 10, 102-103). Ogou refers to “Ogun”, the “master of iron”, a “warrior” figure also represented as a “blacksmith” (Santeria, *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 920, 929). ‘Xang’ refers to “Sango/Shango/Changó (lord of thunder and lightning)” in the orisha traditions, who bears associations with kingship and in Santería is additionally “the lord and master of drums { . . . } and virility” (*Orisha Tradition, Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 647; Santeria, *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 918) . Their names, on first glance linguistic play with associative spelling, prove in fact to tidalectically enact the process described in the more lengthy surrounding text. The meanings encapsulated in these electric Iwa are therefore summarizable as: connectivity (Elegua), creativity (Ogou) , and kinetic energy (Xang).

This recalls Brathwaite’s construction of nation language as connecting speaker and cosmic force via some kind of spiritual electricity in *‘The African Presence in Caribbean Literature’*. Brathwaite claims that, “In addition to sound-symbols, nation-language sets up certain tunes, tones and rhythms which are characteristic of the folk tradition { . . . } The overall space/patterns of this language { . . . } are controlled by a groundation tendency, in which image/spirit is electrically conducted to earth like lightning or the loa (the gods, spirits, powers, or divine horsemen of vodun)” (*The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 93).

Brathwaite’s construction syncretizes ideas of Iwa/orisha with Rasta lexical specificity through his pun on electrical grounding, “groundation”, by claiming that the “word/idea (contributed by Rastafari) comes from the experience of religious

possession, its ripples of meaning reach further than the idea of simple, secular "grounding" (93).

Brathwaite's construction here does not completely hold up, due to the aforementioned problem of Rastafari's incompatibility with possession, and an inaccurate definition of 'groundation'. As George Eaton Simpson explains in *'Personal Reflections on Rastafari in West Kingston in the Early 1950s'*, "spirit possession" was "regarded by Rastas as "backward" and never occurred at their gatherings", an observation that fits with the other literature delineating differences between Rastafari and other syncretic Afro-Caribbean traditions (218). Meanwhile, Verna Reckford points out in *'From Burru Drums to Reggae Rhythms'*, the word 'groundation' does not correlate to possession; it refers to gathering for meditative drumming, dance, and cannabis smoking, initiated for the realisation of a "high spiritual feeling" and to "free" the "mind" – but crucially do not enter the epistemological/spiritual space allowing for possession (242, 243).<sup>57</sup>

While important to point out, for the sake of this analysis the differences Brathwaite elides here are less important than the overall idea he conveys. Even if not theoretically accurate with regards to Rastafari, the construction that Brathwaite makes of nation language controlled by spiritual power and transmitted by human channelers of this spiritual power complements the construction of spiritual energy making its inscription on memory. In this manner, Brathwaite's logic behind the punning on electricity and Iwas representing energy comes into focus. 'Connectivity (Elegua), creativity (Ogou), kinetic energy (Xang)' thus builds

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<sup>57</sup> See *'Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader'* for both of these sources.

into: The human grounding rod channels the lwa/orisha, and receives energy, which inscribes new icons into their deep memory. Timehri function as spiritual gifts, resonances left behind by this exchange of energy, providing poetry with local iconography geography and historiography all attuned to one another.

Poetry produced from this consciousness thereby itself may function as timehri. Harris speaks similarly in *The Music of Living Landscapes* about the experience of sound and image replaying in an irresistible and unexpected “Theatre of memory!” the encoded marks of landscape on mind (40). To describe this encoding and replay he relates in present tense a past experience of landscape in which he was immersed, “A fish leaps close to where I stand on a riverbank, in the great dark of the South American rainforest night, and look up at the stars,” a compound image drawing together sound and more than one sense of space (40). The sound of the fish jumping follows Harris once imprinted in his mind. This imprint could be considered a kind of timehri. Speaking in both rhetorical and chronological present tense once again, Harris says “I hear that leap or voice of rippling water all over again across the years as if it’s happening *now*, this very moment, within the Thames of London besides which I have often strolled since arriving in England” the ripples speaking in his memory like a familiar voice over distances of time and geography (40). Harris then explains that “Inner ear and inner eye are linked to eloquent silences in the leap or pulse of light in shadow, shadow light, as if the fish in remembered rivers fly through an ocean of space and witness by enchantment, it seems, to the *miracle* of living skyscapes, oceanscapes, riverscapes wherever these happen to be, on Earth, or at the edge of distant

galaxies" (41). Whether Brathwaite's "mkissi" or Harris's "miracle" the "living" environment finds itself "witness{ed}" and given expressive "inscription" by "timehri" sighted in the physical realm of landscape or psychical realm of imaginative consciousness (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 50; Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 41). Given expression in the mind these timehri also affect epistemological approach to examining abstract formulae and concrete information, or artistic approach to textual composition and analysis. The music underpinning the "living" universe – underpinning "living time" in all of its kinesis – finds itself paradoxically "encoded" into an "imprint...a silence" of poem as timehri (Harris, *Aubrey Williams* 222; *The Music of Living Landscapes* 41; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 201). The timehri silently incorporates the music and tidalectic kinesis of creation and time within its seeming silence and stasis.

Ripple-producing jumps made by enchanted fish through waters of memory work as a more kinetic timehri than Harris's explicitly timehri rocks, one which might satisfy Brathwaite's desire for greater emphasis on kinesis. A similar move toward this inherent kinesis from apparent stasis proves central to Brathwaite's ideas in '*ConVERSations...*' about what Harris accomplishes in his poem '*Vision at the Well*'. As noted above, this poem incorporates into a timehri image seemingly timeless interaction between "woman" and "well of time" (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 104; Harris, *Eternity to Season* 61). Kinesis appears inherent in woman and landscape's interactions with one another through her implied usage of the well and through how "Touched by vision / the light

fingertips of rain pass softly / to change the stone and burden of her perfection,” a kinematic-chain image implying that human seeing constitutes contact which enacts some kind of transformative environmental response (Brathwaite 104,105; Harris 61, 62). Brathwaite claims that Harris’s poem

“{. . .} moves us from the vi  
vid but static ‘grecian urn’ tendency of the antillian ‘timeh  
ri’, into closer to what I have in mind – carrying the memory  
of this primeval, translating it into the ‘present’,”

fashioning a specific and focused yet at the same time kinetic and universally applicable trope out of the local landscape, and working towards a “specific & unique & and universal” meditation on both the physical and societal formation of the space represented (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 203, 54).

On one level Brathwaite’s “static ‘grecian urn’ tendency” comment refers back to examples on the preceding pages of poetry that functions as timehri, but somehow for Brathwaite embodies too many of the timehri’s artefactual attributes (203). On another level this comment distances the concept of timehri itself from its artefactual origins in favour of something actively present yet still imbued with the mythos of eternity. Harris’s stress on the animate and living nature of timehri rock via definition of timehri as “a garment on living time” does include ideas of presence and kinesis – but it also allows for Brathwaite to move from an idea of marked rock as time’s garment to more explicitly kinetic tropes (Harris, Aubrey Williams 222). A move from the “static {. . .} urn” of timehri rock to “quetzalcoatli



flying” by means of ocean creates multiplicities of object and movement that imply a more – or differently – complex trope (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 205). Quetzalcoatl, described in Gordon’s *History of Ancient Mexico* as the “green feathered serpent” god of Aztec pantheon, also represented as pale, bearded man, is considered the inventor of the calendar, guardian skies, and “distributor of the seasons” (183, 184). Quetzalcoatl deployed in this context recalls Brathwaite’s deployment of the Biblical/Canaanite serpent “Leviathan” as part of his multivalent symbol for problematic synthesis; in this context Quetzalcoatl also recalls the serpent image of cyclical time identified in Maureen Warner-Lewis’s analysis of *Masks*<sup>58</sup> (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages* 46; Warner-Lewis 34). The addition of Quetzalcoatl can be read as adding multivalence to Brathwaite’s compounding of tidal movement with time, rounding out a trio of serpent-figures related to ideas of the divine and interacting with one another as nuances of a shared controlling metaphor for progress, temporal or otherwise. By flying, Quetzalcoatl transcends tidalectic weddedness to oceanic space, yet in Brathwaite’s construction it is tidalectic motion of the timehri ocean manifested as poetry that facilitates this flying, As such, that which is being transcended need not be read as tidalectic dynamics themselves so much as the perception that oceanic space constitutes these dynamics sole domain of influence.

Quetzalcoatl crosses boundaries of culture, space, and space-time, as a kind of embodied timehri – which as mentioned above already cognates to poetry. In considering poetry as a form of kinetic timehri, Brathwaite moves from marked rock

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<sup>58</sup> See section above on ‘Tidalectics: Local Revisioning’

to more complicatedly marked and marking ocean. This leads to divine dominion over time held by the embodied, Quetzalcoatl-flying poem, vectored by the tidalectic kinesis of timehri-ocean. Applying the criteria of timehri and its intellectual basis in Harris back to Brathwaite's 'Wordsworthian' ocean gives a sense of what Brathwaite attempts to instil in the ocean with this descriptor. Brathwaite's usage of 'Wordsworthian' for lack of "critical references { . . . } of our own" is tidalectically answered by the directions forwards in the text framing Harris as a potential reference who could complement or possibly even replace Wordsworth (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 53-54). It becomes apparent that Brathwaite means to say he is attempting to systemize the ocean as both trope and literal manifestation of the properties with which he intellectually and metaphorically charges it; in this manner it functions like a timehri.

Since something described as Wordsworthian also carries within its descriptor the weight of poetic authorship, the ocean may also function like the hand authoring or projecting itself as timehri. Indeed, during a moment in '*Barabajan Poems*' when a young Brathwaite lies "watching the light from the sea on the wall of the room", the ocean constantly writes an image of itself on the wall, producing a kinetic timehri representing and produced by tidalectic wave motion (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 109). A timehri sea-authored in light. It is the sea's literally reflective qualities that allow it to write in light that becomes "*water on the wall*", established tidalectic interplays between water, light, and stone interlinking with the archetypic timehri's similar elemental constituents (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 109).

An obvious parallel arises with the Judeo-Christian Biblical story of Belshazzar's Feast, from which the colloquialism about 'the writing on the wall' originates. In Daniel 5 1-31, King Belshazzar has a feast and uses sacred vessels from the Jewish temple as cups. In response, God or one of his avatars appears from the shadows as a hand, writing on the wall:

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote { . . . } Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof." (Daniel 5.5, 5.8)

The sea writing on light on Brathwaite's wall performs a similar action. The speaker can see the fact of it 'writing' and can discern the shapes it is making - but the face of the author beyond the hand and the meanings of that which inscribes remain closed off in the same way that King Belshazzar and his wise men cannot read the writing on the wall. Is Brathwaite setting himself up as a Daniel figure, able to read whatever the sea writes in light and from it foretell doom? Such a reading proves tempting – but fails to work because in this example the speaker cannot discern any more meaning behind the sea's writing than the reader. It is the fact of writing by extrahuman agent that is of more importance in this instance. By the same token, the fact of the speaker's immersive experience in a room filled with this language of water written in light / light written in water proves more important than any ascription of meaning. It allows for recognition of the fact of the sea's writing – itself enough to facilitate perspectival shift, even without an obvious divinatory

parallel in Brathwaite's construction. The idea of timehri as marks written by the hand of God recalls Wilson Harris's idea of timehri as the "mark of the hand, therefore, the hand of God upon rock { . . . } a confirmation of our intercourse with living nature" (Harris, Aubrey Williams 222). Recognition of writing – or apprehension of writing in the markings made by environmental timehri, in this case embodied as ocean – proves to be the most important part of this Biblical reference. Interpretation and oracle, at least for now, remain submerged in the experience itself, the young Brathwaite speaker/subject left bathing in water and light.

The properties that Brathwaite charges the ocean with and which it literally also embodies include its statuses as kinetic vector/vessel rather than "static" container/vessel for ancient "memory," and as a local landscape that facilitates and self-describes the "specific & unique & and universal" forces that shape it while linking the "primeval" physical origination and ongoing social development of the spaces it contains (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 203, 54). In these aspects Brathwaite's 'Wordsworthian' ocean also resembles Harris's timehri. Exercising creative authority over local perspective and explicitly building on concepts from Harris, Brathwaite formulates the ocean as a kind of animated, outwardly-kinetic yet still eternal timehri that itself might contain and vector many more timehri.

By making connections with Wordsworth and the poetry of Wilson Harris, Brathwaite asserts in explicitly literary terms the ocean's dually literal and archetypal roles in facilitating the tidalectic relationships and conditions which he views as inherent to Caribbean experience. Literary deployment of the ocean in this

context requires extensive re-imagining and movement beyond established tropes of ocean as empty space, object of human exploitation, or vector of travel – all of which favour human agency over the extrahuman, and self-determinacy over other forms of environmental mediation over selfhood. Brathwaite's tidalectic metaphor diverges from these readings. It foregrounds the ebb&flow of tidal movement rather than the movement of human traversing tide, and it recalls constantly the overlaps between physical and psychical spaces in terms of this ebb&flow. While transposing these overlaps onto multiple layers of potential selfhood, it populates oceanic space with divine beings capable of facilitating human channelling of deep collective memory through the interactive yet unconscious production of oceanic timehri.

### 3. TIDAL ENACTMENTS

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Momentarily stepping outside of the nexus between Brathwaite and Harris provides opportunity to test and challenge some of the inferences so far drawn, and observe how these inferences open new lines of inquiry into tidalectic metaphor.

Consider the brief interview portion of Bahamian poet Christian Campbell's BBBC poetry postcard<sup>59</sup>. Campbell first declares, "That primal scene of the brochure, the beach, is this sort of space of respite and beauty," his language picking up the associate values of the brochure (Campbell). The scene is 'primal' in that it is the primary or base scene for touristic representation within the medium of the brochure; it is also 'primal' in that the visual language of the brochure picture tends to elide or minimize the appearance of encroaching development or entrenched urbanity surrounding this primal environment. At the same time, however, the beach is a "space of respite and beauty" – both naturally mediated and yet both more in alignment with the manufactured, brochure-ready element of the beach than its primal qualities (Campbell).

As Campbell continues to talk about the beach, geo/historical triggers activate in his psyche. Campbell offers the tidalectic backflow, "but it's also this historical site of extreme violence right when we think about the relationship

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<sup>59</sup> See BBC Radio Scotland – Christian Campbell : Poetry Postcards, The Bahamas (2014)

between the beach and the sea or slavery and the slave trade or indentureship” (Campbell). The beach that Campbell looks back on fondly from adulthood contains – accumulated below the poet’s grounding in physical footprint on sand and grounding in personally/communally influenced psychical experience of beach-going – historical undertows of brutality. It is not possible to perceive one without seeing the other, yet something akin to this process allows for Campbell’s simultaneous enjoyment and consciousness of a former site of brutality.

The action of wind and water on sand works to mark the beach space as a kind of timehri, kinetic in the same manner as the ocean, vectored with iterative ebb&flow. Within the physical ebb&flow of sand and water, something less fully analysed comes to the fore. The mechanics of this kinetic timehri reveal themselves as concurrent processes of erosion, accumulation, and drift.

Accumulated drift deposits and erosive outflows create a space that, like its sands, remains in a state of flux. Campbell continues, “you know the beach is one of the most complex and ironic and layered spaces”, the layering both physical in terms of layers of sand/material, and psychical in terms of layered meanings (Campbell). Like physical layers of sand, these psychical layers do not perfectly cover or reveal each other. Rather, they imprecisely grown, shrink, and mix with successive accumulations and erosions, and also drift into unpredictable patterns, so “that beauty and the terror and the pleasure and the violence so you see all of that at the same Time { . . . } that’s what it means to be a Caribbean person right that deep paradox” (Campbell).

The paradox at the heart of Caribbean personhood reveals itself to Campbell though the animated timehri of wave on beach, a process of literal layering and unlayering as wave accumulatively deposits and erosively strips away materials from and of the beach. His close engagement and immersion in the beach landscape facilitate his understanding or realisation on a subconscious level of these processes. The combination of this close attention to living landscape and receptiveness to tidalectically kinetic timehri allows Campbell to discern more in the image from the brochure than the static photograph conveys. Campbell's brief associative dive into deep memory, through tranquil tourist brochure and beyond his personal memory of growing up by the beach – a deep dive into waters of malevolent associative value – brings him into contact with a history for which he may not have expected or attempted to reach, but which leaps out to meet him, animated by psychic resonance. As Campbell speaks, the beach functions as a tidalectically kinetic timehri, while the tourist brochure image of the beach becomes a forgotten archetype of mass tourism.

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Itself a form of timehri, the ocean embodies and enacts that which it signifies. Coast and sea and other aspects of the living landscape also embody and enact tidalectic processes. Local landscape becomes conduit for perception across geographic, temporal, and psychic spaces. Brathwaite's ideal response to universalized metropolitan tropes roots itself in an imperfect counter-universalization of the local. The ebb&flow inherent in tidalectics entails that this counter reveals



interstices and lapses of perception that allow multivalence to be compounded into ever more complex formulations.

While emphasizing the literary, this gesture also gathers and codifies the numerous instances of oceanic language and imagery hitherto and afterwards deployed in areas relatively far away from specific musings on the tidalectic into an ocean of representation and resonance greater than their individual moments of usage confer. Any instance of oceanic metaphor can be further unpacked in terms of its relation to kinetic timehri ocean's literal motions, and their emblematic enactment of the tidalectic processes inherent in that which they describe. At the same time that they relate back to the tidalectic, these individual instances of oceanic metaphor become relatable to each other also. One may begin to ponder how concepts of "drift" might relate to "erosion" within established tidalectic parameters, as in the discussion on Christian Campbell above; on the other hand one may investigate how these concepts modify established tidalectic understandings (54, 104).

Questions arise as to how interplay between tidalectic processes and ideas of timehri facilitate the wrecking and reworking of colonial archetypes, while also bearing in mind the tidalectic systems of relation from which they derive. The metaphorically oceanic elements of the text flesh out the mechanics of forces at play in the moments dealing explicitly with the tidalectic.

### Erosion and Counter

If tidalectic forces vector the passage of cultural development, they also play a potentially destructive role on the spaces they affect. The term “erosion” first describes the “erosion of the Mother’s hopes dreams expectations etc” that take place in Brathwaite’s volume *‘Mother Poem’* (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 54). This plays with the dual characterization of island and mother at work in this volume; furthermore, it works to maintain the links between psychological and physical spaces fostered throughout Brathwaite’s tidalectic epistemology.

Shortly thereafter, he describes *‘Sun Poem’* as “a counter-erosion imaging – counter to the erosion I discover in **Mother Poem**/Barbados/in my own life of course/in my own mother/lineage age/ing etc – which means that under the ‘counter’ that what i call ‘erosion’ is still *there* and I still can’t account for it except to say that it leads me to **X/Self**,” a statement that gestures toward a definition of “erosion” but remains vague and multidimensional (55-56). Counter-erosion works in the context of ebb&flow as counter-flow to erosion. .

The implied idea that ‘counter-erosion’ enacted by writing opposes forces of erosion could help to simplify an understanding of the term ‘erosion’ by embodying its opposite, but via wordplay Brathwaite complicates things threefold:

(1) By declaring that counter-erosion also refers to hidden erosion (“under the ‘counter’” colloquially referring to a hidden exchange);

(2) By means of the inverted commas around “counter” leading, via ideas of counters/counting in the context of poetry, to an understanding of “counter-erosion” and erosion “under the ‘counter’ as not oppositional forces to erosion but rather as a somehow inappropriate/alien meter or other type of counter either causally iterating or more passively numerating erosion;

(3) Finally, by how the assonant and trans-rational tidalectic reformation of counter into “I still can’t account for it,” speaks to a notion of Brathwaite the poet as an enumerator or counter of erosions which he then catalogues or discourses on in poetry which acts as this erosion’s counter-action (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 55-56). In this formulation the poet complexly becomes both complicit in (being in one sense erosion’s passive and ineffectual enumerator) and resistant to (being in one sense erosion’s active counter-actor) processes of erosion.

Positively tidalectic counter-erosion by means of writing therefore refers idealistically to reclamation of culture and of self, similar to reclamation of lost land (lost ground); it also refers to a literary enumeration and recounting of various erosions, that which erodes and that which is eroded.

Meanwhile, the fact that this leads Brathwaite to his idea of X/Self reaffirms the personal/identity-related erosions that occur along with larger geographic, political, or cultural erosions – while the actual definition of what erosion actually ‘is’ and the precise delineation or categorization of what is being eroded remains elusive. This being said, all the meanings of ‘erosion’, and some of the negatively tidalectic

meanings inherent/immanent in 'counter-erosion', eventually refer back to processes of cultural loss

Much later in *'ConVERSations...'* Brathwaite states that the "Amerindian imagination" no longer has a "presence" in the Caribbean, having "almost been totally eradicated, eroded and destroyed . . . so that we only get glimpses of it – which means/suggests that this Presence was – is – not as 'totally eroded' as the stereotype has it," (199). By this formulation, 'erosion' refers to a sweeping away of – making invisible – cultures by the waves that brought "Columbus" and the tide of events his arrival unleashed (199). It is not simply the physical presence of the Amerindian that has been eroded, but a larger consciousness encapsulated as their "imagination" (199). Erosion therefore refers to both the literal physical erosion of space, and to a range of metaphoric psychological erosions of identity. Both processes draw from the same wave-force of physical erosion, but the psychological dimension of these vectors may extend beyond the initial reach of physical environmental phenomena. Distressing as the inundation or sweeping away of physical space may prove, Brathwaite's central concern remains psychological erosion of culture and identity.

This central concern finds expressive linkage to concepts of erosion at a moment in 'New Gods of the Middle Passages' in which, similarly to the list accompanying the watershed moment in *'ConVERSations...'*, Brathwaite speaks about tidalectically positive and negative events. Their sum demonstrates the necessity of constant positively tidalectic activity to counter persistent negation:

“Over & over again we disco

ver that when we achieve something like cricket, World Cup dances,  
Federation that that something is slowly sometimes almost immediately –  
once again being eroded/but that our responsibility is not to la

ment it but to start again” (Brathwaite, *New Gods of the Middle Passages*  
47)”.

The erosion of achievement begins almost immediately and occurs at various rates. Erosion might not constitute immediate erasure of achievement, but its ongoing nature portends possibilities of total erasure in the absence of corrective counter-flows.

Erosion is to be expected – it erodes something away “once again”, a seemingly inevitable eventuality (47). By emphasizing a “responsibility { . . . } to start again”, Brathwaite stresses the importance of positive acts and efforts that might constitute positive forms of counter-erosion, and also the constant and repeated yet varied – tidalectic – motions constituted by such acts of counter erosion (47). Erosion itself, then, must be multi-vectored, continuous, cause of partial erasure and reconfiguration of that which it erodes. Erosion itself is therefore a tidalectic process. Erosive reconfiguration occurs regardless of the existence or nonexistence of processes of counter-erosion.

This relates thematically to an instance in which Brathwaite recounts a “night”, in which all positively tidalectic geophysical, cultural and personal elements of his islands drift (113). This night of drifts becomes a space,

“where other image/pressures begin to impinge/impose them

selves – creating, in a strange way, an unhinging process – an unhingin

(g) of like the archipelago itself – a metaphorical chip

ping away of it – hence (itself a ‘strange’ word but part of this ‘ne

(w)’/old ‘Europe’ world) at one level- **X/self**” (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 113).

In this paragraph, the words “unhinging” and “chipping away” perform similar functions to the preceding and following deployments of “erosion” while again leading the poet to respond with *X/self* and a charting of how forces exerting influence on collective self-understanding affect individual consciousness (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 55-56, 113, 199). The idea that “other image/pressures” – in terms of poetic image and form, or in terms of pressure to conform to images generated by others – act as erosive forces through

“metaphorical chip

ping away of {the archipelago}”

further situates aspects of erosive process in the literary and representational field while ascribing to these processes a literal act of erosion (113). Meanwhile the

verbal and procedurally adjectival/adverbial classification of ‘erosion’ – ‘chipping’ – foregrounds the idea that active forces cause this loss of cultures in a manner preclusive of the possibility that these cultures passively disappear or assimilate into dominant cultural norms of their own accord, or through some form of passive ‘loss’.

Complicating further a concept of erosion as a force external to the poet which the poet then counters or recounts is the idea that “counter-erosion” may also refer to a positively tidalectic act of “erosion” performed by the poet which runs “counter” to external erosive forces (55). This understanding of erosion can be applied to the above-mentioned “mechanics of this document”, which describes the final stage of Brathwaite’s methodology as “KB undertakes the palimpsest & eventual return to Chris for precious process publication,” (15). Brathwaite’s verbal act of “palimpsest”, that is “to write again on (parchment, etc.) after the original writing has been effaced; to overwrite (an earlier text)”, posits a creative and tidalectically positive act of both erasure and overwriting as ‘erosion-as-counter-erosion’ on the part of the poet (*Oxford English Dictionary*; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 15, 55).

The geographic/geological usages of the word “palimpsest” – as descriptor of phenomena such as the unique topographies generated by “drainage pattern{s} { . . . } exhibiting superimposed features produced at two or more distinct periods”, and of “sediment or deposit { . . . } that has been reworked since it was first laid down” – maintain the submerged connection between natural process and

compositional practice inherent in Brathwaite's deployment of the terms 'palimpsest' and 'erosion' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

More overtly, Brathwaite's constitutive act of "palimpsest" renders the entire manuscript of 'ConVERSations. . .' a "palimpsest" in the word's nounal form: "A parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In this manner, Brathwaite connects a localized epistemology to contemporary technological production of an ancient art form. By doing so, he recalls the sentiment expressed much earlier by Aubrey Williams that the true avant-garde must be located in contemporary production of traditional art, rather than modernist pretensions toward ideas of the primitive.

The text does not again explicitly reference its own eroded nature or the erasures undertaken by Brathwaite. However, a question asked by Mackey that begins "You mentioned MIT and MTV" and goes on to ask about "hieroglyphs" and "petroglyphs" retains its place in the manuscript, with notation attached to explain why Mackey's question says Brathwaite has "mentioned" subject matter that he has not (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 192). The note refers "to a section of the *Conversations* now deleted in which Brathwaite expresses [Nov 93] more interest in video performance than he does now [May 97]," (192). This lays bare the text as palimpsest and displays Brathwaite's usage of erosion, stripping material from the earlier text and washing it up later in broken/partial form.



A few pages later, Brathwaite appears to answer, “referencing Nate’s Q about hieroglyphs” (195). However, the full note to this answer refers to this question as “Nate’s Q ref hieroglyphics, p.158” (195). Because Mackey’s only question about hieroglyphics is the question a few pages earlier, this looks like an erroneous ascription of page number – either to Mackey’s question, or to deleted material it references. However, if the reader flips back to page 158, a description of Brathwaite’s mudslide-ruined house in Irish Town and the negative effect of this destruction on the poet’s ability to write fills the middle of the page in prominently centred text (192,195,158). The act of erasing text and creating a palimpsestic document thereby links itself to physical forces and metaphorical concepts of erosion present on the text by channelling the reader’s focus back to a massively destructive instance of physical erosion.

The example of erasure and its linkage to erosive forces operates tidalectically. Brathwaite’s positively tidalectic erosion of the text via erasure and overwriting flows back, via the reference to page 158, to the result of a negatively tidalectic overwriting/erasure by erosion of Brathwaite’s writing over which he has no control, before leaving the reader adrift in the earlier chapter’s final moments (158, 195). At this point the reader can skim or skip like a stone over water to where they left off in chapter XI. If they so choose they can also keep reading and wade back through thirty-seven pages of chapters X and XI – the first of which deals extensively with Brathwaite’s “murder by two gunmen” and his subsequent “resurrection” with its echoes of the tidalectic genesis image as Brathwaite “begin{s} to dream, stepping on these stones of pearl and peril, back into each

morning, re/living, re/learning,” – until once again reaching the note on page 195 where the possibility of again turning back to 158 invites the reader to join in the gyre-motion of Brathwaite’s ongoing resurrection while also entering a tidalectic gyre/ebb-and-flow motion of both content and physical text (158-195, 162, 164). The point that may be lost in the charting of that long resurrective circle through the text is that it also enacts tidalectic cyclicity in terms of imperfect progression through denotative meaning. A textual feedback loop, this device simulates a kind of electronic malfunction within the space of the paper book. It also creates a negatively tidalectic dynamic within which Brathwaite’s home is destroyed again and again, he is murdered again and again, etc. This demonstrates the problematic status of entrapment in negatively tidalectic constructs. Tidalectics thereby accounts for, absorbs, and combines the processes of palimpsest, erasure, and erosion into its own host process.

## Drift

While processes of erosion take place, another metaphorically oceanic process facilitates, describes, and functions as element of tidalectic motion: drift. The idea of drift surfaces when Brathwaite asks questions reminiscent of those from which the word 'tidalectic' emerged,

*"What is the nature of my educatio*

*(n)? What is the nature of all these cultural and assum-*

*ptional continental drifts that make me what I complex*

*fragmented contradictory etc etc etc –*

**am**

*how is the magic and where and why the **yam** – the real*

*reality Why is my beautiful landscape harbour so materi-*

*alistically rather than so magicalistically exploited?" (Brathwaite,*

*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey 104).*

Actual continental drift cannot be excluded from Brathwaite's greater conceit, if only to extend the realm of tidalectic space to landmasses themselves – creating further conflation and complication between physical spaces and eschewing more obvious metaphorization involving fixed notions of land and fluid notions of ocean. Even though it seems like a literally and metaphorically big topic, the fact of

continental drift cannot be lost on a tidalectic understanding of reality. By remaining mindful of this dynamic, Brathwaite asks, How do various continents' cultural elements and modes of thinking/seeing interact with the poet, society, and each other? How do vagaries of drift affect the poetic modes and means used to represent this space? These questions may prove unanswerable, but the process of asking can lead to productive inquiry.

This said, "continental drifts" refers simultaneously to drifts or gatherings of various cultures and their perspectives, to the drifts or forces that carry them, and to the poet's own internal/perceptual drifts (104). In the latter of these processes, lexical drift enacts drift elsewhere. The verb 'to be' expressed as "am" drifts into "yam", both a play on the vegetable and on Caribbean-specific meanings (104). "Yam" recalls "Kouche Yam (Consecration of the Yam)" – a harvest season ceremony in Hatian Vodou in which "the yam { . . . } thought to be the soul of the earth" is consecrated along with other parts of the harvest in a ceremony reminiscent of human initiation rites (Brathwaite 104; Vodou, *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 1066). The symbology of the yam as the soul of the Earth cognates back to two core epistemologies of the word 'am': ideas of sentience and selfhood. 'Yam' also bears sonic resemblance to the African-derived Caribbean word 'nyam', which Brathwaite elsewhere defines as "foods and foodstyles (nyam<sup>^</sup>/yam)" and asociativly connects these to "(*nommo* - Bantu for the Word) and ideas (*nam*)" (*The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 75) . Selfhood connects to food, which leads to the soul, to naming and to the word itself.

The associative values of unspoken popular lexicon here come to surface – ‘I am what I am’, ‘I am what I eat’, ‘I am the Word’ – in a manner that seems unlikely would be lost on a poet so invested in linguistic play. The fact that some of this is associative fits with the unfixity and unpredictability of drift, casting drift as a tidalectically transrational vector. English language drifts into Creole and then into an identifiable African language via subtle changes of letter and inflection. Sense of self as represented by the word ‘am’ demonstrably holds potential for similar drifts. A series of drifts between meanings functions tidalectically, with the word “am” coming unfixed within the ebb&flow between meanings. Continents metaphorically drift into one another as their cultures and epistemologies interact in tidalectic spaces of psyche and ocean.

At the same time, related drifts carry physical forces of exclusion and exploitation, “Hotels {...} squatting on {...} metaphors” that cause assumptive/perceptual drifts within the culture where they squat, orienting its representational processes toward service of the materialistic functions they require (104, 105). The hotels placed along the beach by mostly foreign<sup>60</sup> ownership could read as extremely large examples of longshore drift. Meanwhile the accumulation of continental flotsam created by drift is also referred to as a drift. In the next chapter, Brathwaite speaks of his finding it

“is very very difficile to find the words – ‘the right words’? –

to fit these things, these drifting continents of feeling, driftin

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<sup>60</sup> Foreignness being important only so far as the construction of the drift metaphor, wherein these hotels have arrived with the tides, is concerned. Local hotels could also drift along the shore.

(g) like in the night – “

This seems to refer both to Brathwaite’s surreal “encounter with Europe as a weird unexpected echo of the ‘encounter’ with my father {...} with all the love doubts ambiguities + in this case of course the need for complex liberation”, and to his slightly earlier discourse on “cultural and assumptional continental drifts” (113, 111, 104).

At first glance the two constructions of continental drift at play here seem relatively stable for a process of constant movement. However, there is significant pressure placed on both terms by their unfixed linguistic constructions, let alone any process of drift they denote. The main difference between Brathwaite’s conceits here and earlier is that “continents of feeling” paradoxically functions as a noun denoting a physical unit, whereas “continental drifts” adverbially denotes a specific process (113, 104). Each of these constructions at first reads as if they are in fact the opposite. Indeed tidalectic dynamics allow for a verbal “continents of feeling” and nounal “continental drift” to coexist with the previously mentioned delineations (113, 104). The geographic and emotive processes denoted signal interplay between geographic drift and drifting conception of self in relation to familial and spatial orientation.

Each construction of drift above therefore falls subject to internal drift or contains elements of drift within its scope of potential meanings. Linguistic play proves to be the most significant enactor of drift in the tidalectic text, facilitating larger drifts between continents with the slightest drift of a letter. In this case,

Brathwaite's tendency to split words over lines and/or by means of punctuation manifests itself as "driftin {line break in original} (g) like in the night" with the g adrift from the rest of its word and floating on the page in a set of brackets (113). This creates a pun in which a 'driftin' g' is doing just that. This "driftin {line break in original} (g)" mirrors the erosive processes of "unhingin{line break in original} (g)" and "chip{line break in original} ping" mentioned later on the page physically illustrating how processes of drift affect that which has been eroded or chipped away from larger constructs (113). 'Unhingin g' makes a similar pun to 'driftin g', demonstrating drift between denotative and illustrative meanings that are tidalectically both the same and different. The construct 'Chip ping' adds a sonic element that represents the 'ping' sound of chips chipping away from things – including the word itself. This construction paradoxically ascribes a sound to a silent scribal practice that actually makes sense in reality. The simultaneous physicality and ephemerality of the word are thereby demonstrated in transrational tidalectic space.

### Harmattan and Hurrigan{e}

Various wind forces are evidently at play in Brathwaite's oceanic cosmology – from the “sand” that must be constantly swept back from the coastal home by the old woman in the tidalectic genesis-image, to real and conceptual “hurricane{s}”, to the “harmattan” winds that defined the economy and population of colonial space (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 29-30, 136, 303). Interplay between ocean and wind produce tidalectic currents vectoring human and cultural passage. This carries the added associative weight of the transatlantic slave trade, as the harmattan form a prevailing wind between West Africa (and beyond, given their vectors over land before reaching water) and the Caribbean. Brathwaite's incorporation of the concept of harmattan into tidalectic epistemology draws together more than the metaphorized transatlantic motions of wind and water, and functions beyond obvious reinforcement of his contention that physical elemental forces foster ongoing cultural linkages between Africa and the Caribbean.

Two of these functions should be summarised before the harmattan receives closer attention: Firstly, the wind element harmattan explicitly Africanizes the contentious territory of transatlantic current it tidalectically compliments. This does not imply political or economic mastery, but rather a deep psychological connection to communal horror and the potential for this past yet ongoing horror's translation into positive contemporaries. Secondly, equating the tidalectic wind element to harmattan links tidalectic epistemology to some of Brathwaite's earliest discourses on elementally mediated African-Caribbean connections.



The harmattan features in Brathwaite's sleeve notes to *Rights of Passage*, reproduced at the beginning of his essay on '*The African Presence in Caribbean Literature*'. Brathwaite describes harmattan as

"the seasonal dust-cloud, drifting out of the great ocean of sahara — the harmattan, by an obscure miracle of connection, arab's nomad wind, cracker of fante wood a thousand miles away, did not die the sea-shore of west africa, its continental limit; it drifted on, reaching the world archipelago to create our drought, imposing an african season on the Caribbean sea. and it was on these winds too, and in this season, that the slave ships came from guinea, bearing my ancestors" (73)

In this early example, overlap or conflation between seascape and landscape already prove essential to the ongoing connections and back-and-forth motion between African and Caribbean spaces that Brathwaite will later characterize as tidalectic. The first and most noticeable evidence of this motion is dust in conflation with water, like in Brathwaite's later depiction of tidalectic archetype or generative image as an old woman sweeping and walking on water. Harmattan conceptually unites wind, dust, and water within vectored transatlantic current. Indeed, Brathwaite's placement of this excerpt at the beginning of both his first major collection and this essay from seven years later signals the importance conferred by the author on harmattan as a formative African element of Caribbean cultural space. Like other elements of tidalectic epistemology, the harmattan facilitates tangible in addition to conceptual unities. Dust borne on the harmattan constitutes

a visible physical geographic manifestation of ongoing tidalectic interchanges between Africa and the Americas.

Brathwaite's definition of harmattan differs somewhat from the *Oxford English Dictionary* description of "A dry parching land-wind, which blows during December, January, and February, on the coast of Upper Guinea in Africa; it obscures the air with a red dust-fog," although he does base it on the real trade wind (which the OED surprisingly does not describe it as) and its transatlantic vector (*Oxford English Dictionary*). However, the dictionary definition signals a contemporary meaning of the harmattan for African and Caribbean spaces, much less glamorous than any of Brathwaite's observations: seasonal allergies and dust "the harmattan brings { . . . } from the Sahara { . . . } across the Atlantic into the Caribbean" to varying degrees each season (John 455).<sup>61</sup>

In *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, Brathwaite's defines "harmattan" as,

"[the seasonal wind blowing out of the Sahara and across the stethoscope of the MiddlePass-

*age Atlantic – trade winds – slave trade winds{...}]"*

a definition tailored to the spatial and historical specificities of the Caribbean (303). Brathwaite's definition conceptually situates trade winds, and winds in general, as forces operating over both land and ocean that enable exchanges to occur along its vectors, while specifying the "harmattan. . .slave trade winds", that enabled

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<sup>61</sup> See 'Palynological investigation of haze dust in Ayetoro-Itele Ota, Southwest Nigeria', *Journal of Ecology and the Natural Environment* Vol. 3.14 (455-460)

colonialism and the resultant formation of cultural space on the islands, as those to which attention must primarily be paid (303). The attention that is paid to them is not posited as a purely historical perspective; their definition as “seasonal” makes explicit their continued activity and implies that this ongoing activity bears examination (303).

This definition is complicated and enriched by the description embedded in it of the “MiddlePass-  
age Atlantic” as a “stethoscope” – “an instrument used for examining the chest or other part by auscultation, the sounds of the heart, lungs, or other internal organs being conveyed by means of it to the ear of the observer” – implying that trade routes and the sea itself can be listened to and that what they convey in this case is transmitted via them from the interior of Africa into the Caribbean physical space and consciousness (*Oxford English Dictionary*; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 303). The interplay/influence of “harmattan” winds on “MiddlePass-  
age” trade routes illustrates the manner in which both wind and water enable the ocean’s tidalectic motion to facilitate the stethoscopic transmission of peoples and cultures (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 303). The sea becomes the transmitter through which the poet can tune in to Africa, one living landscape transmitting the music of another, but this is only part of its function as conduit for physical and psychological/cultural drifts. Meanwhile the stethoscope’s application in listening to that which is internal clarifies that it is the Middle Passage, and the Atlantic ocean’s attendant trade routes, to which the Caribbean poet must listen in order to hear or discern that which is at the heart of

their own cultural space. By listening to that which is transmitted over the ocean one also tunes in and listens to ones' own psychic interior and, potentially, aspects of the physical factors at work in its shaping/definition.

While the concept of "harmattan" gives name and mechanical definition to one of the forces enabling or working in concert with drifts and potentially causing erosions, it also allows an element of agency to those who feel its effects as Brathwaite declares it necessary to "check the harmattan {...} and make more provision{line break in original}to save {...} to rescue and pre{line break in original}serve, since no lasting civilization can build on hurricanes" (303). Brathwaite's usage of the term 'check' could be taken to mean both examining the harmattan and countering its negative effects.

The idea of the Middle Passage and/or other trade routes as stethoscope lends one potential explanation for how exactly the harmattan is to be checked, with the poet listening and formulating responses to it via the ocean. Brathwaite's definition of "harmattan" as "slave trade winds" with his declaration about "hurricanes" attached to it harkens back to, and in fact almost directly quotes from, his discourse involving linked concepts of "hurricane" and "hurrican" as they appear in 'History of the Voice' (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 7, 8, 10; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 303). In the earlier work, Brathwaite speaks about "the labour on the edge of the *slave* trade winds, the labour on the edge of the hurrican, the labour on the ledge of Africa" as the source of African peoples and languages in the Caribbean, with "the hurrican" referring to the Mid-Atlantic

gyre as a massive hurricane generating the winds and currents that define geographically the manner in which colonial society formed and developed economically, politically, socially and culturally through a facilitation of the transatlantic slave trade (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 7). The edges of the gyre on the coasts of Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe account for the geopolitical systems of trade and exploitation and the vectors of movement of goods, peoples and ideas.

Ongoing hurricane, facilitator of both middlepassage catastrophe and cultural (re)genesis, must be considered in order for the tidal language and culture of those in its path to be properly represented. This procedure sounds like a work of geomorphology, but in fact involves the practical task of considering “hurricane” as physicality beyond human agency (7). While in *‘History...’* the “hurricane” represents the mid-Atlantic gyre, it shares the same conceptual space with more traditionally defined “hurricanes” when Brathwaite speaks about the necessity for localized “perceptual models” that can account for “the force of the hurricanes which take place every year” and laments that “we haven’t got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane” (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 8). This line of inquiry proves reminiscent of that undertaken by Harris when he stresses the need for awareness that “we are in nature, of nature’s chorus in response to hurricane or waterfall” in *‘The Music of Living Landscapes’* (Harris 43). For the purpose of *‘History...’*, Brathwaite identifies the problem in achieving such a perceptual model

in issues of scansion and syllabics and questions of traditional forms, “the pentameter { . . . } carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameters. And that’s the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the *natural* experience, the *environmental* experience?” (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 10). This is not an outright rejection of all European forms or all usage of pentameter so much as a call for strategic decisions regarding when to eschew traditional forms for non-traditional forms that result in the best possible evocation of Caribbean experience – and, conversely for a different kind of measure divorced from or de-emphasizing metric counting.

In ConVERSations, the manner of looking at or being conscious of the culturally formative and destructive effects of “hurrican” moves explicitly from a historical procedure to, if one is to “check the harmattan”, a means of discerning that which is happening in relation to this gyre at the present time – a means for discerning the “hurricanes” that might be generated within the greater “hurricane” in the same way that one might look out for smaller tornados during the onslaught of an actual hurricane’s inner bands (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 7; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 303). This approach posits a more active role on the part of the checker of the harmattan, providing opportunity to prepare, to ‘preserve’ and make contingencies for the onset of upheaval in the form of hurricanes – to ‘check’ as in to ‘counter’ harmattan, opposed to the more passive

appraisal of hurricane's role in culture formation after the fact as enacted in *History of the Voice*'. The multiplicity of meanings created by the breaking of the word 'preserve' in Brathwaite's call to "pre / serve" transforms the word's obvious temporal associations with a preserved or petrified past into a future-tense "exhortation to value tradition" in the face of cyclical destruction and rebirth, reminiscent of that identified by Warner-Lewis in the African symbology of *Masks* (Brathwaite 303; Warner-Lewis 17). It also implies service, both service to the traditions preserved and on some level service to the overarching cyclical forces with which the checker of the harmattan must engage. In terms of the African spiritual traditions that Brathwaite espouses, ideas of hurricane also correlate to the Santería Orisha, "Oya" – "owner of whirlpools and flash of lightning" as well as guardian of the cemetery, deepening her associations with the hurricane and potential destruction (Santería, *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 920). Present earlier in Brathwaite's text, her potential for electricity and storm remain (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 51). Her submergence within the discourse adds complication to the gendering of oceanic space so far engaged, in which male figures tend toward fury and electricity while female figures tend toward water and comfort.

As called for in '*History...*', '*ConVERSations...*' also fleshes out a "perceptual model", inclusive of the "hurricane" in its oceanic discourse on tidalectic motion and its attendant processes, by virtue not only of its content but also its non-traditional hybrid form in which back-and-forth collaboration, drifting quotations and drifts in perception, revision and erasure, and other elements of tidalectic

compositional practices pushing the text's form to "approximate{...}natural" and "environmental experience" in the process of its discourse on the same (Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 7, 10; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*). The concept of "hurricane" provides the tidalectic epistemological space with another prominent force derived from wind and water, a destructive enactment of the Atlantic gyre's cyclical currents reproduced in miniature form (303). Brathwaite's description of "the roulette of annual hurricanes" posits the hurricane as a cyclical event expressing tidalectic dynamics of randomized cyclical recurrence and vectored motion (303). This relates also to the destruction by hurricane of Brathwaite's "house" and "archives," his ability to "physically write" overcome by feeling

"as if Naip-

aul right after all . That we have created nothing,"

as if the hurricane's destruction reinforces and vindicates VS Naipaul's declaration, "History is built around achievement and creation, and nothing was created in the West Indies" (139, 158,140). Indeed, the destruction of Brathwaite's archives seems to have left such a mark on his thinking that years later he still calls for not physical archives but,



“archives of sound of memory archives of the oral archives of spirit, the archive as the sun piano on which you play the troubles and the travails of your soul {} archives of ownership, of reclamation of record of discovery of yourself in a strange land by the stilled or turmoiled waters where you lay down and weep where you lay down and dream where you become free the oral moment here as text becoming the oral moment as text becoming {} a slave knows that they are free when he or she has reclaimed his archives {} freedom archives without the printing block, without the roman alphabet” or the scope for disappearance in a single event of physical erasure (Brathwaite, Black Writers Conf. 2010 - Kamau Brathwaite, Poet - YouTube).

By searching for his archival response to erosion in tropes derived from local landscape, Brathwaite works in the spirit of Harris’s feeling that “the landscape, for me, is like an open book, and the alphabet with which one worked was all around me” (Harris, *The Music of Living Landscapes* 43, 40). The hurricane acts as an enhancer or instigator of erosive forces and is therefore linguistically linked and conflated with the destructive forces that affect the land. The “mountain of hardening mud” with which the hurricane-induced mudslide covers his house characterized as being caused by “this earthquake of hurricane – I call it ‘earthquake’ – from that lannslide of the hurricane –” further indicates the extent

to which hurricane exerts the tidalectically erosive influence of oceanic space on dry land (Brathwaite 154).

The idea of earthquake picks up the text's ongoing conflation between drifting continents, continental drift, and the movement of people and culture over water. When Brathwaite describes himself as "walking {...} on earthquake" he seals this connection with the oceanic by mimicking both the old woman's walking on water and his own walk over "stones of pearl and peril," thereby foregrounding the similarities and subtle variations of consequential motion and instability that these varying constructions of walking over unstable space imply (114, 164). The hurricane's total decimation and manipulation of all forms of landscape enacts a tidalectic extension of oceanic power over terrestrial space, while the earlier classification of the winds and currents of the Atlantic gyre as 'hurrican' adds the possibility that the cyclical gyric motion of these currents may be considered an aspect of tidalectic motion running concurrently with back-and-forth ebbs and flows.

### Submergence and Drowning

Another tidalectic piece of oceanic language that carries over from ‘*History..*’ to ‘*Barabajan Poems*’ to ‘*ConVERSations...*’ is the word “submerge” and related concepts of “submergence” and emergence, with Brathwaite expanding the scope of this terminology’s meaning in each book (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 189, 191). In ‘*History of the Voice*’ Brathwaite describes how “language” and its corresponding perspectival “sensibility” plus cultural resonances may be “submerged” in Standard English (Brathwaite 7).

As I have already argued,<sup>62</sup> the “coming to the surface” of “submerged...sensibility” and “language” in ‘*History of the Voice*’ could be viewed as Brathwaite’s first iteration of a tidalectic event in Caribbean poetics (7). Early in ‘*Barabajan Poems*’ Brathwaite defines “culture” as including “submerged undertones – ghosts, spirits, sky-juices, ancestors, immemorial memories” within the more overtly evident contemporary and historical milieu of social and political and artistic influences one might immediately consider in a poet’s expression of culture (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 21).

This discourse on submerged cultural undertones deepens over the course of the book. Much later in the text, an example of resurgence illustrates what Brathwaite means by the submerged aspects of a culture. Brathwaite recalls asking a group of Belizean “Garifuna, the great Black Carib people . . . **xpelled**” from St. Vincent “by the British during the wars of the Haitian revolution” if he can “see how & where they worship,” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 167). At first the Garifuna

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<sup>62</sup> See ‘Sounding the Tidalectic’

reply that “of course they were all ordinary & Christian (like evvabodyelse) and therefore worship in a church or chapel/ tabernacle” (167). This is because “they wanted,” according to Brathwaite, for him “to think” they are “in no way different from anybodyelse,” in terms of how they worship; they wish to blend in with dominant norms (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 167). Brathwaite must negotiate with them in order to gain access to “their **Place of Drums**” and its attendant Afro-Native traditions, and reads their presentation of these to him as the “Garifuna” having “*unsubmerged* themselves” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 167). In this formulation the Garifuna’s submergence of native traditions within their identity as “?Christians” is strategic and reversible whenever they desire (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 167). In contrast to the kinds of vanishing demanded by colonial forces, this strategic and subversive invisibility links to the ways in which language carries culture/cultural experience. Subsequently the metaphoric submergences/emergences of culture and of language form a linkage between one another, and at the same time a linkage to larger constructions of tidalectic motion and the physical oceanic underwater spaces implied by their metaphorization.

This definitively occurs when Brathwaite speaks about visiting the place where his uncle once owned a business, now long gone. The congregation of a church that was once Brathwaite’s uncle’s carpentry shop transcend language, “no longer singing in English or Bajan . . . they are into the pull of an alteration of consciousness as if the tides of their lives have paused,” and instead of their “cries . . . breaking from their crests” their transformed language starts “to sweep slowly backwards . . . away from our shore . . . sweeping away into a new dark wail ” a

language like the hurricane's roar called for in *'History of the Voice'* (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 181-182). The singers' "dark wail . . . sweeps us all up . pebbles & plankton & memories & the shale that is like a low moan now. out out towards a new meaning out there" in the open ocean (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 182). This new meaning takes the form of "a more guttural sweeping that comes slowly & more swiftly back now higher & brighter & still {paragraph break in original} darker than before . . . with new tongues of the water we had not known before or rather had forgotten," a oceanic cant moving and changing with tidalectic motion and alteration which, according to Brathwaite, represents the surfacing of "SUBMERGED" African sounds in the singers' "Bajan Igbo voices" (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 182). The syncretism at work between forms of worship, and possibly beliefs, tidally shifts so that the African elements become stronger. This recalls the involuntary states of consciousness discourse on earlier.

As in *ConVERSations...*, nation language here both emerges from and enacts changes in consciousness and expression along tidalectic vectors. Their "dark wail" over water comes back altered into "tongues of the water" that also stand for nation language, drawing together the various languages literally brought over water and the drone or wail of the winds and tides that swept them to their destinations (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 182). As the singers' voices become more like the voice of the ocean, the human languages submerged in this oceanic voice begin to surface. The power of nation language voices and of forms that suit or replicate the language of the hurricane to enact tidalectic shifts in consciousness

is laid bare by the next passage. The African “Igbo” sound of the Bajan church singers “takes” Brathwaite “back & drags” him

“tidalectic into this ta

ngled urgent meaning to & fro . like foam . saltless as from the bottom  
of the

sea . dragging our meaning our moaning/ song fom Calabar along the sea-  
fl-

oor sea-floor with pebble sound & conch & wound & sea-sound moon”

(Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 182).

This passage incorporates the moon into the tidalectic dynamic, possibly invoking romantic associations but also realistically describing a physical actor on tidal fluctuation. Brathwaite here exemplifies numerous tidalectic movements of language and vocalization that amount to a kind of internal surfacing of submerged perspectival sensibility within the mind of its subject. Hearing the submerged language of the singers break surface allows for this internal surfacing. The speaker’s consciousness undergoes tidalectic shifts upon hearing the singers’ nation language attuning to the landscape. The sounds made by the sea compounded into nation language are exemplified by the “pebbles”, with sounds that the sea enables humans to make exemplified by the “conch” (182). The drifting of punctuation or letters from line to line and within words that reiterate themselves inexactly as

“meaning . . . moaning” exemplify tidalectic processes of linguistic change. The nation-language “song from Calibar” travelling submerged on the “sea-floor” references the ideas of submerged language and submerged unity which Brathwaite has with regularity deployed in some form throughout his work (182). The “sea-sound moon” adds realistic scope for cosmic metaphorization, given the moon’s literal effect on tides and the subsequent sounds that the sea might make or influence/enable humans to make (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 182). Anna Reckin notes that this section tidalectically joins many of the currents entered by Brathwaite over the course of *Barabajan Poems*, “Lecture hall . . . workshop, church, hounfort, Barbados, seashore, ocean, and Africa; family, academe, government, nation, loa, and geography have all come together at this point in the book,” (Reckin 10). Tidalectic motion compounding human language with the language of living landscape enables nation language to surface; the surfacing of nation language enables tidalectic motions in human consciousness via the music of living landscapes. Consciousness attuned to tidalectic motion sings along with the living landscape in nation language.

Brathwaite’s description of “Rastafari” making “resurgence” carries the idea of cultural resurfacing over into ‘*ConVERSations...*’ (49). While ideas of submergence continue to hold effect in ‘*ConVERSations...*’, Brathwaite devotes more time in this book to exploration of submergence in relation to a note made in ‘*Barabajan Poems*’ that touches on the Shakespearian character Sycorax. In this note Brathwaite describes Sycorax as “perhaps the most important person/element in the drama. The invisible (she doesn’t even APPEAR in Shakespeare), the

SUBMERGED MOOrTH{line break in original}ER . . . the Igbo Damballa women I wit-  
 {line break in original}ness (eye of the navel) in D'Ogou the carpenter's shop in  
 M&Q/ Barbados," drawing a comparison between the "submerged" elements of  
 African culture Brathwaite earlier claims to observe surfacing in a woman who  
 becomes overcome or possessed as she worships and the "submerged" yet ever-  
 present mother-figure, Sycorax (*Barabajan Poems* 317). Indeed, this is nearly the  
 exact formulation from which Brathwaite works in '*ConVERSations...*', with added  
 layers of technological mediation: Brathwaite's "ole computer" and its repertoire of  
 fonts, "Sycorax", is "the submerge African and woman and *Iwa* of" *The Tempest*,  
 "the original submerged mother" encompassing local languages and cultures in its  
 wide-cast net (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 189, 191). This  
 formulation repeats once again the trope of "mother" figures exemplified by the  
 old "grandmother's – our nanna's" walk on water and carried over between works  
 in which Brathwaite discusses tidalectics (34). Brathwaite's personifying co-  
 characterization of Sycorax as an "ole computer" further relates Sycorax to the "old  
 woman" in the tidalectic genesis image, the computer becoming a kind of mother  
 to Brathwaite's texts and storehouse of cultural memory (176, 30). It is tempting to  
 say that while Nanna walks on water, bringing content, Sycorax is submerged and  
 influences form – although this is not a perfectly correct or defined dichotomy as  
 each (content and form, Sycorax and Nanna) results from and is entangled with the  
 other.

It is while discoursing on Sycorax that Brathwaite spends most of his time  
 speaking about submergence in '*ConVERSations...*', in a note attributed to "St Maria



Headley (UG Spr 97)" but punctuated and interjected by Brathwaite's comments in such a manner as to suggest extensive palimpsestic erosions of and perhaps additions by Brathwaite to whatever comprised the original note (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 191). While I do not intend to discourse at length about Sycorax the "invisible mother", it is helpful that an illuminating deployment of the concept of "submergence" posits "Mary Seacole" as a Sycorax, "able to care and feed without credit," due to "*Her ability to submerge herself. to fade into the background in order to change things from within. Is a definite Sycoraxian method. She has the ability to be the most important character on a plantation – (or island or hospital) without even being present to witness her importance,*" (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 191). To submerge can mean to fade into the background to such a degree as to no longer be present, but at the same time remain contradictorily present and influential - and potentially immanent in altered form. For no matter how submerged, the "result of process of submergence" will be "gestation {...} perhaps to emerge into [a] radically different world" (191). Remembering that Sycorax and all that she embodies additionally refer to Brathwaite's "computer" and its "fonts", it follows that the former inhabits the latter and lives submerged within the text "without even being present" as an entity described by the text – existing not only as the text and varied fonts themselves but also the entire apparatus of the "ole computer" used to generate them (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 191). The text speaks with "the voice of {...} Sycorax", a submerged voice that Brathwaite makes apparent visually; Sycorax's submergence mirrors and has similarly influential effects on culture and expression to the submergence of African

language in *'History of the Voice'* (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 176). Implied in all of this is the idea that not only language and text but their combination into poetic form may be in some ways submerged, with form an invisible yet influential current running under content. To submerge may entail willfully or unwillingly hiding or being hidden, submerging perhaps to the point of disappearing entirely while at the same time remaining immanent within and influential over that within which submersion takes place – influencing and constituting parts of its larger form.

To submerge, of course, also carries the threat/implication of drowning in that within which submersion takes place, which carries the aura of ocean and the compounded varieties of the ocean's tidalectic movements. Resurgence, surfacing, or coming to surface may prove impossible. The real and metaphorically theorized implications of drowning are examined by Brathwaite in *'ConVERSations...'* and in *'New Gods of the Middle Passages'* via two versions<sup>63</sup> of Brathwaite's dreamstory, *'Dream Haiti'*. This story depicts an instance of drowning that also relates to ideas of tidalectic overlap, crossing between, or blurring of boundaries while simultaneously reinforcing the tidalectic perspective's concern with the role of maritime power in contemporary post-colonial relations as central to Brathwaite's vision. In *'ConVERSations...'* this story/poem is presented at the end of Chapter XI as being read by Brathwaite (complete with the audience's applause) as a kind of interlude before the Q&A session that follows. The body of the text is presented inside of a box, and incorporates visual elements such as art and play with fonts

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<sup>63</sup> Versions of *'Dream Haiti'* can also be found in Brathwaite's book *'Dream Stories'* and its reimagining as *'DS(II)'*

even as it purports to represent orality. “The sea is like slake grey of what is left / of my body & the white waves // I remember they was like v/snake on my skin” opens this poem with what looks like a conflation between body and ocean (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 233). The dynamic of this conflation becomes complicatedly multi-vectored when Brathwaite continues “& they keep comin in at this soft swishin diagonal diamond > / the blow & wet metal sides of my nerves // where the US Coast Guard cutter was patrolling all along the / borders of the Mexicans & my brothers – the what was call / the // Haitian refugees,” on the one hand situating the symbol of metropolitan power represented by the coast guard cutter within the poet’s ocean/body, and on the other hand appearing to conflate the body not with the ocean but with the ship itself (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 233). The first of these dynamics – ship being within poet – is borne out when Brathwaite talks about “the ship in my head / w/the nerves breakin out sibilant & white like a long line of / voice,” and then adds another layer of conflation by reaffirming the perspective occupied as that of a passenger on “the ship {...} wantin to throw **up**” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 236). The second of these dynamics – poet as ship – is borne out when Brathwaite states that he does “not know why i am here – how i come to be on board / this ship – this navel of my ark –“ with its competing bodily and nautical meanings, “since I am suppose to be a poet and not a coast guard cutter,” indicating poet/narrator’s fluid identity (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 236, 238).

Most consistently, however, the poet occupies the perspective of someone aboard the coastguard cutter, and it is through this perspective that the Haitian refugees first appear as “something like bells on the horizon either still like a sword & / shine like an affordable razorblade of light / or goin up & down slowly & soffly grey like the ship in my head” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 236). The refugees’ resemblance to and conflation with bells on the part of the poet resonates with their later role as poetic instruments and with the idea that the poet attuned to the sea picks up on their sounding. It also signals the dualistic or conflictingly multivalent morality of bearing poetic witness to human tragedy, a position from which Brathwaite does not shy away. The conflation of the refugees with bells resonates with European traditions of hydromancy, in which “stones { . . . } thrown into {a} well” were answered “by the ringing of submerged bells” (Binnall 35). It also resonates with European traditions of submerged bells, such as those “ringing beneath the waves” at the submerged Welsh kingdom of “Cantre’r Gwaelod,” or the state-plundered bells of Yorkshire’s Whitby Abbey still sounding after sinking King Henry’s ship (Gwyndaf 68; Charlton 283). This conceit also plays a part in Brathwaite’s implication of speaker, reader, and poet as complicit witnesses to and participants in the power structures that kill and create refugee crises. If the human bodies floating up to the speaker’s safe vantage point as bells become poetic instruments, their oracular potential must be realized if they are not to become passively consumed objects of poetic mythologizing. If the refugees bodies sound as bells, they sound an alarm. The description of the horizon’s motion as “still like a sword” complexly both correlates and is juxtaposed with its “shine like an affordable razorblade of light” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel*

*Mackey* 236). The horizon is not a boundary made of anything more than light, but it remains a cutting edge nonetheless. Unlike previous tidalectic constructions of crossing, no-one here walks on water or light but rather floats in both until exhausted unless precariously equipped with some form of flotation. At the same time, the coast guard cutter remains a constant and malevolent presence, even for the poet/speaker onboard.

Brathwaite's emphasis on the military presence within and territorialisation of oceanic space fills an imaginative blind spot in the creation of oceanic metaphor. Elizabeth DeLoughrey points out, "the rise of the nineteenth century American maritime novel coincided with a naturalizing discourse of fluid, transoceanic routes precisely when the United States became a global naval power. Similarly, our current efforts to explore the fluid, transnational networks of the sea are constituted by an unprecedented era of global ocean governance and militarization" (*Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity* 705). The tidalectic perspective from which Brathwaite approaches this blind spot subverts notions of boundary between reader, author, and subject. Points of view shift and converge tidalectically, encompassing multiple contradictory values within the aegis of tidalectic perspective.. DeLoughrey notes that "This text merges the perspective of drowning with the witnessing (and documenting) of others' drowning, suggesting that the poet is complicit in recuperating and ordering the waste of oceanic modernity" 709. Brathwaite's tidalectically shifting perspective "problematizes the line between witness and spectacle" and "destabilizes the border between the disposable and the enduring, between wasted lives and their surveillance" 709. By

overtly representing tidalectic dynamics between author, subject, and object, Brathwaite interrogates the poetics of witness in the arts and news media – and beyond. By foregrounding physical plight, the drowning or near-drowning of refugees in an atmosphere tense with the dynamics of militarized global power, Brathwaite works here to present a tidalectics removed from sentimental poeticism or unquestioningly positive valuation. The tidalectic movements described are real and negative, their observer’s position one of self-consciously ambiguous morality.

With the poem’s “poet” speaker perspective now firmly inhabiting that of a person onboard the cutter (if not without a degree of angst and confusion as to why), the Haitian refugees eventually float past,

“lobbyin by w/their heads up&down

in the corvée of water & their arms still

vainly tryin to reach Miami

& Judge Clarence Thomas & the US Supreme Coast &

their mouths wise open wise open & ounsi drinkin salt &

dream & the golden sound of the court like

**LA CRETE-A-PIERROT** {*crete’ partially represented as a machinegun in original*}

&

**Cite Soleile** {'o' of *Soliel* represented as a sun in original}

**all over & over & over again**

while we stann off on the soff hard deck of the

**Coast Guard**

'Impeccable'

watchin them poem" (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*

238, 239-240).

Brathwaite's description of people bobbing "in the corvée of water" at first reads like a variant spelling of "curve" deployed to enact its wavy subject (239). On investigation this proves to be a pun on "corvée" – a "French" word denoting a hard day's work, but originating in "feudal law" as both "a day's work of unpaid labour due by a vassal to his feudal lord; the whole forced labour thus exacted," and "statute labour upon the public roads which was exacted of the French peasants before 1776," (*Oxford English Dictionary*; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with*

*Nathaniel Mackey* 239). This resonates with Haitian historical specificities of colonial slave labour, and enforcements (both external and internal) of *corvée* in independent Haiti. The association with road building draws in resonances of pathmaking and travel, significantly wedded to the prescribed vectors of hegemonic power. It dually provides literal description to the people in the water's motion as forced by their immersion and metaphorization of these same motions, these forced attempts to make a crossing over the water and the struggle to survive this labour (*Oxford English Dictionary*; Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 239).

The "corvée of water" forces its own motion or a response to this motion on those immersed in it, "lobbyin by" the "Coast Guard" cutter (239) . The cutter itself is also subject to the motion of water and to its function in relation to policing the waters and attempting to block their conveyance of that which the power it represents considers undesirable (239). The word 'lobbying' stands in for the more expected adjectival verb denoting movement, "lobbing" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This adds verbal meanings of "influence" and nounal resonances of "passage or corridor" to the latter's meaning to "move heavily or clumsily", inscribing their motion with spatial and psychical layers of significance for the speaker (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Representation of their gasps for air as "mouths wise open" implies the imparting of some form of redemptive experiential knowledge, while the sobering qualification "& ounsi drinking salt" poetically depicts the in fact brutal process of inhaling water and coughing it back out from open mouths gasping and perhaps desperately vocalizing, only for an inaccurately timed opening of the



mouth to fill it again with saltwater (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 239).

Brathwaite's naming of the drowning refugee "ounsi" tidalectically draws vectors between Haitian Vodou and wider Afro-Caribbean traditions. Ounsi As elucidated in the *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, "The term "hounsi" (also spelled *ounsi*) has its origin in the Fon language of Dahomey, where it means that one has become the spouse of a spirit (*Vodun* or *Lwa* in Haiti). In accepting the call of the *Vodun* or *Lwa* to become a hounsi, one becomes accepted as a member of a *oumfò* (temple) with all the religious and communal responsibilities that such a position requires, but, more important, one becomes a *serviteur* (servant) of the divinity" (319). According to the glossary appended to the essay collection '*Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*' by editors Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "hounsi" also may be referred to as "*spirit wives*" and are "most often women" (285). Brathwaite himself notes elsewhere that, "hounsi are servitors, usually female, of the vodun complex. The religious leader (invariably male) of the hounfort is the houngan, his chief female assistant, the mambo." (Brathwaite, *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature* 86). The ounsi drinking salt therefore constructs a negative tidalectic vector of nanna walking on water – a female representative of connection to African tradition struggling against drowning – that simultaneously contains positive vectors of resistance and continuity in the face of submergence. Physically separated from the overarching structures of the hounfort by the fact of their immersion in water, the hounsi drinking salt also risks spiritual rupture. These

spiritual and gender dynamics are complicated by proximity to the Voudou “*lwa anba dlo* (gods below the water),” especially the “*lwa Sinbi* or *Lasiren*, two *lwa* of fresh water whom the Haitians identify with the Yoruba orisha (sprit) *Yemanja*” of the oceans, and to orisha tradition in *Santería* wherein the depths are ruled by *Yemaja*’s ambiguously gendered<sup>64</sup> iteration, *Olokun* (Pressley-Sanon 100; *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* 1097, 928).<sup>65</sup> Within the tidalectically negative vectors at play in Brathwaite’s poem, there exists this tidalectically positive counter-flow, submerged but not drowned.

The construction ‘ounsi drinking salt’ appears to conflate hounsi status with traditions in which salt nullifies magic and blocks spiritual powers of return to Africa. Themes found across African folklore of the Americas that describe salt destroying witches, or disrupting supernatural forces both benevolent and malevolent – from the killing of witches by “sprinkling salt and pepper” on their skins, to the varied beliefs concerning the “consumption of salt” and its “impediment to spiritual flight” (Gadsby 815). Salt “prevents enslaved Africans from escaping bondage by making their spirits too heavy to fly,” while “river and sea orisas” and ancestor “spirits { . . . } the only beings that can travel all over the world { . . . } do not eat salt” and are not offered salt by their devotees, who themselves may or may not personally eschew its consumption (Gadsby 815, 816). Negatively tidalectic vectors of hegemonic control within which the refugees have become immersed force water down their throats. In order to expel this water and the perspectival apparatuses it represents, they must expel it from their mouths

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<sup>64</sup> See commentary on the website of The Santería Church of the Orishas ([santeriachurch.org/the-orishas/](http://santeriachurch.org/the-orishas/))

<sup>65</sup> See *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions* entries on “Vodou” and “Santeria”

and in become paradoxically complicit in its transmission. Swallowing saltwater from these vectors could also therefore be read as swallowing the perspectives and biases they transmit, internalising a worldview unaccommodating of magic potentialities. Spiritual powers blocked, the hounsi in Brathwaite's poem is stuck in the water and unable to fly – unable to exit the corvee of water in which they find themselves negatively tidalectically engaged. On another level, this represents the colonial subject stuck in cyclic reproduction and retransmission of hegemonic discourses and perspectival modes.

The introduction of Vodou to tidalectic discourse here gives opportunity to look at how tidalectic epistemology has facilitated an analysis of Vodou – which itself renews tidalectics by connecting its intellectual soundings more closely to Afro-Caribbean religious thought. Toni Pressley-Sanon's book length study, *Istwa Across the Water: Haitian History, Memory, and the Cultural Imagination*, deploys tidalectics as a primary theoretical framework because: its "back and forth movement" enacts "a bodily epistemology" of ritualized "repetition" similar to repeated bodily action deployed in "Voudou { . . . } ritual to change how we experience the world ," focused on the "transoceanic" domain "of the *Iwa Legba* { . . . } Guardian of the crossroads" and Middle Passage (10). Pressley-Sanon also describes "tidalectical movement" as "intrinsic to the Vodou concept of "*balanse*," which in Hatian Kreyol" implies not stability but a "back-and-forth-movement" within a field of values "that allows for the true nature of something – in this case history – to reveal itself " (10). Pressley-Sanon goes so far as to describe "*balanse*" as the "Vodou counterpart" of "tidalectics," relating both "to the dynamic back-

and-forth relationship { . . . } between Africa and its diaspora” (Pressley-Sanon 11). Pressley-Sanon also draws parallels between the “cyclical nature of the tide” modulating historical perspective and “the Vodou belief system that embraces cosmological unity in which the living, the dead, and the unborn play equally significant roles in an unbroken historical chain” (11). Like Brathwaite, Williams, and Harris’s work with ideas of timehri, congruencies between tidalectic epistemology and Vodou further reveal the experimental sensibility of Brathwaite’s fusing traditional elements into a new contemporaneity.

Identifying the imperfectly cyclical tidalectic ebb&flow as centrally important, Pressley-Sanon finds that “tidalectics as a theoretical framework allows us to reconceptualise the multitude of dialectical relationships that are facilitated by the ocean’s back-and-forth as well as cyclical movements and which exchange energies as it does so” (*Istwa Across the Water: Hatian history, memory, and the cultural imagination* 12). Her project in this regard does not rest with analysing aspects of Vodou in terms of tidalectics, with identification of parallels between tidalectic and Vodou epistemologies, or with considering the potential influence of Vodou on tidalectics – although these all take place. Instead her analysis strives toward adopting the tidalectic as an overarching perspectival mode or standpoint. As such, tidalectic epistemology permeates everything from argumentative structure to areas of focus. At the end of her introductory chapter, Pressley-Sanon explains this rationale. She sees her “text as part of the ongoing work of throwing away and gathering together” articulated by the vectors along which narratives travel “from both Africa and the diaspora by way of the spirits. The chapters should

be read tidalectically – that is, reflective of the backward and forward motion of the tides that keep the dialogical relationship between Africa and its diaspora going while discouraging a linear orientations. My argument is circular, as life and history are circular, doubling back as it moves outward” (*Istwa Across the Water: Hatian history, memory, and the cultural imagination* 22). Pressley-Sanon thereby presents a fully developed idea of tidalectics that demonstrates the manner in which Vodou enriches tidalectic epistemology and vice versa.

In the context of Brathwaite’s poem, Pressley-Sanon’s analysis provides further respite to tidalectically negative forces threatening to drown the hounsi. The presence of Legba further populates their threatening surroundings with familiar spirits, while pointing to the transformative rather than destructive elements of their situation. The crossing and gateway that Legba signal both prove preferable to the watery grave or monstrous leviathan of European philosophy. The concept of *balanse* provides a framework within which momentary entrapment in a tidalectically negative and dissolutive vector must eventually find its positive, reconnective counter-flow. Immersion in tidal ebb&flow connects to the cyclic model of history that posits eventual transcendence of the current. If this sounds poetic, then it signals a need to step back from the poem’s Vodou elements and interrogate exactly what the poetic entails in this context.

The actions of crossing water, floating and bobbing and even drowning in-between coasts, all fall under the verbal form of the word “poem”, the half-drowning motions and sounds reduced to performance for those onboard the ship “watchin them” – whose perspective the narrator and thus reader occupy; to poem

therefore involves enacting the movements of water and also bodies within water desperately breathing and thrashing and choking on salt, and the danger inherent in such enactments (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 240). It also means to literally enact that which may be or is in fact later poeticized – to live and in some respects perform the raw material which then makes the poem. At the same time, the water itself could be said to “poem” the bodies; it is that “corvée” in which they float, it forcefully defines their motion and prompts their bodily movements, and it (implicitly) will kill them (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 240, 239). Harris’s skeleton-walls of history are penetrated by these bodies’ recall/repeat of Middle Passage catastrophe. While the implied drowning of these submerged bodies provides a tidalectically negative instance of submergence, their elegiac presentation in the context of a poem carries an aura of redemption, of salvaging on the part of the poet that at the same time contradictorily foregrounds the degree of privilege held by the poet recording these bodies poeming without having to join them in their deadly poesies. Like ‘*ConVERSations...*’, a section of ‘New Gods of the Middle Passages’ recounts in surreal/dream logic the plight of Haitian refugees, replete with coast guard cutter. Drawing together various perspectives that ebb from and flow into each other while containing and assimilating various sources as flotsam, this section’s mechanics prove tidalectic. Brathwaite passionately connects his tidalectic perspectives of history and current events to tidalectic modes of expression and composition<sup>66</sup>. Although at first more rooted in the floating/drowning refugees’ perspective, it goes through many shifts before again settling in the poet-persona’s

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<sup>66</sup> See wrecking passages below

uneasy position of observation from safety. While in ConVERSations...’ the drowning is implied, here it is literally stated from multiple perspectives. Surreal but detached horror expressed as prose-poem from the perspective of TV news viewer gives way to centred, lineated verses from a less detached, direct, perspective. Brathwaite’s tone becomes one of elegiac outrage, his mode poetic and expressionistic as he holds a “{...}liddle boy. in my hand / like a dolphin but dead. drownn” (New Gods of the Middle Passages 32). The following line declares in smaller type, “you have seen him on tv,” complexly indicting both passive reader/viewer of tragedy and poet/speaker’s own previous perspective(32). Washed up “dripping w/history,” tidal movement mirrored by “his soft sea / body hanging heavy” from the poet’s hand, the little drowned boy glossed over by TV news takes his rightful place at centre-stage (32). Brathwaite goes on to “drop” the drowned boy he holds

“{...}back down w/the splash

*let me say it*

that he never deserved

back into the water that he nvr deserve

that he nvr nvr deserve

that he never deserve" (33).

Brathwaite thus allows that bearing witness may imply paradoxical complicity/helplessness, before affirming the value of poetic witness by lambasting those who would "chide" him for "chanting like this"(33). The poet-witness to drowning tidalectically embodies coexistent contradictory positions, and must psychically swim against their more negative currents. Attuned to tidalectic motions and forces, Brathwaite must now choose between bearing silent witness to that which this perspective reveals, and running the risk of trivializing in the form of poetry that to which he bears witness. His outlook on this situation as expressed above displays both disgust with the position of those who might think poetic silence a favourable option, and with his own position as poet who metaphorically plucks the drowning from the sea only to throw them back again. It is, for the speaker of the poem and the reader, a difficult position to occupy – but reflective and encouraging of reflection on the comfort enjoyed by poet, speaker, and reader relative to the drowning. Still, Brathwaite's act of composition both bears necessary witness to and may offer some recourse to the victims of imperative oceanic crossing.

In the seas where real bodies "submerge" and drown, "MiddlePass-{line break in original}age Atlantic" to Sargasso to Caribbean Windward Passage and Nicholas Channel to the Straits of Florida and the Gulf, they then enter "gestation {...} perhaps to emerge" later as poems, haunting the waters in the mind



(Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 191, 303). The haunting of mind's waters links with haunting by twinned middlepassages in *New Gods...*, that image which haunts simultaneously breaking through Atlantic hurricane-gyre and skeleton walls of time to surface or become salvageable/wrecked from the depths of the poet's consciousness. This dynamic anticipates Capildeo's later composition by wrecking from a sea of voices that functions like memory<sup>67</sup>. Sea remains ultimate editor of all discourse enacted by the physical and geographic and conceptual bodies over which it extends agency and influence.

Brathwaite's situation of this entire scenario within the "ship in my head" relates back to the ideas of self-formation and identification running through the text and the attendant tidalectic overlap between "psychology" and physical space, while positing poetic practice as involving the risk of a kind of internal drowning and the interplay of strategies in response to this drowning represented by the coast guard ship's power relative to the ocean and the bodies it contains (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 236, 34). Ocean and ship may also be external to the poet/speaker and affecting his world, but in the context of this poem it is the way that the oceans and ships of the world affect the oceans and ships of the mind - and the tidalectic relations and movements between world, mind, art(ist) (in this case poesis/poet(ics)), and world again – that is at stake. Brathwaite also commits a very personal act of self-questioning, asking how much agency the poet who bears witness to historic or contemporary atrocity or injustice holds and what right they have to do so if this agency is proven naught.

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<sup>67</sup> See section on 'Hazardous Shelves...'

In *New Gods...* the perspective is more rooted in that of the refugees than that of an observer. With “*the US Coast Guard cutter scowling above us / the scull in front of us capsizes / screams hollas cries / the green tide ruining us all the way back / to distant Dakar to the dungeons of the Cyclops / Goree Goree Goree Goree Goree // the salt in my eyes of rainbows / my hope fading faster than my heartbeat / the water like silkworms now / in the chunnels of my mind / in the cracked ghastly tunnels of my lungs,*” speaker’s tidalectically stereoscopic view of historic middlepassage extends from contemporary American transoceanic migration (29). A piece of flotsam in the form of a newspaper clipping from the *Barbados Advocate* shifts the perspective and mode of portraying the same or similar events from lineated poetry into something a reader may recognize as ‘reality’ (30). The “video (30)” prose section that follows this clip appears to continue in the realistic vein of reportage at first, “You wd. now be watching some CNN footage of these Haitian boat people,” but becomes stranger and more poetic when a “coconut...com{es} along swiftly on the tide past the boat” and its occupant hoists it from the sea (30). Brathwaite’s news clip turns supplication, “He reaches out his hand o David Rudder out into the waters & lift it out o Edwidge Edgidge Danti- / cat” invoking via the sea and referring both the successful Trinidadian calypsonian and Haitian American author to the practice engaged in by this man plucking that which may be of use from the “tide” (30). By including two prominent figures in the discourse, Brathwaite touches on national ideals of success that the refugees may take as emblematic of their goal. He also weaves a web, via Danticat’s Haitian diasporic themes and Rudder’s famous track, ‘*Haiti*<sup>68</sup>’, of artifice around the refugees that has

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<sup>68</sup> David Rudder – Haiti - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PDuOxwAS3I>)

a warmth and familiarity of therapeutic value. Brathwaite engages in similar practices in the construction of this section of the lecture-poem, with its shifts and conflations between found and composed texts (30). When Brathwaite holds the “likkle boy {. . .} drownnn /” his assertion to the reader that “you have seen him on tv {. . .} dripping w/history,” creates a crossover between the specific and very personal moment depicted in the poem and the all-too-common trope of the anonymous violated body as news item (32). By drawing together various perspectives that ebb from and flow into each other while containing and assimilating the useful flotsam of the newspaper article, this section’s mechanics could themselves be described as tidalectic. Moreover, wrecking constitutes an active tidalectic process here engaged in by poet<sup>69</sup>. In this section’s ebb and flow Brathwaite passionately connects his tidalectic perspectives of history and current events to tidalectic modes of expression and composition<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> See section on Wrecking

<sup>70</sup> See section on Drowning

## Swimming

Entering the ocean and immersing oneself need not always entail drowning or a loss of definition before “gestation” or transformation can occur, as the narrative of white creole Bajan Julian Hunte’s around-the-island swim – recounted in *ConVERSations* and *Barabajan Poems* – makes clear (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 191). Hunte

**“nativises him-**

**self in swimming (solo) around – in this way possessing – the sea-island;**

**and xpressing his love for it not only in his act of courage and endur-**

**ance in so swimming; but in his knowledge of what he was doin**

**& in the way he xpress in words that knowledge & love ve. He kno**

**ws by sight/by feel/by name/by memory/ every beach, rock, reef,**

**tide of the island. It is this love & strength & knowledge that m-**

**ade him wish to swim around the island in the first place – fro**

**(m) Caribbean, thru Atlantic to harbour; and above all, *make hi***

**(m) *able to do it*” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 182-**

**183).**

It may sound highly problematic for Brathwaite to imply that this white Bajan has a need to nativise, which instantly sounds like a need related to his ethnicity. However, the fact of Hunte’s whiteness is not brought to bear in order to stress a particular need for nativisation as a result of his ethnicity, or even as a particular need for him personally. If anything, his need to nativise comes from a

deep personal love for his island. Hunte is positively described in ‘*ConVERSations...*’ as a “white rasta” possessing a rootedness in the folk life of the island, while in ‘*Barabajan Poems*’ he is “a white ITAL Baje “ and part of a number of white Bajans who positively contribute to the cultural life of the island (*ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 182; *Barabajan Poems* 289). Moreover, as the tidalectics of swimming imply, nativisation in this instance refers to immersion in local landscape in a manner that it would be productive for anyone, white or otherwise, to undertake.

This observation comes in the midst of a 10-page digression that cuts off from Brathwaite’s description of *The Tempest*’s dramatis personae, runs into a summary of the popular meaning of ‘redlegs’, into a meditation on Emancipation Day (where the above comment on Hunte also explains why he was one of a few white Bajans to attend an Emancipation commemoration), and into a description from a newspaper of two poor white Bajan sisters who also upset stereotypes of white Bajan class/wealth. This movement through ideas echoes drifts and flows of information-as-flotsam washing in and out and turning in a gyre. One current splits off, describing itself circularly before rejoining the main stream of thought and resuming the sentence cut off 10 pages earlier by tidal digression and associated flotsam: Brathwaite’s descriptive list of dramatis personae (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 178-188). Brathwaite’s digression tidalectically links the tradition of using *The Tempest* as a model for postcolonial discourse to a sampling of specific histories and nuances of Bajan postcolonial

realities that provide complicating examples of the dynamics between colonizer and colonized set up by such models.

The idea that Hunte actively “nativises” by “swimming (solo) around” Barbados not only complicates these dynamics and models but also foregrounds from a tidalectic perspective the relationship between human agency, tidalectic forces, and local cultural identity (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 182). While submergence in the sea is part of Hunte’s way to self-nativise, it is at the same time as a result of “love & strength & knowledge” that both make and aid - “m-  
ade” - him in wanting and finding himself “able to do it,” implying that the act of swimming and its successful completion is not a singularly nativising experience but rather the cumulative result of a consciously enacted process of nativisation predating the swim described, complemented by his “xpressing his love” for the island and by “the way he xpress in words that knowledge and love” (183). Brathwaite’s line-breaking of the words

“him

self”

and

h

im”

imply that a cathectic break and reformation of self occurs during Hunte's nativising swim and attendant accumulation and expression of local knowledge (182, 183). Brathwaite foregrounds the "way" Hunte "xpress in words" as a necessary component of his nativisation, integral to the formation of his tidalectically nativised perspective (183). This perspective allows for and to some degree causes his nativisation to occur – a tidalectic dynamic of exchange between perspective and identity at work in the figure of Hunte. In the same gesture, Brathwaite reinforces his assertions of the importance of orality, language and storytelling to Caribbean identity literary tradition. The manner in which Hunte expresses his relationship with the island in words and in deeds is integral to his nativisation, perhaps more than the swim that comes to emblemize his position; being native is a matter of perspective deriving from or fitting a space as much as of existing within a space. However, the swim fully articulates Hunte's nativisation; it is by swimming that he proves, strengthens, and completes his love and knowledge "by sight/by feel/by name/by memory" of the island (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 182). Immersion and swimming give him these intimate forms of knowledge in a manner that invites Brathwaite's hyperbolic statement that "he knows {...} every" single "beach, rock, reef" and "tide of the island," as if immersion in their environment has allowed this knowledge to fully osmose into Hunte (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 182-183). Knowledge of "every tide of the island" specifically denotes the oceanic tides and currents with which Hunte contends during his swim, and also implies a knowledge of the tides that are not strictly oceanic but "of the island" – tides of migration, of history, of ideologies and events such as the "declaration" of "Emancipation Day" earlier noted as

“positively TIDALECTICAL”– tides and tidalectic motions that describe more than mere oceanic activity (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 183, 49). Hunte’s swim’s imperfectly circular route itself enacts a tidalectic imperfectly cyclical motion that mirrors that of “hurricane”, the Atlantic gyre and its attendant trade winds; the listing of oceans he touches in his passage “from Caribbean, thru Atlantic to harbor” imperfectly mirrors the passage of enslaved peoples from Atlantic through Caribbean to various ports and harbors (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 183; Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* 7). Hunte’s “way” of “possessing” his island and its culture is based in immersion and intimate knowledge, not the type of possession-by-domination enacted by colonizers (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 182). Like Sycorax, Hunte’s submergence portends transformation and emblemizes the tidalectic agency of the ocean in identity formation and the production of culture. In submergence and subsequent swim, Hunte’s knowledge and love for his island gestate and coalesce into his recognizably native and uniquely Bajan identity.

In *Barabajan Poems* the story of Hunte’s swim occupies both a place within the main body of the text and within an appendix to which the reader may flip forward and refer, the placement of the narrative of Hunte’s swim surrounding a section of the book mimicking his surrounding the island, and the motion required of the reader flipping around this section also referring back to the actual motion and direction of Hunte’s swim (289-296). This encouragement to imitatively explorative motion through text finds thematic basis in the tropes placed around its



introduction. Brathwaite describes setting out with childhood friends to explore their island, quoting from his early poem 'The Hopeful Journey' in the process. The poem thematically maintains concepts of knowing one's landscape as integral to the development of cultural/artistic epistemology, and continues to highlight the overlap or conflation between land and sea with its description "old shells forgotten by the sea" on an inland path (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 30-31). A note attached to this poem then refers the reader forwards to an extended notational description of Julian Hunte's swim around Barbados – another kind of exploration that mirrors the overland journey made by the poet and his companions, while the reader's movement around the text works in concert with both (30-31, 289).

Brathwaite's note runs for a little under eight pages (289-296). While both lauding Hunte's achievement and lamenting his lack of recognition, it also contains many kernels of Brathwaite's thoughts regarding both what it means to know the landscape/seascape and what meanings or processes of thought the landscape/seascape literally embodies and metaphorically/symbolically represents. Brathwaite's recounting draws from Hunte's account of the swim in various news clippings, and from his own placement of emphasis, imagined reconstructions, and comments. Like Hunte and the young Brathwaite exploring the island, the reader must explore these textual flotsam as they wash through Brathwaite's discourse. The usage of these sources does two things besides merely recounting Hunte's swim from the perspective of a primary source. First, it allows Brathwaite to criticise the sparsity of reporting on Hunte's swim by reproducing everything he can

find on it and judging it insufficient; throughout the note Brathwaite expresses incredulous distaste for the lack of exposure and coverage given to Hunte for his swim's "native record-breaking surely proud-making achievement" by the media and government of Barbados, noting that "if this was some Canadian or Swish or Swede or comebody like dat like a whiteAmurican touriss, there wd have been one hell of a hellabulloo" (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 290, 294). Second, it facilitates the de-centering of individual perspective demanded by tidalectic methodologies of narrative formation by incorporating Hunte's own recounts and what scarce third-party commentary on his swim might exist into the discourse without negating Brathwaite's personal voice.

Deployment of Hunte's own voice reinforces the significance Brathwaite places upon his swim. Brathwaite quotes liberally from Hunte and gives almost equal importance to "the way he {Hunte} talks about the x-{line break in original}perience/ achievement & the truly nativist knowledge he reveals of tides, beaches & landfalls" as he does Hunte's "fantastic . . . solo SWIM AROUND THE ISLAND" (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 289). Hunte's physical act of swimming is defined and heightened by his already "nativist" perspective and love for the locality, while also informing and enriching this nativist perspective in the process of its enactment (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 289). The swim enables Hunte's "whale-eye view of the ilann," which Brathwaite declares "a precious gift" (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 290). Brathwaite laments the lost opportunity for a visual record of Hunte's perspective, "The tv camera could have looked through Hunte's eyes at the sea, the waves, the foam, the spray, the splash, the sand, the

shore, the beaches, the reefs, the island, the white water,” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 290). This lamentation resembles a longing for a literal version of the video-style kinetic timehri Brathwaite later speaks about in *‘ConVERSations...’*, a longing for the reproduction of a vision attuned to the invisible hand of tidal forces inscribing themselves on the landscape. Swimming entails a participatory role within kinetic timehri, mediating perspective through landscape’s incorporation of and action on the swimmer. Brathwaite lends significance to Hunte’s rejection of “goggles,” quoting Hunte and adding emphasis, “they were misty goggles; they {a group of swimmers Hunte encounters} were just putting them on for speed; they didn’t want to see the scenery or nothing so. But I didn’t enjoy that at all; I said **‘Man I can’t see Long Beach; I can’t see all this beautiful scenery ‘round me. So I took off the goggles,’**” indicating that Brathwaite approves Hunte’s purposeful slowness, desire to see the island from the water, and rejection of any mediation between his vision and the sea (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 290). Brathwaite’s emphasis on Hunte’s rejection of goggles contains implications of painful perspectival change, and refers to submergence’s various forms of visibility and invisibility. Not wearing goggles forces the eyes to adjust to saltwater exposure, eventually allowing eye to touch sea without experiencing a powerful stinging sensation. The submerged eye burns until it adjusts, vision cauterized by sea. The sea-acclimatized eye can thereon return to water almost painlessly, enabling perspectives of local environment unavailable to goggle-wearers.

Once Hunte’s eye has been submerged literally in the sea and metaphorically in local perspective, active and deliberate submergences become

viable parts of his tidalectically positive swim's survival strategy. Local knowledge and sea-attuned senses enable Hunte in moments such as those when he deals with endless sets of "tremendous big waves" by recognizing that he must "dive down . . . under them" or else he will "die," a factor in his journey that fits well with its deployment in tidalectic metaphorization and explication by Brathwaite (29?). In this light, Hunte's way under the waves embodies deliberate submergence enacted as nativist response to tidal forces. It represents knowledge of tidalectic motion that allows for adaptive resilience to or mediation of the dangerous and destructive potentialities this motion may enact. But submergence and swimming carries the risk of submergence and drowning. Just as local knowledge or perspective proves enabling, a lack of either proves dangerous. Problems with native perspective or local knowledge hinder the nativising swim not just metaphorically but in real terms. It is a deficiency in Hunte's perspective - "**by not knowing Consett Bay intimately**" {Brathwaite's emphasis} and realizing that a "cliff" alongside it "does not co {line break in original} me right in straight" but rather "comes in & then it goes back out and then it comes back in again [TIDALECTIC]" {Brathwaite's notation in caps} – that "almost" costs Hunte his "life," trapped between sharp rocks and waves (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 292, 293). This tidalectic motion that endangers Hunte is, it should be noted, described by dry land<sup>71</sup>, pointing to Harris/Brathwaite's ideas of 'swimming on/in dry land'. The cliff's "TIDALECTIC" descriptor derives from how it has been shaped through erosive contact with the sea into a deadly imago of various tidalectic forces encoded in rock. Because Hunte lacks the knowledge necessary to traverse or use the tidal forces in this area to his

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<sup>71</sup> See section on 'Swimming on Dry Land'.

advantage, the sea takes on agency. It pushes him towards its self-authored image in rock, human form starkly insignificant in comparison to water and rock embodiments of tidalectic motion. Totally helpless in the “chop (a whirlpool where two tides met)”, with “no control over” himself, Hunte eventually lashes himself to a “pole sticking up” from a “rock” with a “cross against” it that he has swum past “six or seven times”, only to find himself tidalectically backwashed “back out to sea beyond that pole” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 293). In this state of helplessness, Hunte is trapped in a system of tidal motion – surf him washing into land, backwash pulling him away from land, other currents pulling in various directions, wave crests and troughs, whirlpools and undertow and chop – that exemplifies many aspects of the tidalectic. It is only by working with these tidalectic forces, declaring to himself, **“the sea is my friend,”** {Brathwaite’s emphasis} that Hunte manages to find, “behind the rock . . . a little area where I didn’t have to swim too hard,” in which he can wait “until the waves” have “gone by” before he swims to the rock and survives by tying himself on to the pole (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 293). Affinity to the sea – and recognition of its friendship – further enables in Hunte the perspective required for discernment of waves and currents and identifying a safe way to swim. A process begun in his eyes’ submergence and adjustment to the sea allowing for a “whale-eye view” finds its completion in his entire body’s escape from harm through usage of knowledge when swimming under waves, and through affirmation of the sea’s benevolence when learning how to work with its dangerous currents in order to escape them.

Brathwaite doesn't leave the swimming to Hunte alone, frequently referencing his own experiences in the water throughout *'Barabajan Poems'*. Two autobiographic sketches related to de- and re-lineated sections of *'Sun Poem'* unpack swimming and immersion's significance for the poet himself. An indicator on these pages refers the reader just under two hundred pages forwards to note #32, which consists of beautiful and impassioned invocations of the sea creatures encountered and children's games played on the beach, including "riding the waves" – indicating these idyllic remembered games' and creatures' strategic deployment in relation to Brathwaite's tidalectic discourse (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 109, 306-307). Brathwaite's "first memories . . . when {he} first or e\*ven before {he} first saw th{line break in original}e sea" involve arriving at his childhood house and later, "waking up . . . and watching the light from the sea on the wall of the room and not knowing what it was," the sea revealing itself slowly to the young poet over the course of the next page's quotes from *'Sun Poem'* as light on the wall, until he finally ventures out and has his first encounter with the sea itself and begins to swim (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 109-111). Timehric sea writes on wall - writing itself a sea-authored timehri in light. As in my discussion of timehri above<sup>72</sup>, water-modulated light on Brathwaite's wall functions as a kinetic sea-authored timehri. Swimming here therefore on some levels entails immersion in both a timehri and in elemental forces capable of authoring this timehri. Water, light, and authorship again compound into the sea; the young poet enters the nexus of tidalectic forces expressed on his wall as light and begins to gain the same perspective as its projections. Swimming proves just as potentially dangerous for

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<sup>72</sup> See pages 123-143, 182.

the poet as it does for Hunte. Brathwaite recounts an incident in which, while swimming with his mother and sister, “suddenly on the horizon glittering & tall HORRORZON { . . . } there was this Great Wave Coming Up Coming In { . . . } by the time we tried to get out/ the tow was sucking us outwards that coming-from-nowhere wave which was building up & was getting bigger with bright lights all along its long line of rising water like lighted glittering windows,” before quoting a related excerpt from *Sun Poem* that recounts the impact of this wave and ends with poet, mother, and sister all knocked over (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 112). Another conflation of inhabited land and sea, “bright lights { . . . } like glittering windows” continue the idea of the sea’s reflection of light as projection of light from itself, while conflating its earlier projection of light through Brathwaite’s window with the light apparently reflecting from its own windows (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 112). Meanwhile the sea’s agency over Brathwaite and his family via the tidalectic motion of undertow pulling them out towards the wave that throws them in again shows that Brathwaite has experienced this motion and its potential dangers first-hand. These stories do not merely provide biographical background to the various poems Brathwaite discusses; they also situate the poet within the environment he poetically theorizes and place his own young body at the mercy of tidalectic wave motion – a literal immersion from a young age in his chosen perspective and its subject matter. In this manner, Brathwaite’s act of recounting these childhood stories in relation to his poems is more strategically aligned to the theoretical framework he is building in the text than to nostalgic entertainment for his original audience at the bank. By discoursing on swimming, Brathwaite is demonstrating his

rootedness in the environment of the Bajan seascape/coast and the real-life effect on him of the forces upon which he has chosen to expound.



### Swimming on Dry Land

While swimming represents a dangerous yet fruitful opportunity for perspectival shift during baptismal immersion in living currents driving tidalectic localisation of epistemology, Brathwaite also describes an uncanny co-process of ‘swimming on dry land’. This process relates immediate experience of landscape to its psychical imprint. Brathwaite takes this concept from Harris’s response to the “kind of realism” in which “The ideal artist {...} conform{s} to an immediate stasis of place and time” – aesthetics useful to established socio-political structures (Harris, *The Amerindian Legacy* 174) . Harris roots its origins in dissonance between remembered and present experiences of changing coast/seascape:

“I often swam at the Fort on the Georgetown foreshore {...} the sea no longer stands where it used to be and the land has grown in its place by six or seven feet. Therefore, if I were to endow the *de facto* mound or grave, which now exists on the foreshore with a figurative meaning beyond the present stasis of reality, I might see the ghost of the past (the ghost of my childhood) swimming in dry land. That kind of imagination {...} corresponds to an architecture of consciousness within which the opaque mound or wall of earth possesses fugitive not absolute boundaries; and the swimmer in dry land witnesses to a fluid room or dimension. (174)”

Harris's experience of 'swimming in dry land' provides him with "a landscape of the imagination which can be unravelled to lay bare many complex rooms and dimensions that have a profound bearing on Caribbean man as a civilisation-making animal, as an architect or a poet" (174). Harris compares his experience with a comment by Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez<sup>73</sup> about the need for "language and {...} technical forms of narration" accommodating "the entire fantastic reality of Latin America {...} to promote it as a form of reality which can give something new to universal literature" (174-175). He also refers back to his earlier quotation of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>74</sup>, "The act of the artist or philosopher {...} consists in appropriating a *de facto* situation by endowing it with a figurative meaning beyond its real one" (156). Harris compares the "'form of reality' of which Marquez speaks" to his "swimmer in dry land or to Merleau-Ponty's endowment of the *de facto* situation with a figurative meaning beyond historical stasis," (175). Harris's subtle alteration of Merleau-Ponty's words from "beyond its real one" to "beyond historical stasis" jettison's Merleau-Ponty's apparent perspective of figurative meanings' and historic resonance's disconnect from experienced reality and from each other (156, 175). It also signals Harris's idea of artistic expression as ideally linked to deep sounding of historical and cultural resonances underpinning consciousness. As such, Harris locates in swimming in dry land a perceptual trope that for him inextricably links with localised cultural vision. This mode of perception differs inherently from a prosaically realist attempt to reflect perceived reality. However, the manner in which realism is breached relates

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<sup>73</sup> Best known for his novel '*One Hundred Years of Solitude*', canonical classic of Magical Realism

<sup>74</sup> Best known for his critical text '*The Phenomenology of Perception*', about complex mechanisms mediating ostensibly straightforward experience of reality. (Merleau-Ponty)

not to some academic or abstract surrealism but rather to account for experience of the local in an appropriate perceptual mode. On the same page, Harris concludes by naming Brathwaite as the poet with “the greatest potential {...} for the revival of poetic folk drama,” a reference that sends the reader referred by Brathwaite to this text back to Brathwaite again (175). By referencing a text by Harris that sends the reader back to him, Brathwaite emphasizes a tidalectic ebb-and-flow between their ideas while signalling his own conscious self-placement within a developing localized literary-philosophic tradition.

Brathwaite similarly links his concept of ‘swimming on dry land’ to shifting coast and childhood memory in *Barabajan Poems*:

“when she {Brathwaite’s mother} was growing up on Brown’s Beach, the sea was much further out – as it is going back out now – so that where I am now swimming out to the pilot boat/was dry land. . . and her mother told her that even before that, that out there. . . there were farms. . .” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 24).

However, it is in ‘New Gods of the Middle Passages’ that Brathwaite directly links his experience to Harris, consciously and conspicuously building Harris’s concept into tidalectic metaphor:

“Yet here in the Caribbean the tide comes lapping to the door of my room  
and then it goes back again

& over, sometimes at the door, at I say, at the time of my mother’s  
childhood & before that too, in her memory of before as now in mine, there  
was a tree & a well where the pilot’s >> boat, when I’m growing up, lay with  
its shadow under 12 to 15 feet of water – what Wilson Harris calls  
‘swimming on dry land’ and to-day, on Browns Beach, opp my house, as the  
sea keeps going back out, we might well see that well again ‘soon’

and we are rowing out to sea where the woman

live with her pipe and her smoke

shack

and her tea in the tea

pot

tankard of hopes

herbs

*lamagorafele*

*izwe lawo*

and we are rowing out to sea

where there are farms

and our farmers laid waste the land

to make honey, we are the bells of the land" (45-47)

Brathwaite's subtle modulation of Harris's "swimming in" to "swimming on dry land" without direct challenge or claim to alter Harris's concept articulates a geographic and philosophic extension inclusive of the original conceit. Immediately notable from these excerpts is that Brathwaite's examples reverse Harris's replacement of water with dry land – at least in Brathwaite's lived memory. Descriptions of his mother's experience of land/water's replacement with one another and uncontradictory reference to Harris dispel notions that Brathwaite simply wishes to replace Harris's dynamic with his own. Instead, Brathwaite makes the dynamic within the idea of swimming on dry land tidalectic. Land replaces water; water replaces land. The concept ebbs and flows between both theorists' experiences, with the totality of tidalectic motion once again linked to a mother figure. Brathwaite's mother enables him to see the tidalectic motion facilitating swimming on dry land. Mother's physical and psychical experience of the marine imprint psychically in son, whose psychical experience then anticipates and informs the physical. His mother also informs his purely physical experience of the sea, as

he frequently recounts her taking him swimming. He is able to conceive of the sea's shifts because his mother has told him about a time when the submerged well was visible, and a time when the sea was closer. He is only just beginning to glimpse the tidalectic totality of this movement, marked by the imminence of his seeing the well once more. The well bears imagistic resonances with Harris's *'The Fabulous Well'* cycle, referenced by Brathwaite in his discussions on Wordsworthian ocean and timehri<sup>75</sup>. As source of freshwater from deep inside the island and constantly drawn-from archetypic well of time (a kind of 'timehri'), Brathwaite's covering of well with ocean evokes tidal influence over terrestrial space and tidalectic incorporation of timehri into oceanic space. The saltwater of tidalectically vectored oceanic timehri alternately covers and reveals the freshwater of static (in the absence of Harris's woman drawing) well timehri, bequeathing unexpected forms of kinesis and attendant metaphoric potentialities. One must at times like Brathwaite first submerge oneself and swim down to the bottom of saltwater ocean in order to reach the well which extends down, perhaps infinitely, into layers of freshwater. At other times, like Harris's well, this well can be approached on foot, observed and drawn from, or dived and explored. The former implies Brathwaite's swim on dry land, the latter Harris's swim in dry land; both conflate land, sea, freshwater, present, future, and past into an apprehension of reality divergent from traditional realism.

A more substantial link between Harris, Brathwaite, 'swimming on dry land', and wider tidalectic epistemology, reveals itself in how both writers conflate land

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<sup>75</sup> See pages above.



technological imposition on living landscape. Meanwhile, the potential for oceanic forces to destroy this human imposition remains inherent in the constant sound of literal-ocean's assault. Brathwaite's identification of land-ocean with canefield makes similar a conflation of space work slightly differently: a product of human imposition, canefield as land-ocean twinning with literal-ocean emphasizes not just conflation or semblance but human exploitation of both. Tidalectic interplay between similes – "the sea like canefields/canefields like the sea" – supports the image of both spaces overlapping, mirroring, or describing one another while creating a more complex relational chain than a single-vectorized simile. This plays out in later musings on "place" and "alteration of consciousness" in *Barabajan Poems*, when Brathwaite offers a complex visual metaphor, "all the oceans churning to sugarcane" (170). The way the sea churns resembles the pulp/juice of churned cane. The churned sugarcane-ocean travels on churning vectors of literal-ocean churned to sugarcane. Unlike Harris's construction, Brathwaite's marks interior-ocean (canefields) as exploited space while the violent action of its oceanic twin does not threaten so much as invoke exploitation of landscape. Inherent in both local land and seascape he claims and cherishes are physical marks recalling histories of exploitation. Like in Harris, human imposition and exploitation of landscape here finds visual expression as wave-break. With terrestrial and oceanic space conflated, points of wave-break become emblematic of dissonance if not sea-change. Dissonance and attendant processes of change may not prove tidalectically positive. However it is also in wavebreak - on solid land that breaks and is broken by waves, and in shallow waters containing wave-broken things, where many treasures of tidalectic currents rest as detritus ripe for beachcombing, wrecking, or



salvage. Indeed, all of these intertidal and ambiguously land/ocean spaces form zones of accumulation and dissemination within which related practices of beachcombing, salvage and wrecking can be enacted. These practices do not perfectly correlate, involving different methodologies and the potential for finding different categories of item. However, all of these practices involve the removal from oceanic space and reutilization of that which has been lost, broken, or discarded.

## Wrecking

In Appendix IV of *Barabajan Poems*, an excerpt from Brathwaite's unpublished novel *'Boy and the Sea'* recounts incidents surrounding the torpedoing of a large Canadian ship at Carlisle Bay in 1942. This excerpt concludes with the subsequent entry of the young protagonists' small craft into the interior of the torpedoed ship, full of "dead sea" devoid of "wave. . . ripple" or "tide" (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 347-61). Ecological concerns – spilled fluids, weaponry, polluting detritus - evoked in 'dead sea' mix with an overarching awareness of the space's literal example of imperial structure. Prior to wrecking, the metropolitan ship bears its contents over water without regard for tidal forces it traverses with apparent impunity. Wrecked and filled with immobilising water, its still-entrapping structure impairs living sea's tidalectic movements: 'dead sea'. However, dead water immobilising the wreck also facilitates a tidalectic methodology for retrieval and repurposing cargo from within metropolitan structures and aspects of these structures themselves: wrecking.

Wrecking here means not just of the wrecking of the ship, but the act engaged in by the protagonists who pick from the wreck that which proves valuable to them. Michael J Jarvis defines "Wrecking" in this sense as "salvaging goods from sunken vessels," often surreptitiously – a longstanding practice in the Caribbean that goes back to colonial times despite "The British Crown" claiming "shipwreck ownership" in their waters (*In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* 81, 212). In the Bermudian context this was facilitated not only by free diving, but also by means of "a primitive diving bell that

Richard Norwood,” an early settler of some repute, “had invented” (81). By the end of the seventeenth century, “Bermudian wreckers { . . . } were well known throughout the Caribbean,” and their experience in reworking recovered materials translated into other adaptive practices, such as “shipbuilding framing techniques” applied to the construction of homes (81). While local knowledge of reefs enabled passage, ships wrecked due to lack of local knowledge – or to malicious action<sup>77</sup>, or extrahuman tidal forces – became sites for salvage before even sinking.

Wrecking was a pan-Caribbean activity; crews from different islands would compete with each other for the best sites, sometimes traveling thousands of kilometres. Practices of wrecking engage with, and are enabled by, multiple elements of Brathwaite’s tidalectic epistemology. These include back-and-forth passage, submergence, swimming, drowning, and confluences between spaces. Wrecking also represents the agentive role of local landscape in repurposing metropolitan cultural form and content. Before considering how these historical specifics of wrecking fit with its place in tidalectic epistemology, full examination of wrecking as it appears in Brathwaite’s narrative and as manifested in his methodologies is warranted.

In Brathwaite’s recollection, wrecking immediately reflects a few of the tropes already mentioned: danger, illegality, and exploitation of Empire’s waste by its subjects. The manner in which it is introduced plays into Brathwaite’s larger tidalectic strategies, and links with tidalectic concepts of passages – both journeys and texts. Following brief onomatopoeic evocation of the ship being torpedoed on page 154 of *Barabajan Poems*, note-indicator 43x refers the reader forwards to its

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<sup>77</sup> See (Chris Astwood, 'From Somerset, Bermuda' in *World Literature Today* vol.89 no.5, (September 2015) pp30-32)

corresponding endnote (Brathwaite 154, 317) . This endnote instructs the reader to “see Appendix IV” without giving further explanation (317). Before encountering wrecking as a practice described in the text, the reader is compelled to dive down into the text and retrieve the narrative fragment describing this practice.

Reader becomes wrecker, retrieving textual representation and explanation of wrecking practice before tidalectically returning armed with this retrieved information to the point where they left off. Brathwaite’s selection and incorporation of this specific fragment from his larger unpublished work speaks to deliberate compositional processes of wrecking. Guiding the reader through these wrecking passages, the writer also becomes wrecker - salvaging a useful passage of submerged text and integrating its form, content, and technical/aesthetic aspects into a new piece made from a combination of new and repurposed parts. Methodologically this most obviously forms an oppositional practice to tidalectic engagement with palimpsest<sup>78</sup>. However, wrecking does also engage tidalectically with palimpsest in its disassembly and stripping the usefulness from immobilized forms unable to traverse local waters. Through tidalectically congruent palimpsest and assemblage, wrecking turns metropolitan forms into wrecks and the contents or structural aspects removed from them into something locally useful:

“Ever since the day that the ship had been hit, the beach-boys had paddled out to its side and had dived down into the dark through the hole in its side, to the hold, for the things that were hoarded in there . . . treasures of oil-

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<sup>78</sup> See pages 106, 127, 148-152,

soaked time: tins of black coffee, brown cocoa, soups of kinds & sizes;  
 tomatoes, cornbeef, sa  
 rdines squeeze-ithered from Guinea, condense milk far far from the shad-  
 ows of cows They wd keep & eat what ever they wanted & sell the rest in  
 the market” (356).

The variety of food items retrieved references the sprawl of empire while directly evoking the centrality of maritime trade. Note that this activity is “Against the Law” and punishable by beating; power structures recognize and seek to mediate reuse of the empire’s tools without sanction (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 356). Threat of punishment coincides with dangers of submergence confounded by the wreck’s spatial specificities. Although the ship – symbol of metropolitan power – is sunk and filled with water, its interior remains dangerously territorialized space containing hazards and treasures. Brathwaite’s wreckers doubly submerge in water and in submerged ship’s dark interior where water mixes with oil. In this submergence, ship becomes literally a constricting imperial structure that might facilitate drowning – while avoiding drowning meanwhile entails retrieving something useful, either from within or from the structure itself.

Wrecking in terms of a tidalectic poetics necessarily involves ideas of textual passage in relation to oceanic passage, both verbally and nounally inflected: action and tidalectically vectored route of oceanic crossing, excerpt and action of crossing through book. It forms part of a tidalectically multivalent response to consequences of multiple manifestations of passage. In the context of tidalectic poetics and its epistemological background, wrecking and passage conspicuously draw together

many of the concerns raised throughout the ocean of tidalectic metaphor described above. They also relate back to Brathwaite's characterization of North Atlantic Gyre as 'hurricane', and Harris's numerous related discourses linking 'music of living landscapes' to manifestations of localised perceptual/representational frameworks in postcolonial space. While Harris's 'theme of expedition' reveals various perspectival distortions undermining applications of metropolitan power as charted by simpler models such as Slemon's, wrecking tidalectically complements Harris's representation of metropolitan incursion into other spaces as ship. Passage and wrecking further geographically situate and respond to such incursions, expressing in the same metaphoric language means by which metropolitan assertions of agency are pillaged. In this respect, the wrecking enacted by Brathwaite's protagonists proves the most direct tidalectic confrontation with metropolitan power described. Ship-on-passage and ship-as-passage are doubly wrecked, their cargos and structural elements stripped of archetypal, architectonic and ideological underpinnings then reapplied to the production of localized forms and perspectives.

In Brathwaite's developing tidalectic consciousness, psychical and physical passage also become intertwined with concepts of timehri and the relationship between African and Caribbean spaces. Wrecking therefore entails salvage from combined and disparate passages of coloniser and colonised, linking with the production of localized perspectives and tropes. Brathwaite calls for his audience to "vision me five thousand miles away on the other end of the Middle Passage/ but about to turn the corner back to Brown's Beach," because within the setting of a fever dream "high up in the forests of the Volta" Brathwaite sees "within the

miasma, of water & river & coastline & blue/green & whitewater breaker & ocean . . . not Elmina, not Accra, not Keta, not Lome, not Lagos, but the sea & not just the sea but *my sea Brown' (s) Beach* & the morning & meaning of *home* with which I began, I begin and that now – I knew – I could sing –“ (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 82-83). This compacting of spaces echoes Brathwaite’s remarks in *Timehri* on “the bridge of my mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland. When I turned to leave, I was no longer a lonely individual talent { . . . } I came home to find that I had not really left. That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean. The middle passage had now guessed its end. The connection between my lived, but unheeded non-middle-class boyhood, and its Great Tradition on the eastern mainland had been made” (Brathwaite, *Timehri* 38). Brathwaite’s revelations reduce middlepassage’s distance through textual passage’s devices of tidalectic multivalence, brevity and compaction. Physical and psychical passage, and the spaces at passage’s supposed antipodes, undergo constant tidalectic interplay. A perspective attuned to these processes can take advantage of them creatively.

Realization of ongoing tidalectically-vectored passage between spaces does not, however, provide unproblematic empowerment: experience in Africa allows Brathwaite to reconceptualise historic middle passage as compound of ongoing contemporary vectors of brutality. Brathwaite describes a triply physical/geographic, psychical/informational, and technological/economic

“new slave tra de Passage Mid-

le Passage the new Middle Passage Passages flowing out across Atl-

antic now not to factories of cotton sugar flash but to new industries of

fax – computer processes – flowing out from/ flowing in towards a new world New World that was always here although we couldn't see it .  
 though we sell it (*Barabajan Poems* 80).

This recalls Brathwaite's contention in *New Gods...* that the "'old' middlepassage is being over-layered by a second 'postmodern' middlepassage and we are living in the interweave & haunting of these two & twin xperiences. And we've tried to break out of it thru *synthesis* when we should be < breakin out of it thru acceptance, thru what Keats celebrated as negative capability, Gandhi as *satya* & *ahisma*, Christ as love, spiritual subsistence & community; all breathing into & w/ this movement of the ocean" (43-44). Limited to this declaration, one might take Brathwaite's statement for Romantic evocation of poet as inspirationally witnessing and/or transcending material oppression. However, Brathwaite goes on to reference both a more modernist practice of assemblage, and a poetics rooted in awareness of physical realities underpinning the metaphysical. In the process, he makes explicit the tidalectic character of passage:

"But there are also other things: the whole nation of **middle** passage which this presentation is 'about'. Already you will notice from the way I'm using passages – i.e. xcerpts & quotations" that < the concept & poetry of **passage** is not only the traditional << one(s) of the human cargoes of Europeans & Africans into the Caribbean in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 17<sup>th</sup> century & 18<sup>th</sup> century; > but there is a passage back across the Atlantic in the other direction. Most of them physical, all tidalectic. So if there is the savage, we



must remember & look for also the special & the sacred; i.e the metaphysical middlepassages which we all < constantly undergo and *undergrow* (50).

In this formulation passage encompasses physical textual excerpt and act of reading-through text, back-and-forth oceanic crossing, and psychical shifts of perspective or metaphysical current. Brathwaite's qualifier, "all tidalectic," makes explicit 'passage' as a concept's encompassment by tidalectic epistemology, and reasserts tidalectics' crossing between physical and psychical fields (50). Less overtly, Brathwaite's statement demonstrates flow of information/culture through metropolitan-dominated physical space not as simply an unchallenged vector from metropole to antipode, but as tidalectically multi-vectored in a manner conducive to localised response – yet also beyond full subjugation to human agency.

In the context of wrecking, metropolitan failure of assumed agency over passage provides opportunity for local disassembly and/or appropriation of metropolitan passages or forms. Local recognition of extrahuman agency meanwhile allows for creative response, actively joining in and benefiting from the effects of local landscape on consciousness and physical condition. Harris's concerns with tradition and appropriation also find answer in methodologies of wrecking underpinned by tidalectic epistemology's layer of extrahuman mediation. Discoursing on appropriation, realism and tradition, Harris asserts, "Cosmic love arises then in the dire precipice of storm {...} cosmic love may be visualized within the sweep of imageries sprung from different times and ages {...} Without that salvage of cosmic love within the convertible imageries of linked pasts and presents

and futures what – may I ask – is art? {...} Archetypes cannot be seized in their wholeness” (Apprenticeship to the Furies 234). These assertions doubly warn against capitulation to metropolitan perspectives/traditions and against the wholesale appropriation of fetishized alternatives, while emphasising consciousness of local landscape’s power and voice. They also echo Brathwaite’s alternatives to synthesis mentioned above. The storms of Brathwaite’s hurrican and middlepassage require responses rooted in acceptance or love. Elements these storms bear and of the storms themselves allow for part of this response to enact appropriative strategies embodied as wrecking underpinned by tidalectic processes.

Wrecking’s salvage does not lend itself to recreation of original vessel or archetype, but to the development of something new under local conditions. As Jarvis notes, wrecking “helped Bermudians improve and redefine the vessels they built. Taking vessels apart and surveying shattered hulls provided great insights” into “a wide array of maritime technologies” and “useful design details {...} wrecking done with a critical eye provided {...} a window into the full sweep of Atlantic vessel designs” (215). Consequentially, “the Bermuda sloop was at the cutting edge of eighteenth-century technology,” crafted from both locally-sourced and strategically appropriated materials and designs into a locally specific form (215). Wrecking thereby adheres to Harris’s admonition that “purely formal appropriation of the material of the past reduces the past to a passive creature to be manipulated as an ornament of fashion or protest or experimentation in post-modernist styles, post-modernist games {...} rooted, I believe, in a one-sided modernism {...} that aborted a profound cross-culturalism between science and art, as among the diverse cultures of humanity across the globe” (Creoleness 243).

While superficially agreeing with some of Derek Walcott's position on avant-garde practice, Harris distinguishes a particular "one-sided modernism" to critique, allowing for the multivalent salvage and assemblage enacted by Brathwaite (243). Harris makes "a distinction between the opaque content of ancient symbolizations or legends and purely formal innovation employing characteristics borrowed from another (as Picasso, let us say, borrowed characteristics from the African mask to create a new formal style)," favouring deep engagement with source material (246). His distinction complexly involves the "*involuntary* ground of association which is native to the arts of humanity," advocating scrutiny of metaphorized ideological and spatial underpinnings of perspective (246). This entails engagement with local landscape.

Because environmental processes mediate all aforementioned underpinnings of perspective, they necessarily factor in the reworking of wrecked/incorporated material and creation of new perspectives. Indeed, "*involuntary* ground reaches subconsciously, unconsciously, *through* the *humanization* of nature that we set up into ruling models in our places of learning and in the humanities, the universities, reaches through such models into nature(s) which, I repeat, are extrahuman even as they (such gestures) bear on humankind, even as they bring gifts to humankind" (246). The manner in which dominant perspectival modes humanize nature is penetrated, reached through, by involuntary associative gestures that reveal forces beyond humanization yet profoundly impactful and intertwined with human experience.

Ability to recognize and incorporate physical and psychical "gifts" borne by extrahuman forces of local landscape proves integral to their successful adoption

(246). Success in this context involve opens perspective “to quantum fire of soul (anima mundi) quantum oceans, quantum landscapes, quantum riverscapes, which imply minuscule linkages between being and nonbeing, psyche and pebble or leaf or wood or cloud or tide or rock” (246). Adoption of materials/forms must consciously assess both source and destination’s perspectival underpinnings while reinscribing meaning/value into said materials in concert with the music of living landscape’s mediation. If the aforementioned criteria are met, the perspective engendered transcends its sources and recognizes tidal flows or overlaps between various physical and psychical spaces. Archetypes – metropolitan imposed or salvages of submerged colonised culture alike – are not problematically adopted wholesale, but strategically wrecked to create new localized forms.

In addition to the appropriation and redeployment of various source materials, wrecking and passage relate to Brathwaite’s similar treatment of his own material. In *Barabajan Poems*, both the main body text and Brathwaite’s notes incorporate numerous instances of his own excerpted and reformatted work. Brathwaite’s notes and note-indicators function tidalectically, send the reader on currents making passage back and forth in a tidalectic advance through the text.

For example, note-indicators 36 and 39 both appear on page 117, while numbers 37, 38 and 38a appear on pages 120 and 121 (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 117, 120, 121). Number 36 glosses a stanza in which one a child asks another “you think // i cud dive from hey to de pilot?/eyes opening out from her basin of blue / to de piolet” and sends the reader to page 308, a reference to the part of ‘*Sun Poem*’ from which the poem was extracted. Note number 39 glosses “and it bloomed into islands,”, a famous line from Brathwaite’s early poem, ‘*Calypso*’,

about skipping a stone and birthing a Caribbean cosmos, and it sends the reader to page 312, where a reference note to page 48 of *'The Arrivants'*, directs the reader to where the poem appears in full. Flipping to each of these notes and then then back to the main body of the text, the reader surges and recedes as if riding waves in a rising tide (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 117, 308, 312). The motion that the reader makes through the book, and beyond if they so choose, similarly moves backwards and forwards through Brathwaite's personal canon.

The next note, 37, surges forwards slightly less distance than the last – only reaching page 308, where it rests on a lamentation from Brathwaite for Caribbean little magazine *'Bim'* before rushing back, as if in ebbtide (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 117, 120, 308). Note-indicator 38 glosses “the destruction of Pelican to build the Deep Water Harbour” and refers forwards to pages 308-310 and a series of laments for and listings of places like “Pelican Island”, which Brathwaite informs us was “blown up”, and others that have been altered by unchecked development, in what becomes a kind of spatial graveyard reference to the poet's landscape of memory (121, 308-311).. In light of the poet's preoccupation with environment and the shaping of psyche, these notes raise questions as to the effect of a landscape that changes around an individual who remains attached to its previous iterations. In this vein, the next note refers to a “GIGANTIC GOLF CURSE GOLF COUR/SE – ‘the far lonisht in the West” and accordingly sends the reader onwards as far as 311, where a “KEEP OUT” notice from the previous note hangs above a pastiche of ruminations over the golf course and “Caliban” resistance to development (121, 308-311).

Note 39+ glosses “I wish she w’n’t wastin she cash pun a turtle!” from Brathwaite’s poem *‘Francina’*, sends the reader forwards to a note where Brathwaite talks about visiting the site of the poem’s action years later, then refers them back to the appropriate poem in *‘The Arrivants’* (124, 313). The reader’s advance tidalectically mimics that of waves advancing and receding in the chop of surge and backwash and ebb and flow, and of water catching in coastal rock-pool or tidal eddy. It also involves movement backwards and forwards through Brathwaite’s published works, his locations of significance, and his personal recollections. The effect is the simulation of a tidalectic journey through Brathwaite’s personal and private career, with a multiplicity of registers – from the KEEP OUT signs from the note on development, to the nation language of the speaker incredulous at Francine for buying a turtle – both traditionally poetic and otherwise. These movements through time, space, and lexical mode all speak to Brathwaite trying to make his book function tidalectically. In doing so, he utilizes and invests considerable artistic energy into features of the book’s physicality less often engaged with by authors. Reader must act as wrecker, repeatedly diving down into the various sites Brathwaite demarks.

The notes themselves tidalectically send the reader on wrecking dives into distant passages, note-indicators like beacons marking salvage-points: wrecking sites. This most explicitly occurs in wrecking’s introduction via Brathwaite’s own wrecked text. As mentioned above, note-indicator 43x refers forwards from page 154 to its corresponding note on page 317, which urges the reader deeper down to Appendix IV’s excerpted tale of wrecking (154, 317, 347-61). Similarly, note-indicator 52 leads to page 326, which directs the reader to look both backwards and

forwards in the text, “See p246 & fn56,” only to strand them on page 328 with note 56 urging a dive into Brathwaite’s monograph, “Missile and Capsule” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 187, 326, 246, 328).

Brathwaite wrecks and incorporates his own works into new pieces in a manner that points to and away from source, as Brathwaite’s differing deployment of the same material reveals. For example, *Barabajan Poems’* Appendix V contains a transcription of someone else reading Brathwaite’s poem *Shar*, and excerpts from his correspondences with the University of the West Indies - both later reproduced in *ConVERSations...* (*Barabajan Poems* 362-366; *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* 142-148). The later reproduction tidalectically reiterates this material in different form, containing a slightly divergent text of *Shar*, replacing Brathwaite’s commentary with a poem from Anthony McNeill, and integrating with the main body of the manuscript rather than isolated appendix.

Similarly, Brathwaite quotes from his poem “Labourer” twice in *Barabajan Poems* - first in unlineated and abridged form describing a childhood love-interest’s father, and later as unabridged lineated poem in a section on “Barabajan Landscapes” subtitled “Labourer at Farley Hill” (Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* 133, 221-224). While the first passage contains a note referring to Brathwaite’s multiple versions of the poem, its second iteration specifies one source version - multiple sources for named individual, one for nameless figure within landscape (133,21-224).

Wrecking tidalectically expands potential meaning, form, and resonance of Brathwaite’s own wrecked source-works in the same manner it does other wrecked material. Combining one’s own past material with outside material in a creative act

consciously attuned to local specificities thereby becomes code for wrecking – in terms of both poetic/textual composition and larger perspectival/epistemological modes underpinning creative activity. The successful wrecker-poet's own voice/vision does not drown in wrecked passages, but enacts salvage useful to the poet's own ends. This may entail assimilation of wrecked material into the poet's distinct idiolect, or other incorporative strategies. In Brathwaite's ocean of metaphorized tidalectic processes and tropes, wrecking gives opportunity to make imposing metropolitan cultural leviathans person-centred in the way Nation Language mediates Standard English, locally voiced in concert with living landscape.

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Here concludes my own wrecking-dive into Brathwaite's ocean of tidalectic metaphor. The next section presents another poem by Vahni Capildeo, this time not meditating on metropolitan appropriation but rather enacting a successful strategy of wrecking that can be studied for ways of building local perspectives and poetics conscious of the concerns raised above.

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#### 4. TIDAL APPLICATION

##### **Hazardous Shelves, Deep Waters: Wrecking As Raiding from Tidalectic**

##### **Depths**

Vahni Capildeo's "HAZARDOUS SHELVES, DEEP WATERS" consists entirely of eight quotations from various sources, plus an endnote (*Undraining Sea* 41-42, 91-92). These quotations evoke and engage with nautical themes, empire, poetry, migration and the practice of quotation itself. As a "sea of voices", the poem must be viewed not only as a collection of referential texts but also as a unified whole in its own right (91). However, as a sea of voices, the poem's unity proves kinetic and fluid as opposed to static or fixed. Its constitutive excerpts collectively instil tonal, representational, and associative resonances that go beyond the texts' original meanings. Capildeo's poem can be argued to function as a tidalectic text, in terms of its composition from various wrecked passages retrieved from a psychical sea of voices occupying memory, its making these passages flow in multiple directions of meaning and tone as parts of a new unified voice, simultaneously preserving and usurping their original content/intent. As tidalectic text it also performs role of timehri, rewiring metropolitan resonances into new oceanic archetypes. The eight quotations forming Capildeo's poem follow, interspersed with my commentary.

The piece begins with the largest block of quoted text, taken from Samuel

Johnson's writings on landscape, poetry, and aesthetics:

“[...] The sea, though in hot countries it is considered by those who live, like Sannazarius, upon the coast, as a place of pleasure and diversion, has notwithstanding much less variety than the land, and therefore will be sooner exhausted by a descriptive writer. When he has once shewn the sun rising or setting upon it, curled its waters with the vernal breeze, rolled the waves in gentle succession to the shore, and enumerated the fish sporting in the shallows, he has nothing remaining but what is common to all other poetry, the complaint of a nymph for a drowned lover, or the indignation of a fisher that his oysters are refused, and Mycon’s accepted.

Another obstacle to the general reception of this kind of poetry, is the ignorance of maritime pleasures, in which the greater part of mankind must always live. To all the inland inhabitants of every region, the sea is only known as an immense diffusion of waters, over which men pass from one country to another, and in

which life is frequently lost. They have, therefore, no opportunity of tracing, in their own thoughts, the descriptions of winding shores, and calm bays, nor can look on the poem in which they are mentioned, with other sensations, than on a sea-chart, or the metrical geography of Dionysius.

This defect Sannazarius was hindered from perceiving, by writing in a learned language to readers generally acquainted with the works of nature; but if he had made his attempt in any vulgar tongue, he would soon have discovered how vainly he had endeavoured to make that loved, which was not understood.” (Capildeo 41)”

Capildeo’s selection of Johnson engages with a metropolitan figure both extensively quoted and in part responsible for establishing the English language’s current norms. In context, Johnson critiques Jacopo Sannazaro’s shift from the pastorals of *‘Arcadia’* to the marine themes of *‘Piscatory Eclogues’* (Johnson 167-170). Capildeo extracts the basis of Johnson’s critique, exposing its submergence in his limited perspective. Johnson’s perspective makes same that ocean which endlessly modulates and contains vast unknown depths, dismissing its “less variety than the

land". In addition, Johnson assumes that "the greater part of mankind" are not only "ignorant of maritime pleasures" but also that "all inland inhabitants of every region" uniformly view the sea merely as dangerous space "over which men pass from one country to another". His perspective neatly universalizes and compounds into poetic aesthetics that of the inland imperial subject, given to thinking of spaces in terms of territory and commerce. Deployed here by Capildeo, Johnson's words work at cross-purposes with their original intention – not only by exposing the limitations of his perspective, but also by evoking the very marine environment to which he objects.

Capildeo's next quotation emphasises dimensions of marine space beyond danger and traversal:

"So absolute the deep" (Capildeo 41).

Capildeo takes the above from 'Ode to the Virginian Voyage' by Michael Drayton. Drayton's poem exhorts "Britons" to "Go and subdue {...} get the pearl and gold," in an enthusiastic endorsement of colonial settlement and occupation (Drayton). Like Johnson, Drayton casts sea as space passively crossed for imperialist purposes of exploiting that that lies on the other side – in fact, without any of Johnson's implied danger, Drayton's space is all the more passive. Capildeo's isolation of the sea from

this treatise jettisons colonialist dogma and perspectives of self-agency in favour of that which even this discourse cannot fully deny is greater than itself: the “absolute{...}deep” . De-emphasizing crossing, Capildeo invites the reader to consider depths that Drayton literally and figuratively sails over. The absolute deep is, in its potential for swallowing up whatever passes over it, absolutely not passive.

Capildeo’s next quote shows an idea of active force hidden in the previous quote’s depths:

“the lash and hiss of water” (Capildeo 41).

A single line from single stanza of William Carlos Williams’ expansive poem ‘Paterson’, this one small quotation from a poem full of quotations in a poem made from quotations foregrounds Capildeo’s procedure. In fishing text from the depths of memory, she has hooked one here that is larger than and swims deeper than at first obvious. This is because this small nautical quotation finds its genesis in a moment of nautical quotation on William’s part. Elizabeth Gregory explains in *‘Quotation and Modern Poetry’* that “Williams {...} introduces {...} the same sort of hierarchic quotation that he objects to in Eliot and Pound, “O Thalassa, Thalassa!/ the lash and hiss of water / The sea!”,” the first line of which is “in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* the cry of the Greeks who have been fighting for Cyrus as they approach

the sea that will carry them home” (92-93). It appears that Williams has placed his own words in the middle of Xenophon’s, modulating their meaning (W. C. Williams). Capildeo’s nautical quotation from Williams thereby references a moment of nautical quotation and adaptation of meaning. This creates a referential trail that cuts through modernism to classicism, collecting salvage for the building of new linguistic and cultural meanings. Taken alone in Capildeo’s context, this text animates and adds texture to the absolute deep of the previous line via compounded visual and sonic evocations of water’s movement.

Movement and description both conceptually take centre-stage in Capildeo’s next quote:

“Hard to salute each other, harder to describe each other, and  
hardest to look at each other at our destination.” (Capildeo 41)

From Amos Tutola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, the above appears as both subheading and first line of a section in the original. Quoting from this first English-language African novel to gain overseas exposure, Capildeo taps into and transcends an ambivalent history of the work’s critical appreciation. In context, the protagonists have recently been captured in a “bag as a fisherman catches fishes

inside his net”, along with other creatures alongside which they are enslaved (Tutuola). Capildeo’s extraction evokes human transit – willing and unwilling – and attendant naval/maritime hierarchies without making direct historical reference. It also captures a sense of liminality charged with the transformative potentiality inherent in crossing.

Capildeo’s following quotation further evokes ideas surrounding description and transformation:

“And you,

could you have played a nocturne

using a drainpipe for a flute?” (Capildeo 42)

This quote from Mayakovsky concludes a short 1913 poem: 'And Could you?', which is brief enough to here reproduce in full:

"I splintered the landscape of midday

by splashing colours from a tumbler.

I charted on a tray of aspic

the slanting cheekbones of Atlantis.

Upon the scales of an iron turbot,

I found ladies' lips, aloof.

And you,

could you have played a nocturne

using a drainpipe for a flute?" (Mayakovsky 22)

Mayakovsky's original describes in its first four lines a state of total artistic agency over landscape, of landscape being created even, by the artist's wild procedural deployment of raw material. Lines five and six show the poet successfully ascribe meaning or value to elements of this dually created and natural environment. The concluding question therefore expresses braggadocio in the form of artistic challenge. Capildeo's usage of Mayakovsky's concluding question in isolation changes its tone. Gone are ideas of artistic agency over landscape or notions of artist creating landscape; retained is the challenge to produce something of beauty



from base raw material - more generally posed and not set against any poetic 'I' speaker's alleged accomplishment.

Capildeo's next quote even more deeply plumbs dimensions of description, perspective, and being:

“What we call wings the birds can give no name.” (Capildeo 42)

Capildeo extracts the penultimate line of Carter's 'What we call wings,' a meditation on fullness, mortality, and the duality of life-in-death/death-in-life. The last two lines originally read: “What we call wings the birds can give no name / To heaven is their flight, on earth our sin,” a construction in which wings represent something other than simply that physical appendage which allows for flight (Carter, *What We Call Wings*). In the original, literal wings pushing birds skyward imply inherent good or access to heaven that is so innate the birds cannot name them, while the ability to name and see wings as embodying this innocence rests with fallen, sinful man – to whom this access remains blocked. Capildeo's extraction of only the penultimate line breaks this conceit, releasing the original's sense of morbidity and creating a different sense of wonder via its more open-ended construction while retaining some of the ideas about naming expressed by the original. The singled-out line reads as a statement foregrounding disconnect

between, on one hand, the capabilities of human linguistic conceptual or perspectival acts of labelling and, on the other hand, the unvoiced/unspoken capabilities of that which is described. We can name the wings of birds, but cannot use them, while the birds themselves have no concept of having wings even as they fly. Recall the cahow from this thesis's opening section, landscape singing through its reborn voice.

Similar ideas of lacking the ability to see and describe that which is inherent to oneself while at the same time consistently expressing that which remains undescribed manifest themselves in Capildeo's penultimate quotation. Capildeo cites from the sixth of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnets from the Portuguese,'

"[...] What I do

And what I dream include thee, as the wine

Must taste of its own grapes." (Capildeo 42)

The original sonnet considers influence, both in terms of tradition ({...} Yet I feel that I shall stand / Henceforward in thy shadow{...}") and in terms of the kind of double-vision derived from perspectival influence discoursed on by Harris (thy heart in mine {...} pulses that beat double {...} within my eyes, the tears of two")

(Browning). This statement works similarly in the context created by Capildeo: the influence of others' perspectives, as represented in the rest of 'Hazardous Shelves...', are accepted not in their original form but as that which has been distilled or fermented by Capildeo's poet/speaker. Wine necessarily comes from grapes, but also alters them considerably. Likewise, Capildeo's speaker acknowledges canonical ideas of their space but at the same time ferments these ideas into new concoctions of dream.

These new concoctions of dream are the note on which Capildeo concludes, with her second quotation from Carter. This time Capildeo draws on a poem entitled *Where Are Free Men*:

“And what in dreams we do in life we attempt.” (Capildeo 42)

Carter's original describes the paradox of freedom as a “prison of air,” with the line quoted above a kind of lamentation contradictorily compounded with idealism (Carter). This line comes immediately after a comparison of "our souls" crying "in the night" to "cries / of the ghosts of homeless birds {...} flying from the sea," from which the poem builds towards its prison of air (Carter). Concluding Capildeo's poem, it loses some of its original morbidity – although it does not take on an unambiguously positive tone. In Capildeo's context, this line creates feedback between the ideas of description, influence, and perspective evoked by the previous quotations. Just as experience, inculturation, and invisible influence inform description or dream, so does description or dream inform lived experience.

'Hazardous Shelves, Deep Waters' compiles layers of associative description that play on the numerous feedbacks generated by their accumulated resonances, while building new resonance and meaning of its own. The excerpts function primarily not as evocations of their original contexts or signals to look elsewhere for wider context, but rather as parts of a unified discourse that Capildeo's poem assembles from pieces of both. All collectively give tonal, representational, and associative resonance to a piece that, while derived from diverse sources, Capildeo's act of selection and arrangement has moulded into a new unity. Any single excerpt alone proves insufficient for evoking the aura of "Hazardous Shelves, Deep Waters". Capildeo's piece works as an accumulation of auras and meanings made new, tidalectically multivalent and localised evocation of ocean and repurposing of source material.

Does this constitute an engagement with any of the writers quoted in a traditional sense, or an engagement with traditions of quotation as poetic practice? Yes and no. In her interactions with the source materials, Capildeo in some respects takes on the Viking in her next poem's role of "trader-and-raider" (41-42, 44-45). She raids texts of their raw constituents; the trade is more complex. This form of engagement in her act of bringing together texts not only creates a new discourse that sings its own song but also paradoxically foregrounds the persona, the self, the hidden but not absent I, who takes these words from disparate places and chooses to make them sing the sea of memory and the memory of sea. Traded, then, are an old meaning for a new meaning and an old voice for a new voice – even as parts of

old and new meanings/voices lap into one another. Capildeo dismembers, reassembles, and sculpts these voices into their own vector-agent, into the sea of poetic discourse that carries them like flotsam or memory fragments. The poem enacts, evokes, describes, and attempts to embody these seas' actions. Meanwhile its constituent voices simultaneously function as dismembered parts of their original voices, as a unified poetic discourse, as embodiments of the seas that carry them, as the voice that chooses to bring them together, and as the persona that remembered or sought them out. Assimilating these functions of voice, the poem represents a fully integrated and assured hybridity on many levels, persona mixing seamlessly into quotation and vice versa.

Also compounded into the poem's poetic voice is the more conventionally academic or notational voice of Capildeo's endnote. Capildeo might as well have not provided the endnote if it were simply a reference or an academic convention; it is less necessary when reading the poem in the course of the book to know what the poem excerpts so much as it is to know that it uses excerpts to say something of its own. The manner in which this endnote augments voice proves significant in that it not only introduces an academic register but also invites the creation or location of further text by the readers themselves. This further differentiates 'Hazardous Shelves, Deep Waters' from other poems that interpolate, assimilate, or re-use text/sound from primary sources. The endnote that begins as a list of excerpts with citations contained in the poem concludes:

“Quotations have not been converted to the earliest or the best editions.

Though in some ways this would be ideal and readers are urged to seek out these writers in such editions (or produce such editions where they do not exist), the poem is meant to show how one ‘sea’ of voices rolls from an actual set of shelves or in memory, including the quality of echo and muttering of translation or imperfect transmission” (92).

In essence, the poet here not just invites the reader to look into these inter-textual connections by finding their sources, but also admits that these are not in fact necessarily accurate renditions of these sources, admits that the sources themselves may be flawed/inauthentic, and invites the reader to create an “earlier” or better source if they cannot find one that is satisfyingly authentic. This invitation is self-referential in that it appears to describe the way that Capildeo composed the poem in the first place, while also an opening in that the range of better or earlier editions that a reader could “produce” seems infinite (92). The direct invitation to reader-participation simultaneously assigns and divests readers of the normal rules of research. This is intelligent, not academic, poetry – which is not to make a qualitative assertion so much as a critical distinction. It works in an academic tradition allowing for but without requiring academic reception, exists as a hybrid of materials operating as a unified whole that need not be teased apart into constitutive elements and that moreover invites revision and addition. The reader can plunge down and focus on its hazardous shelves, or swim their own course through the deep waters of thought and association that cover these precipices.



### **Conclusion: The Beginning**

Tidalectic epistemology posits paradigmatic contradictions as inherent and indivisible yet disparate parts of a whole, simultaneously connected and separated by a fluid dynamic of eb&flow iteration. The apparently straightforward generation of this understanding from the natural environment belies a complex network of reference and influence. This nexus of influence includes and forms a part of the ocean's function as a kinetic timehri; it is in part through these timehri that one enters said nexus. This signals the potential for a deep dive into memory beyond personhood, response beyond self, allowing for renovation of the architectonic structures underpinning perspective. Perspective in this sense means epistemology, perception, self-perspective, artistic perspective, and perceptual framework. Even the most entrenched paradigmatic forms and freshest of synthesis are revealed to be in constant flux – much like the motion of the tides, or like the motion of flotsam within said tides. Constant reiteration of tropes within tropes allows tidalectic forces wear down and alter that which they bear over passages in the same manner that wave-motion alters rock or glass.

Important to the epistemology of tidalectics, and worked toward in the preceding thesis, is the manner in which it entails either (a) the relinquishment of personal choice (b) acceptance that personal choice will always be mediated. In the context of tidalectics this mediation does not only come from the elements or some unseen force but also from the population of the elements with a cosmography of spiritual beings. In this manner, tidalectics draws together ideas of science, allegory, geography and religion, syncretizing them into its perspectival and operational



structures. There can be no mastery over tidalectic forces. Existing within the tidalectic is not an inherently a positive condition, and the fact of a tidal dynamic existing does not equate to realization and positive utilisation of this phenomenon. If unrecognized, it may yet leave the islanded subject in what Brathwaite refers to as a Sisyphean state of self-denigration – it is recognition of the tidalectic ebb&flow that provides opportunity for adaptation and transcendence of the negatively focuses Sisyphus-myth way of viewing cyclic recurrence.

Familiarity derived from local knowledge allows for strategic response based on relinquishing a degree of agency to the extrahuman field. In the context of the Caribbean, this means coming to live with and conceive of the natural environment in productive and self-affirmative forms. As demonstrated by Juan Hunte's swim, adaptation of perspective to local landscape develops a substantial component of identity formation. Becoming a wrecker, or collecting some of our varied longshore drift – as Brathwaite does when he picks up on American jazz, African folklore, or English prosody – does not transpire unproblematically. All elements of tidalectics complement and mediate access to one another. To become a successful wrecker, one must first learn to check harmattan or current, submerge, swim, then enter and exit submerged structures without drowning. One must recognize and work within the tidalectic, or risk being swept away. Our survival depends on our ability to check the harmattan, take stock and preserve that of our culture which risks erosion – but which, on closer analysis, was birthed and constantly undergoes rebirth by way of tidalectic mediations.

The project of this thesis has been to examine tidalectics and its epistemological background on Brathwaite's terms. This is an important intervention in the apprehension of tidalectics by the wider academic community, presenting a sounding of the tidalectic before it can be adapted or built upon. Now that it has been thoroughly sounded, a programme of interventions and adaptations can be made where deemed necessary. Not everything that Brathwaite presents in his tidalectic discourses need be taken on; areas of gender dynamics require further interrogation, as does the omission of deeply considered influence from a wider array of the Caribbean's constituent ethnic groups.

The incorporation into discourses on tidalectics of African and European epistemologies and theologies appears to further Brathwaite's wider elisions and explicit exclusions other, particularly South Asian, influences seemingly appropriate for co-deployment in the theorization of a locally generated and indigenized philosophy. The gendering of spirits and landscapes also could be redefined in light of these or other traditions. Brathwaite's own conceptualization of the tidalectic creates the dynamics and the spaces necessary for making corrective interventions. Study of physically geographic and historic tidalectic vectors of migration and connectivity inevitably encompasses vectors of motion inclusive of the groups on whom Brathwaite does not focus. Meanwhile, a developed perspective of tidalectic ebb&flow reveals a dynamic within which the seemingly disparate and irreconcilable develop unities and connective currents. In this context, the psychical elements of tidalectics provides opportunity for new insights. Certain interstitial sites within tidalectic epistemology – such as Rastafari, or the canefield/ocean

dynamic developed within the aegis of the tidalectic – could provide openings for such interventions.

The impetus remains upon later scholars to fully consider appropriate manners and implications of incorporating East Indian and other Caribbean cultural inheritances not considered by Brathwaite into tidalectic epistemology. In this regard, Derek Walcott's aforementioned conversation with Christian Campbell may prove instructive and not out of step with the spirit of tidalectics when the former remarks upon the abundance of untapped intellectual and artistic resources inherited from a multiplicity of Caribbean origins. Tidalectics provides multiple tools for approaching and deploying these resources, for taking Harris's philosophically related 'deep dive' into personal response to these resources' lineages and their resultant perceptual artifices and preconceptions.

In conclusion, I would like to recall that this project was enacted with the creative process in mind. A collection of poetry, below, was composed while research and writing this thesis. However, it should not be taken as a prescriptive model for others. Tidalectics provides a guiding framework for me to write poems that take into account the intellectual concerns above, operating both historically and synchronically with the tidalectics of my home island as their engine. The local need not exclude the global, and within the local, there are spaces for unique understandings of the global. Tidalectic perspectives of the ideas of wrecking provide regionally and cross-culturally appropriate models for the production of a local poetic tradition of literary analytic discourse and creative work. Brathwaite and his generation of thinkers have enacted a potent genesis of imaginative

ferment. It is the duty of a younger generation of poet/scholars to take time and care sounding its depths.

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**Chris Astwood, LDC, 3987825**

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“The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled.

The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad.

The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.

Thy way is the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.” PSALM 77: 16-19; *The Holy Bible Red, Letter Edition, King James Version, Dictionary + Concordance*. Thomas Nelson Inc, Nashville TN 1977 p.363

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## DEPTHS AND SHALLOWS

“The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled...”

**THEME FROM WALCOTT**

Khlebnikov paddled here from Port Royal, dying+  
for dry land to ring his skinny bones,

didn't he? You don't know Velemir? The King of Time  
drew bearings from constellations  
that led him into tangled Sargasso

where brown weed wrapped debris – *held back my freestyle  
strokes*, he said – (But that's nonsense, *innah?*) and where the gyre  
still holds many things in stasis:

takes them in, spits them out at random  
to skip over ocean or spin in currents  
familiar and cyclical. Khlebnikov, I've realized,

must have paddled and understood each in extreme detail  
– but I know why he decided not to say so!

**DRIFT POEM: SHED LOCKS LEAD ME BACK**

A reef

pokes from the sea,

Sargasso

stink we breathe,

we are no part of these,

but late at night

shed locks lead me back

to my Sister Sargasso deep,

who spins them, keeps her circle

of Atlantic a whirlpool,

weeds snaring whatever

until they snap off, drift,

knot into each other,

sink,

or wash up to rot –

drop me back ashore by morning.



against the crushing weight of water on all sides.

## AN OCEANOGRAPHIC COSMOLOGY BURST BY QUESTIONS, A PRAYER

Like the intestine of an old grouper,  
     our universe squeezes  
 random waste through airless  
 space: gasses and rubble, planets like ours.

    Who knows where the grouper swims?  
     Will it get hooked or speared, multiverse of waste  
     guts gutted out –  
     or swallowed whole, our universe inside?

Sometimes we feel it flex its spine,  
 sometimes the cool rush  
 of saltwater through its gills  
 reaches us back in the digestive tract  
 and chills us, because we barely can imagine  
 anything exists  
 outside of these intestines, let alone  
 beyond the body of the fish –  
 although unknown things touch  
 all of us sometimes.

    Give part of me  
     over  
     to that water:

waste consciousness and hard leftovers  
 from my decomposing body,  
 even if I dissipate, if the salt  
 burns ulcers in me,  
 if I'm nothing but a blob  
 of fish shit – give me over  
     to that water beyond waters,  
     the beyond just beyond the beyond,  
     swirling outside the skin  
     that groups these universes together.  
 Let me swim out where the grouper swims.

**DRIFT POEM: BEEN DOWN**

I've been down deeper than sound,

free-diving with you, pressure unbearable,  
farther underwater than weak lungs can handle,  
then come up from eye-sting sea-visions  
with canticles  
for shoreline, moon, and tide – unwritten –  
we sang them together,  
you always swam stronger,  
crossed choppy  
currents of rhythm

tell me, how was it you that drowned?



## THIS LIMBO

Out on the reefs  
land matters less  
than it did underfoot;

we feel the same heave  
as continents  
floating on magma.

But still, it's hard to forget  
how landlock-hearted people  
enforce rules  
that make good people bend  
over backwards,  
paralyze the tongue.

Swear at them,  
they take you under,  
file arrest-papers,  
leave you locked up all night –  
outside stray bullets roam  
lanes in packs,  
burrow into whatever  
crosses their path: living flesh or limestone.

Time matters less  
out on the  
reefs,

limbo becomes apparent:  
Our island looks static –  
a statistical anomaly  
plotted on wave curves  
as a series of dots  
set apart from the shifting  
faces of the Atlantic  
that fold and unfold into  
themselves,  
raw data of waves'  
illusion of a surface

without depths that shift  
in other, unseen vectors –

But the ocean runs  
under our island  
in cave systems'  
complex mazes,

both hide uncharted

fathoms

where unknown things move  
in unknown patterns,  
and no-one's boat can stay upright  
above them forever.

**SISTER SARGASSO SURFACES**

The first time she overhears radios singing overhead,  
she leaps up from the deep trench to sing with them  
in the form of a waterspout. Gathering force,  
her cyclone pierces the ocean below her,  
nearly exposes the seafloor  
and draws the singing metal flies magnetic North/  
declension thirteen point two degrees West  
into spinning white water that swats them  
down against deep green water  
below, one by one. Some sink quick and  
others burn while Sister Sargasso sings  
along with them in manic rounds of radio chatter:  
*don't know where we are entering white water*  
*nothing seems right, nothing green, not white, the water,*

**BOTTLED (FROM LOVERS' ROCK)**

I'd run back into you if you were open,  
if you were close enough to run to,  
(if you wanted me), but there's water  
at the bottom of a cliff in front of me  
and from growing up on islands I know  
it'll be too shallow to catch me. If I jump  
the gun, what will happen to the home I built  
without you, so many miles away? Will  
its doors open if I come back alone,  
will its doors open if I try to bring you through -  
you who I can't reach through shout nor call,  
whose heartbeat used to scan my diction  
but thumps so distant these days I can barely hear,  
which only makes me strain my ears and picture  
your back curled on our waterbed, heart sounding  
notes on your forked ribs and spine. I'd run  
miles to lie down beside you and listen,  
if you hadn't someone listening,  
if they weren't close enough to reach over,  
touch you silent. If I heard one single  
note sound out from you that sounded meant  
for me, I'd take a running jump and swim  
whatever whitecaps I'm thrown into,  
whatever comes between; let western wind  
blow me back into you. I'd love nothing  
more than to know you still listen for my  
calls, still keep part of yourself waiting.  
But it's been years since we've been alone  
together, and the weather closing  
between us has already thickened  
too much for us to see over. I'm throwing this  
poem off the cliff in a plastic bottle, sealed  
against the salt. Either it'll reach you  
or it won't.

**DRIFT POEM: FLOTSAM**

There are and always will be fragments that bind  
our world by floating the reaches of its oceans,

untouched by customs or immigration quotients:

strips of plastic, milk crates, bits of coconut rind,  
and all the tangled myths and legends  
carried on sailors' lips that find

new meanings on new shorelines –  
wind up as trash or scrap,  
icons, or beachcomber's tokens.

Let me be so many floating fragments;  
let me touch and unite many coasts;  
let many parts of myself roll away with line squalls,

roll over the horizon, wetted to saturation;  
let me break into a shoal of faded plastic  
pushed out on many tangents,

and gathered back together at the whim

of ocean currents indifferent  
to any flotsam, any body, any hull they carry.

## SHALLOWS

Better companies of men than me have fished  
these waters bare. These waters, I once wished  
would give up something heavy, let me lift it  
– Or if I couldn't have the biggest catch,  
wished myself to get snatched up  
in one of the big corporations' nets, dragged  
in the death churn  
behind one of their big swift boats, and delivered  
to the hull's belly for dressing  
with the rest of their graft.

Nowadays I don't boat, just take the path  
from the road to the rocks, hook squid and crab  
then throw them to the sea, asking for gifts.  
Sometimes the ocean answers back,  
gurgles, shakes its head, spits in my face –  
but I've learned not to listen,  
always come back hopeful for hogfish.

**THE WORLD OF WATER**

If a marlin at the weigh-in  
breaks a record, it's hats off  
to both fisherman and catch -  
the latter for a life of luck  
the former for a snatch of fortune;  
All the photographs, sun rash,  
and rounds on the house can't add up

to that invisible transaction  
between catch and fisherman:  
we celebrate their exchange  
of providence, the transfer  
between our world and water.  
But one must drown the other,  
and let us never forget:

No matter how many lines we cast  
that pull fish into their last gasps,  
no matter how good our luck  
with chum and bait and hook and gaff,  
their ocean's rising always,  
climbs slow up the coastal rocks  
to reclaim the bones.

**CLIFFJUMP**

More thrill than surf in  
this drop,

this trust in waving  
water to catch me,

bend, absorb impact,  
decrease my velocity

before my soft body sounds bottom.

Buoyant drag.

Bubble cradle.

Sometimes I don't  
know which way is up,

thrill of trying to swim  
back,

blind,  
to surface





## SISTER SARGASSO SINGS

Sister Sargasso, deep and distant, sings  
the signals she's receiving back into the morning:  
distant slogans, long-abandoned, their points  
of origin obscure -  
*down?*

*die?*

Her tangled serenades pierce  
coastal windows, mix with Atlantic whispers: indistinct  
communicues unwittingly received by coast-dwellers  
*eyes*  
that vibrate their awakes and sleeps,  
jingle cochlea like loose change in their skulls.

Human sounding-board, even underwater  
she can hear the distant shell-sound of air whistling  
in dryland ears aching to be filled. Her signal spreads  
out over the Earth's empty regions.

Deep now, her joys recede into blips.  
She trusts her instincts, connects and  
harmonizes messages and portents,  
notates and sings their score.

Numbered, charted, the salt grains echo around her,  
dissolving in the heavens of glasswater inlets.  
She hears each reverb, hears the numbered  
cottages and coastal lanes hum with, toss back, and split  
her intonations. She strengthens the signal.

Her transatlantic transmissions linger after  
her disconnect. Shaken awake by water sounds, I hum  
her estrangement. Prophetic, she  
remembers each day I wake up to face. Her voice  
whispers to my antenna ears. I write back to her  
sometimes; others try to pick apart her whispers,  
but I'm happy to re-transmit, sing along with her.

(-)

(-)

*...you're very*

(-)

*... did I let you*

*...did I let you*

*...was I blind*

*when*

*behind your*

*your brain boiled  
and in your chest  
your heart fried?...*

(-)

*...brand new glock clear old  
block of insurgents;  
draw gun smoke*

*and herb twist;*

*sunburn on my pale chest  
but my heart's too cold...*

(-)

*...going under turquoise, going  
under green and blue,*

*going under*

*white-tipped spikes,*

*going under dark sky,*

*dark water*

(-)

*... a lizard pissed*

*in his eye,*

*blinded him*

(-)

*...you will belong to life;*

*you will consume*

*yourself in light,*

*when the weather*

*clears...*

(-)

(-)

Sister Sargasso's song whispers  
with stinging jellyfish into the mouth of the harbor:

Be her amplifier –

Forget your sense of melody;

Forget your mother, meaning.



The Old White Bastard: *(Old and shrivelled but still muscled, he surveyed the rock with eyes grey as its most weathered tip, hungry.)*

**CABIN BOY:** Least they has left us nets and fishing lines.

**OLD WHITE BASTARD:** The thinnest of lines and smallest of hooks can save more lives than the thickest bounds and biggest knives can take. The same goes for taking lives. If you don't catch fish I'll eat you quicker than you can eat me, and you'll believe it right.

**CABIN BOY:** Makes sense *(prepares to fish, threading line and hook)*. I'll be needing bait though *(casts meaningful glance at poet)*.

**POET** *(crouched low, fingers digging at the rock)*: No matter how many lines we cast, no matter how many fish we pull up into their last gasps, their water's rising – and where's ours? We have no mastery of the sea...we're headed for Anubis or Poseidon at the bottom if we risk a jump off these cliffs.

**CABIN BOY:** Shadup tightpants!

**OLD WHITE BASTARD:** Poets are always such defeatists.

*(a long  
silence, save  
for the slurred chatter of wave  
slopping rock)*

**POET:** ...fine, fine, I'll throw the net for bait.

*(another long silence)*

The poet waited for some kind of acknowledgement,  
got none.

He went about collecting baitfish.

Their slippery bodies flipped, shining, from the net  
and slap-slapped against the rough rock

while they gasped and shook flecks  
of brined blood over its sharp edges.

Fish stench enveloped everything on the rock.

The Old White Bastard gripped  
his knife tight in one wizened fist,

began to cut their bodies

into easily-hooked bits,

and the Cabin Boy played hard

baiting hooks and

tossing heads and entrails overboard  
as chum.

In the distance, Sister Sargasso flung back  
a sea shanty  
sung by unknown others  
sailing above her  
in unknown ships.

**OTHERS** VIA SISTER SARGASSO: ♪ There was a wolf who wandered  
from the cold forests up north, ♪  
found his way down to Halifax  
and from there set forth south, ♪  
♪ roamed down far as the Everglades  
and learned to breathe underwater, ♪  
stalked his way out to the coast,  
killing off alligators ♪  
♪ as he went, until the current  
swept him, took him, drew him under ♪  
and out into sea-tree forests,  
then dark and treeless desert depths  
where the wolf wandered blind, ♪  
♪ until he found a shallow space,  
full of fish, to call his home. ♪  
Now he's living underwater,  
where we sailors go to die, ♪  
♪ and the scent of our dry-land flesh  
makes his mouth foam with saliva— ♪

Slowly her transmission weaved in  
on the waves' subtle breakings against North Rock,  
her voice barely distinguishable,  
until heat made the three sailors' eyes sting, and ringing deafened their heads,  
and thirst crazed them crazy,  
and the Poet found it necessary to declaim once more.

**POET:** Water: barren. Stomach acid: eating my own marrow. No fish, no fish?

The water spread before them not white caps,  
but depths. It cackled at them.

**WATER:** Ha!! Catch Nothing!!

Night, suddenly hungry,  
wrapped tentacles of cloud around the sun  
and began to slowly tug it down into the ocean.  
The stranded men despaired and envied the sea  
for eating its meal of North Rock, and the night

for eating its meal of sun. The dry rock stretched  
under them, then water. No horizon - black empty  
distance filled with shrieks from the south and  
the rock shattering waves. Sometimes it shook.  
Sometimes the water spoke to them –

**WATER:** 

– but they couldn't catch the rhythm, couldn't pick up the Sargasso  
weed dialects the water – so clear before – now spoke.

Somehow the stranded sailors slept,  
ignorant of their position within the  
gyre  
but still fitful, afraid of demons.

The poet remembered classic epics,  
silently spat heroic platitudes at the stars  
as if words alone held back the vacuum's  
constant swallowing pull.  
His lips collected salt. Whispering in his sleep,  
the poet dreamed himself a purpose.

The Old White Bastard sat  
padmasana, in stasis,  
mouth dangling tendrils of drool  
that stretched wide and thin into phlegm-bubble cocoon  
layers  
to protect him from the elements.

The cabin boy sweated and shivered in the breeze,  
tried to sleep by convincing himself that his bed  
wasn't the massive rock-tooth lodged  
in a submerged marid's open cave-mouth –  
as he'd been warned about  
years before, in different water.

All night he dreamed of teeth.

Before they realized they were asleep,  
the sea coughed and vomited up sunlight and orange  
and sky-blue, covering the stars, slow-burning  
the sailors' skins until they woke.

**CABIN BOY:** Ooooh, I'm hungry.

**OLD WHITE BASTARD:** Get back to your task, my boy, and you'll have yourself a fish  
soon after you've caught me mine. Unless, of course, you're ready for me to cut off  
your leg - in which case we'll share the meat.

*(he licks his dry,  
crusted lips)*

**CABIN BOY:** (*placid*) Sounds reasonable.

**POET:** (*addressing the Old White Bastard*) An admirable socio-economic system, hewn naturally as limestone by the elements on this rock. If only this rock were a throne at the center of the world, from which your noble system could flow like water from an ancient Roman aqueduct, wetting the mouths of men near and far as they drink deep your division of labour and delegation of resources and capital to various sectors, oh may you forever be the setter of all trends from frocks to fetters.

**OLD WHITE BASTARD:** Ah yes, Rome; very good. You'll also fish. Now, the sun is hot. Bring your catch to my mucus-cocoon.

While the Old White Bastard slept,  
the others fished. Hours of sun made their skins bubble  
like white ocean froth at the bottom of the rock.  
Suddenly, one bite, two bites,  
and after a short fight two fat silver fish flopped,  
deliciously asphyxiating on the rock.

The poet cast back his line.

Before the Cabin Boy could start cleaning the fish,  
the Old White Bastard caught whiff.  
He emerged from his cocoon.

**OLD WHITE BASTARD:** Dear boy, let me do that –  
I do enjoy their guts whilst they're still warm.  
You catch us some more fish;  
I'll deal with cleaning them.           *(with a scratchy giggle,  
he takes a scaling knife from the Cabin Boy,  
who goes back to the rock's edge).*

The Cabin Boy cast his line over once again, waiting for a bite.  
The short knife  
glinted in the sunlight; sometimes its glint linked  
with the glint of fish-scale;  
in the moment before the one stripped the other  
their linked glints zapped  
the Old White Bastard's eyes.

*(The Old White Bastard gets up and spits, walks up behind the cabin boy with  
armfuls of fishguts and flings them into the water.)*

The guts bubbled and sank; suspended clouds  
of blood expanded until they linked, spread

until too dissipated for the naked eye  
to see their stain in the water.  
Distant, Sister Sargasso tasted the copper tang,  
traces of gut scent and flavour circling out  
away from the rock, weaker and weaker,  
arc of blood nearly too faint even for sharks  
to pick up and follow. The few sharks  
that did find their way to the rock  
circled in opposite directions.

**CABIN BOY:** If we can have ourselves a shark, that's good meat. I once caught one off the ship. Let me hook one, then maybe we can pull it up and finish it with the knife, or let it drown hanging in the air, or pelt it to death with rocks. *(Pulls line up, rebaits it, casts it back over the edge)*

**OLD WHITE BASTARD:** Don't play. The last thing we want is to be prey.

**CABIN BOY:** Relax old man I'm— *(The line jerks, pulls him over the edge. He goes straight under, thrashes in the water; foam around him reddens: the thrashing stops.)*

Before the Old White Bastard realized what he saw,  
he was swatted from the rock into the water  
by an enormous paw; a matted mass of fur  
flew above him, landed on the rock as he clung for life  
at cliff bottom.

Meanwhile up top, the Poet had seen the commotion  
and thought that the cabin boy had fallen overboard –  
but then he saw the wolf spring from the water,  
uncoiling, swatting the Old White Bastard, landing crouched  
behind him, salivating; he could hear it panting.  
The poet clenched, unclenched his fists. When the wolf  
leapt from behind, he spun around and grabbed its front legs  
and spread them, held the wolf at arms' length with it thrashing  
and lunging for him all the while, until he wore it out  
and the two stood with eyes locked in stalemate, joints aching.  
The poet seized the opportunity to speak.

**POET:** Ferocious wolf, you'll never taste my blood.  
I'll never break my hold, lunge at me again  
and I'll part your front legs farther, start breaking ribs –  
we'll both die here together, unless we make some kind of deal.  
We're both close to broken; let's share bodies:  
I'll give you my precious hands with thumbs  
and fingers nimbler than your paws, if you let me wear  
your head over my torso – that way you'll be in control;



I know of a magic spell that can accomplish this,  
 if you'll let me start to cut your head off at the neck  
 and push my head up inside while it's still attached.

The wolf went limp and offered up its neck.  
 things were going better than the poet had expected;  
 he gathered his strength and said whatever nonsense  
 came into his head while lining-up the knife.  
 When the wolf's neck opened with a whoosh  
 of putrid air and squirts of blood,  
 he thought his deception was nearly done,  
 wondered what he could make from the wolf-skin.

But little did the poet know:  
 his spell worked; he couldn't help but  
 push his head inside the severed wolf-head,  
 felt its conscious mind still firing somehow alongside his own,  
 reached to pull his head out and found he couldn't—  
   and the wolf-head cried as it watched its body write  
   jerky cursives on the bare rock in its own foam and gore,  
 but then it felt the poet's warm skull gently slip  
 inside of it, felt the poet's warm skull merging with it,  
 the poet's warm skull one with it from neck to snout,  
 the poet's warm skull now wolf-head wreathed in blood.

*(The Wolf-Headed Poet  
 now not human, nor fully canine: look,  
 the wolf-head kept its furry gills!)*

The wolf-headed poet tested the waters,  
 climbed down, stuck his head under,  
 filled. The gills breathed true,  
 so he climbed back up the cliff and stood looking out at miles of waves.

Then he kissed his Saint Christopher's medal,  
 cocked back his wolf head and sniffed at the sky,  
 took a running dive.  
 At first he was addled  
 by the shock of salt in the blood,  
 then chloride secretory cells nestled under his hairy gills  
 kicked in, re-salting the sea.  
 He paddled deeper,  
   was forgotten by dry land.

Everything went silent. Night calmed the waves.

The Old White Bastard's bald head broke surface

where he floated, clutching at the cliff.

He waited with all but half his face  
covered by water and shifting Sargasso,  
breathing through his nose  
and listening until he thought it was safe.

Then he climbed back to the top  
of the cliffs that were North Rock  
and waited again. Years and years  
of visitors to North Rock  
never noticed him, until he decided to swim  
out to a distant fisherman some time  
just before civil war broke out stateside –  
he sensed an opportunity.

Some say he still lives  
many lives in these islands,  
others call him myth.

A daguerreotype from years later shows the cliffs  
of North Rock reduced,  
but still formidable:

Two men look pleased to have scaled them,  
water a good fifty feet below.

Now the proud rock's so worn down,  
no-one I just told you about  
would recognize it;  
their history will also crumble or grow coral.  
The sea continues its meal.

**THE ANCIENT MARINER MOTORS AROUND PILCHARD BAY**

Stump-fingered, he steers his skiff, gas running low  
as he navigates the crowded harbour  
looking for an unattended mooring,  
or somewhere to tether off in the mangroves.

Big boats rumble in, sharp sleek hulls scoring  
open their ocean-bride's green skirts,  
revealing white-lace garters.

Little whalers putter in: holidaymakers touring.  
Some disappear, others anchor or tilt and drift  
while their tourist-pilots adjust the blue sun-awnings.

No distractions. He's got to put the hurt  
on a bucket of uncleaned fish,  
so he gets to cutting open their white bellies  
and fisting out their wet guts.

Let other boats go do what they will,  
let others get picky about what they catch:  
The ancient mariner's lived for centuries  
on fish most people throw back, swells they can't stomach.



## COAST

“The clouds poured out water: the skies sent  
out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad...”

**THEME FROM WALCOTT**

I didn't imagine the death of Khlebnikov—

it happened among the mangrove roots;  
nobody knows how the guy got to dying in there—

but he'd always loved the outdoors,  
according to three thick volumes of work  
found next to his shoot-punctured, half-submerged head.

Being eaten by many plants and vermin,  
investigators struggled  
to positively identify him—

but we all knew when he opened up his mouth,  
singing songs of numbers, spewing green-black sludge with his song  
until it became water, soon even without salt—

living water lingering on his lips.

**WHO CAN BE SURE?**

Who can be sure of the sea  
that dances too quickly  
for land animals to follow,

the sea that shakes fish  
wriggling in place against its current  
like fleshy leaves, the sea  
that bubbles, whirls, and ripples -  
wind made visible?

Who can be sure enough of  
the sea to turn their eyes away,  
trust it not to creep up  
and snatch them

while distracted, in waves  
that erode and rock  
the coast to sleep  
with repeated motion,

so dryland feels no pain  
while the sea feasts  
and it wastes to sand?

## A LITTLE BOOK MAKES FIRST LANDFALL

A little book washed up in the flotsam,  
     jettisoned  
     by a distant revolution

on an island up the gulf stream's

South-North current –

[a little book must have washed up there first done its due course filled law-  
 books with itself then photocopied and printed itself in their presses until it  
 outnumbered everything cluttered lecture halls and Laundromats alike piled  
 high in libraries and squares pages torn  
 apart and scattered by gulls  
 until one windy day whole copies caught the breeze seeded up farm-fields  
 and grew trees that fruited copies of the little book hung them above  
 everyone's heads then and dropped them covered everything  
 until a week later the wind changed and flung some ocean-ward where the  
 current must have took them under,           scattered]

– It lay drying slow

in the winter drizzle

interspersed with sun,

almost dried out enough to be read by someone –

  then the tide came in and the wind crazed

Atlantic mistook the book

for a coastal hand-hold that might ease its sway,

  reached out to grab it with a wave,

  and tore it away,

falling back

into salt-spray and jostling long-shore drift.

  The book spun blind

  in swirling sand,

  came open

and caught against things that tore whole pages

clean from its spine.

A riptide took the book out to second reef,

where it stuck

between two fan corals' purple gates,

and there it stayed...

**INTERTIDAL**

The oldest mystery known to the sea-grape  
is the level of the last tide's high-water mark,

and now that it dangles, half-submerged, half drying  
out on a sea-slimed limestone overhang,

even this cool memory evaporates.

Invisible water – what secrets get carried  
on your currents as flotsam, unnoticed : stink  
of salt-rot on the tongue their only whispered trace?

Will they slip from my lips after I taste them,

or will they stick, burning in the back of my throat  
until I've washed them away with rainwater,

swished and spat them into the sand, or swallowed them?

Does the sea receive them back as rainwater  
or is part of them lost forever to the air?



**BRACKISH**

This poem sings sadly from the leaves of what few trees can survive  
shoreside for generations. Semi-tropic dew mixed with salt spray  
and exhaust fumes from the coast road coats their leaves and drips poisonous,  
poisons the ground underneath them, you will not drink this stanza –  
it is like my father's wellwater, it will send you spinning,  
you'll be swimming down and pulling others down with you,  
singing.

### SMELLING CLOUDS AT SPITTAL POND

I can smell the clouds  
 before I see the first  
 drops break the stagnant pond  
 downhill by the coast,  
 where brackish water  
 from below ground  
 strains to meet its cousin:  
 the sea, that gently rocks  
 against the limestone  
 and nearly drowns  
 the low ground between them,  
 but they're each beyond  
 the other's reach. I can smell  
 the clouds – the only joint

between these worlds of water, flying over, purer than both, offering a little  
 spit.

From the clouds' scent  
 I know they're swollen  
 and heavy,  
 but this land's too low,  
 too low to make them open  
 unless they're ready.  
 The pond ripples and licks  
 its dirty lips, thirsty  
 and excited, but no –  
 these ocean-thickened drifters  
 won't anchor  
 long enough to drop  
 much, won't make a link  
 between these worlds of water.

**WE WERE MOUNTAINS**

before they crashed sailing ships  
on our wave-breaking tips, and clung to us for life -  
how foolishly we cradled them,  
they were equipped  
to strip us, which they did quickly,  
built ships, and ditched.

We thought that would be all of it.

But when they came back they ripped into us,  
chopped blocks from our faces, scooped out and sifted  
our bellies, made building stone. Now the damp seeps  
deep under the fake ass skins  
that they paint on us, and touch up whenever  
it flakes off, shows our nature.



**YOU'RE NOT / BIG DUMB WIND**

You're not the thick Sargasso rot I breathe,  
I'm not a breeze or zephyr.

Chasing my own tail, I'm big dumb wind.

You're not sharp rocks pointing from the sea,  
I'm not rustling in endemic palmettos.

I spin, spit and zigzag. I speed up the ocean's clocks.

The last wood house sat on blocks – precarious

anomaly on this coastal lane  
of stone and reinforcement rod,  
faded wood poles dangling powerlines  
over Surinam Cherry

hedges and gnarled wet tarmac – is neither of us.

Upsurge in the evening, I bubble rocks  
to nothing. Hold firm all night, dawn  
tornados still rip you out - whatever the tide.

You're not a moon-gate I came to sit under,  
I'm not a sea-swell pastel.

Running over coastlines, I reverse course again.

**SHARK OIL****a**

Augury, still: the plastic vial –  
shark oil – hanging behind the wire screen  
of Auntie Nella's seaward window,  
swings gently on its rubber band,  
begins to cloud.

**b**

By means of totems plucked from sleek predators,  
we foresee the weather,  
but who knows how it looks those who swish  
their shining flesh though the near deep?

**c**

If this oil still ran inside the shark's body,  
would it display something, or shake the fish's guts  
down in its ravenous stomach?

**d**

Bright sun in the sky,  
but shark oil don't lie, so we fasten  
the storm shutters.

## THE MIRROR SEA

The mirror sea that imitates our insides,  
sprays and froths, canine, rabies-shaken.

In the cathedrals, churches, and temples,  
people pray, "Oh give us glass calm, glass calm  
and cool heads layered over with freshwater,"  
because the mirror sea does more than reflect –

The mirror sea enacts, and these are rabid days  
when men and women get themselves bitten

to death for less than cutting their eyes  
in the wrong direction. The mirror sea  
strengthens its undertow. Plenty dumb kids  
get hit with pebbles when it sucks them in deeper

than they'd intended, into the shrapnel  
it strafes at the beach with long-shore drift.

If the earth then takes them kids, people rally  
on Front Street, demand their leaders push back the sea –  
so the mirror sea rallies and wets Front Street,  
pushes the people, leaders and all, inside.





Sea-serpents twisted their cold bodies around houses, flicking their tongues  
in time to a faint song that didn't harmonize with the wind,

or screaming sea — something singing deeper than the hurricane could reach.

## FOUR DAYS

### Day 1:

Six or seven haggard chickens peck at the coastal road that splits off, little capillary, from the main way to Dockyard and wriggles in between hillsides, the ocean, and the inland field flooded to make a lagoon and cover up the fever dead.

Too narrow  
for two cars.

The chickens block a corner, fighting for seed.

### Day 2:

A single half-smashed chicken lolls on the coastal road that splits off, little capillary, from the main way to Dockyard.

Neck split open, guts dribbled, stomach swollen. Blood trickles between the hillside, the ocean, and the lagoon.

Oleander hedges stand quiet, withhold their pink blooms, poisonous and indifferent.

### Day 3:

A few chickens scrap over the body of the smashed chicken on the road that splits off, little capillary, from the main way to Dockyard. Beaks burst the bloated belly, clash against each other. The scavengers pause, squawk at each other, dangle bits of flesh.

The road heats up. The meat slow-cooks and festers while they eat.

### Day 4:

Beside the smashed, beak-ravaged chicken (now completely flat on the road that splits off,

little capillary, from the main way to Dockyard), a second chicken stretches a wrecked wing thin across the asphalt, head crushed and mashed down into where it was pecking at the flattened carcass of the first.

In the oleander, others rustle, invisible, waiting to come out and feast.

A bounty in this dry winter, scarce of seed: God be praised!

**ISLAND VISTA WITHOUT CONSCRIPTS**

Sat off in Astwood Park, protected by the fullness  
of winter skies post-hurricane season,  
I move my lips and listen  
    to the South Shore waves roll in  
        from the boilers, regaining momentum  
only to break and shatter.

No friendly gunshots  
block the waves' slop-slopping song.  
It shouldn't be difficult  
    to listen and move my lips  
        along with the sea these days  
— nothing to cover its complexity.

I move my lips and listen,  
try to catch the faint transmission:  
deep hum of spinning currents.  
    I scramble to hold it in,  
        to descramble it wholly, but when I move my lips  
I spill distorted songs.



### THE ANCIENT MARINER HAULS IN THE OLD WHITE BASTARD (CIRCA 1859)

No small motors around then, outboard clamped the stern was just a patent for an idea drawn up years and nautical miles ahead on land where the Ancient Mariner says he decided early on never to sail to and with whose people he never spoke. He spoke to people from other places on the dock in the former capital, St. George's, where murmurs of civil war coming to the west only reinforced his sentiments. The old town bobbed, distant, on the horizon. He wasn't far from North Rock, but already inordinate amounts of Sargasso gripped at his tiller, slowing his sail. He was less ancient back when boat was the best way up the country, but in spite of all his youthful strength, when something struck against the hull and stopped the boat, he found it hard to haul the skinny pale white man up from the sargassum – in fact he couldn't. He tried everything, from bare hand grip to a rope and pulley from the sail's simple rig, but the Old White Bastard was too heavy for him. So instead, he heaved and hauled with all his might until the Old White Bastard's torso was high enough to let hang against the starboard side, above the high water mark, lashed fast by a line wrapped thrice around the mast, and then he sailed all the way back in to land like that, carrying the Old White Bastard to the old town harbour.

The ancient mariner says he didn't speak to him, took him for one of many agents of enemies on the new continent who already plied the island for sympathy in the bloodletting they saw coming, but when he finally landed his craft and unlashed his rescue and gave him water to drink and dry clothes, the Old White Bastard asked, in a parched throated rasp-voice,

*"I take it this is a time of war, or coming war, somewhere just distant enough to interest us?"*

"Yes," answered the ancient mariner, suddenly sweating.

*"I'll do splendidly, then!"* exclaimed the Old White Bastard, and with that, he bounded off to find a hotel somewhere on the square abuzz with flies on shit and fish-guts and whispers over munitions and supply lines.

The ancient mariner can't remember what happened after that; most likely he went back to his centuries old habit of checking nets and dealing with what fish he did take that day, gently opening their bellies and scooping out most of their insides with one motion before tossing some guts off the dock where a line dropped down to snag whatever it could while he did his work,

saving a share of the guts for tomorrow's chum.  
Meanwhile the Old White Bastard did the same, wooing the town.

**THE OLD WHITE BASTARD FRIES UP ONE OF WILLIAM BEEBE'S BATHYSPHERE FINDS!**

As a stand-in model pauses for a cartoonist,  
he dangles the deep sea creature  
by one of its rubbery whisker-like appendages.

It drips fishjuice mixed with lemon into the pan  
he prepped with oil, baby fennel leaves,  
and ripped pieces of imported kelp.

He will eat it with sea-grapes for breakfast,  
just so seasoned. Consume its uniqueness,  
make it something ordinary to swallow.

He licks his dry lips. No time to fetch the Vaseline,  
this creature's grease must suffice. The flesh screams  
and whistles on the heated non-stick.



## **INLAND**

“The voice of thy thunder was in the  
heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the  
earth trembled and shook...”



**THEME FROM WALCOTT**

Yesterday I met Velemir Khlebnikov –  
dying, again! – this time underneath

the cool-to-skin shade of a Bermuda palmetto.

I asked him why he'd picked this place  
to slowly die from exhaustion, exposure, and chronic illness this time.

He said he liked the specificity of it better,  
how it sounded more familiar  
than some anonymous palm spelling exile  
when exile was a whole life gone from some gone womb's  
bucolic mix of fluids / padded flesh / tubes.

Nomad poets one either side of death  
most of our lives, it was nice to pass each other for a moment of shared breath,  
so pleasant I couldn't bring myself to question  
the situation, or to do the right thing –

leave him alone  
and let him die. Instead, I badgered him

until he screamed at me in zaum:

*Can't you smell time sweat, unable to fit with  
us under this wide low leaf?*

## EVENING IN A NEW BERMUDA

Tomorrow I'll go to the city

where the governor, the bishops, and the premier  
languish on high platforms with many eyes  
that roam squares and side-streets, govern for them.

That's why I'm restless tonight; where I sit  
scents known and unknown come over the hill  
from the west coast, stink up the village  
like election poster slogans -

Atlantic brine, spliff smoke tendrils,  
rotten Sargasso for natural fertilizer,  
rotten Reganomics for natural money woes.

All press inwards, find and catch believers.

But how good's the word of the leaders  
who've called themselves a new government  
since the 1968 election, since the 1998 election,  
since the 2012 election?

Have my eyes lived to see the day they claim  
passed years ago: A NEW BERMUDA born?

Sorrow and the clock don't work in synch  
with politics, nor does the tidal rush  
of new day sun. Night thickens,  
even as the cock crows. Leaders deny  
varied wrong-doings, lay blame, stumble-wade  
shallow seas of rhetoric. No changes:  
The man who stands for Elizabeth  
and the woman who stands for Bermuda

work together, despite word on the street.

Smell the hills leak money in the evening!  
Smell the dirty cash-flow disinfecting  
while people stay tuned to radio debates  
and clergymen, to music and good smoke,  
while smiling government and opposition spin docs insist  
on PUTTING BERMUDIANS FIRST so that we stand strong  
with them on their platforms, SOLID AS A ROCK,  
while the ground beneath us gives,

and only the rich can afford to sleep.

## LANDS AND HOURS WASTE

These nights, when even my low ceiling recedes into stars  
 too bright and too remote for me to feel like I'm a part  
 of their rightly assembled parliament, when the stark  
 floodlights from Cricket Club paint real sky my ceiling's artless  
 dirty white, these unromantic nights, I try my hardest:

Hands tight, I play the only instrument I know by heart,  
 touch type by only screen light while my lover sleeps. Dogs bark

at tough types beyond my bedroom curtains. I'm trying hard  
 to write a song that floats beyond the breaker reefs, imparts,  
 despite our distance, the fresh piano-wire sharpness  
 that slices my tongue when it sings out to you from the dark

silences that I should let stay silent. But silence  
 is unsatisfying bread; Song - a bit and harness  
 that saliva has a habit of dripping down; my harsh  
 hash pipe – my only hope for successful self-sabotage.

I try to sing myself, but I feel automated –

by sleeplessness, by the way that lands and hours waste  
 away together inside me alongside my old lovers,  
 by the edge of the universe that recedes, leaves us  
 behind, and lets night rush in to fill up the distance.

So I type the sound of my mind crying to the edge  
 of space, and preserve it as code – this rhythm  
 that works its way to me through invisible channels  
 and reveals itself the band for tonight's transmission.

And if it floats beyond the breaker reefs, and slices  
 the proper silences imposed on this tongue-tying island  
 with rhythmic echoes from the continents around us,  
 then at least this weird moon gravity, this pull on me  
 that puts my fingers to the keys, somehow does its good –

even as the island's lights go out, and dissolve  
 into the always-shifting edges of the ocean,  
 and the growing space between known and unknown.

If you want to explore these areas, let's make a start:  
 Let's watch the ceiling, wait for it to open.

## NIGHT'S MINDFISHINGS: A TRIPTYCH

### 1. *the sleep man*

When the neighborhood children lie awake  
and dreams refuse to take them  
they're waiting for the sleep man.

They don't know it; they'll never meet him. He comes,  
they can't feel his greasy fingers slide their eyelids down.

He sneaks in through their windows,  
he leaks in through their taps,  
he seeps in through the cracks between the stones  
that keep them safe from wind and sun and rain  
and maybe evil spirits, but never from the sleep man:

He's nothing and nothing, and  
nothing anything can guard against,

his voice drones steady mid-tone  
in the children's ears, plants signals deep,  
opens the unconscious vortex, mixed  
images spin: dreamtime, forced fun,  
unknown to everyone. Everyone but the sleep man.

### 2. *crabtransmitter*

Sometimes the most frightening dreams aren't our nightmares,  
but those that come early  
when we see only black  
and feel ourselves (or is it everything else?)  
dissolve, sink or rise,  
and we think – isn't this like death?

*[enter CrabTransmitter (claws lowered), exit]*

Then sometimes we turn back solid,  
or the world turns back solid,  
but either way it hits us and we gasp for air,  
and see whatever shadows  
we saw before sleep.

Otherwise, the night keeps us; *[enter CrabTransmitter (big claw raised),  
exit]*

then we wake up reborn and forget the death  
from last night,  
the next night's lifetimes off –  
it's so easy not to think. *(not thinking)*

*[enter CrabTransmitter (claw raised), black-bead  
gaze]*

*(as sleep gathers over our eyes we sink in a common drowning; don't tell me you can't remember rising back up through your mattress and sheets, struggling for air at surface, some nights, when it tricks your body and you feel the ocean rush into your lungs, whirling waves and crab-claw's click tick click filling your skull; tell me what they said to you, the waterwhispers and clawclicks; speak them and release your fear; in sleep be their receiver, transponder, repeater - like Sister Sargasso: listening, eager to re-transmit.).*

### **3. the voice of night**

I want for you to be the ear  
to receive me

as the voice of night that speaks under the voices  
of the night, to single me out as that which  
tongue conceives, and nothing else.

I want to undress my sibilants for you,  
to tickle your casuarina-neededled cochlea,  
probe your inner lobes  
with spit and dark figures of speech –

textured words that burrow, wet and muscular,  
into you, make you drip with night and night-whispers,  
make you choke on my song.

When the neighbourhood children lie awake  
and dreams refuse to take them,  
the voice of night echoes around their eye-sockets  
with crabtransmitter visions.

Don't you dare disturb them  
before the sleep man wipes their visions clean.





a night when she hadn't once feigned sleep.  
 Morning sounded with chick-of-the-village  
 belting out a white-eyed song.

Master Benjy Ingham  
 counted,  
 one up to a hundred,  
 while his daddy worked out,  
 did business, got pleasure,  
 standing by the ladder  
 where they'd tied up Mary.  
 The weather became so  
 sultry  
 even Benjy sweated,  
 yelling out his numbers,  
 while daddy swung the whip  
 until he sat back down  
 when Benjy's count was done.  
 They sat off in the shade  
 while Mary's rent skin dripped  
 and butterflies flitted  
 in and out of his view,  
 half shaded by noon sun.  
*I'm waiting in case flies  
 start to come around her,  
 daddy smiled, Then you can  
 help me swat them away.*

Blood in eye, sun in sky drying it  
 and the flies nestled on her lips,  
 Mary kneels head-down, buckles.  
 Fist and foot crunch her body until,  
 suddenly, he stops and sinks back  
 into his chair. At her eye-level,  
 reclining behind her twist  
 of green-bruised broken-open skin,  
 Ingham's almost not threatening;  
 Mary imagines she could beat him  
 bloodier and bluer  
 than his worst licks in a fair fight.

But then his snort – *Water* –  
 to his wife with its subtext of thunder  
 wipes clear the dream from Mary's eyes.

She trembles and listens to Mrs. Ingham's footsteps,  
 counting her time without the Captain's blows by measure  
 of his wife's progress,  
 and she thinks, *today's my last day,  
 the whip the rope the cow skin, one  
 or all of them will kill me when*



*Ingham gets his water.*

But then the earth trembles along with her. Plate grating against tectonic plate  
 on molten sea shakes the captain from his chair,  
 rattles the china inside – clatter and crack –,  
 jiggles a supporting wall  
 until part of the roof comes down, earth groaning  
 and shaking, drowning people's shrieks of *earthquake!* in its own sound.

Mary crawls over the heaving ground, red  
 dirt clumping up in her wounds, sting and shudder reactivating  
 at odd intervals in different places  
 until she finds a quiet spot,  
 hidden from the confusion,  
 and lies down in the shadow of a flight of outdoor steps  
 to moan herself to sleep until  
 morning or until judgement day.

***(mary learns to run away, Spanish Point to Devonshire)***

Cedars, cedars,, prickles and cedars in thickets –  
 Mary parts them where she can, picks a path  
 away from the tracks, won't yet dare an open field, not yet,  
 must find a way home this way, through cuts and dips  
 in the landscape of this island where she was born a slave,  
 and where running home's a serious crime. A futile crime for Mary:

At the end endless cuts, end of endless cedars, bushes and rocks, at the end  
 of her stealth journey and return, her father returns her. He must.  
 But when he does this thing that the law says he must,  
 something else prickles in him and tells him *you must* -

so he complains and tells the Inghams they mustn't beat Mary,  
 says if they treat her better she won't run off. Mary hears the captain's voice –  
 bleached silk – as he assures her father he'll be fair,  
 whatever that means – impossible fair – and that's it settled  
 because it must be settled. Captain Ingham takes her arm. Father slips away.

The tracks back to the Inghams' run through a gutted out hill,  
 limestone core of the island cut into block stacked on top of itself: progress  
 measured by ratio of unquarried stone to artfully erected walls  
 and water-catchment rooftops / divided by the un-quarried land left over.

No human denominator.

Mary remembers overhearing Captain Ingham praise progress  
 like a god, a force beyond  
 the men and women it sweeps from new roads cut through rock  
 by an invisible rush – like water forcing open the hills

or, like magic, the hills opening – no wrecked black bodies  
 (let alone heads full of thoughts)  
 forced to cut and wrestle limestone blocks, men twisted at roadside, invisible.

Mary, too, invisible after her torture, bores the captain.

If she was helpfully invisible, she'd unlock Ingham's gate  
 and make fires break out everywhere, spontaneous-looking,  
 let the last lash up the great house in thick licks of flame, burn it to ash.

She hears her mother's voice, the voices of her sisters,  
 hears her father's complaint, Benjy's child-song counting out the lashes;  
 In the last light her mind plays over everything done, repeats,  
 as she plots escape after escape,  
 makes and unmakes plans all night with freedom on her lips, next day the same.  
 Now she's always eyeing the cedars, wishes more lay beyond than this  
 narrow island's options:  
 a leap into the sea, or from an inland cliff.

***(mary sails for grand turk)***

Salt water,  
 salt spray, salt fish,  
 salt crust on skin, salt-yellowed  
 and salt-whitened hair,  
 all on Mary's way to Grand Turk –  
 sent to rake salt.  
 Whether she jumps ship now  
 or carries on to wade in salt  
 and suffer burns and salt ulcers,  
 the sea will eat her.  
 For now it merely turns her guts –  
 by force when it heaves the boat,  
 and in her thoughts  
 of its deep  
 distance between her and home.  
 In the dark, she tells herself  
 over and again one  
 truth she knows: *No no no*  
*no I'm not cursed.*  
*This suffering's*  
*not fate nor God's work.*  
*No no no no I'm not cursed.* She burns  
 with a righteousness  
 more caustic than decades of salt  
 on exposed flesh,  
 more consuming

than the execution fires  
she comes to recognize by scent.  
Her fire summons  
dazzling orbs to masthead.  
The ship's crew think it's spirits;  
Mary holds her secret.

## HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Under black light she masturbates  
against my thigh while I grind my  
cock into her fat bits and we call  
it dancing, platonic hip flex  
and Willie Bounce, reclamation  
of these primal modes of motion  
from continent- and decade-loads of codes,  
barriers between the bomb crotch  
and the static spark of fabric.  
Not to mention the daggering:  
too much thrust does unfortunate  
damage, like a horny goat fight  
with hard heads once too-many knocked,  
but still oh I love to feel her rock.

## OLEANDERS

Yogic limb-stretchers, oleanders enact the wisdom they've mastered:

reach without grasping for anything, bend without snapping for anything,  
flower without warning anytime despite the climate's refutations,  
uselessly invite pollination, spray sweet pheromones on anyone,  
shake out their heads, and, in one motion, sweep the air clean, and litter the  
road.

Thin prayer whisperers, oleanders incant the lessons that they've mastered, say:

*By you, wind, we are bent, by salt spray our leaves get browned, by the  
Department of Agriculture we're brought to blade; we raise and wave our  
battered petals, so their bruises shine, wet, in the sun, let our ruin-marks be  
evidence of our flowers' broken perfection. On account of you we breathe,  
we fall.*

Quiet poison bearers, oleanders keep venom just below their skins:

Scratched, they let their bitter milk ooze indiscriminately, coat anything,  
anyone trying to go through them, dare the weak-hearted to take a bite  
and swallow them, say: *Yes, yes - we taste well; Come and grease  
on our flowering heads, come and chew our cool green leaves.*

## LANGUAGE TREES

There aren't any endemic language trees growing on this island –

Bermuda palmettos creak and rustle, give no information,  
 Bermuda cedars crack their skinny joints and howl with arthritis,  
 Bermuda olivewoods squat fat and hock thick berries - hock thick berries on the  
 dirt,  
 Bermudiana live too short to speak, shy in their purple frocks  
 Bermuda maidenhairs hide in crevices, draw meaningless maps  
 Bermuda snowberries watch from the ends of many antennae –

As for humans, if we'd stayed isolated here and developed  
 de vway vwe chenj'd de saund vwan vwe vus jaus chopsin wifv each other  
 we might have buried the roots deep enough below our mouths  
 for the seed dialects to sprout a tree that could speak for itself.

But it feels like something speaks, older than the R-P  
 carved by the Portuguese sailors lost in Atlantic histories;  
 it feels like something speaks in the dampness, tells stories to our bones,  
 gives them knowledge to hold in their marrow that ears shall never hear,  
 this speech without a voice. In the small ponds, killifish eat what comes  
 their way, but their sounds remain mystery. In the hedgerows skinks fight  
 to climb from tossed-aside Heinekens, padless feet useless, their throats  
 muted.

Was this the one place where for most of time no voice spoke besides  
 cahows' demon shrieks, and the one voice that speaks and endlessly speaks?

**(BRACKETS)**

Even writing free verse I seem to put my thoughts in brackets.  
Even speaking clearly I seem to colour my speech.

Son of an actress, son of an activist, family of masks.

I can speak as plain as any Gombey. I can speak as plain  
as anybody riding on the Number 8; that's my bus. I can write non-assonant  
post-it notes containing nothing but grocery lists,

or simple short text messages that stick to the pre-saved dictionary.

Grandson of shipbuilders, grandson of comedians,  
grandson of soldiers on both sides - one an engineer and one a motorcycle man,  
family mechanics.

I could pull you close to me without saying a word.  
I could pull you close to me without writing a word.

Even speaking with my hands I put my thoughts in brackets.  
Even speaking freely I seem to colour my speech. (Instead of saying  
what I want to one person, I make poems for everyone).

**ONE MORE DAY, SPRING ...**

One more day, Spring, before your purple  
flowers dry out, one more rain  
before my father risks well water in the tank,  
one more shoot palmetto in the bushes,  
one more sparrow's nest to pick from the drain  
or knock from the eaves before it rots and goes rank  
in the heat, one more crop of ripe loquats,  
one more day to wait and hope, before the strain  
of one more slow tourist season cranks  
the island's dry gears through to next year, one more  
day of rough seas, one more day of hail  
to remind us to thank the lord we haven't sunk,  
one more Atlantic wind so cold it cuts  
through my jacket, puts stinging pain  
in my ears and aches in my injured ankles,  
one more dark afternoon to hide me  
that becomes one more night cold enough for me to gain  
the right to share a little space under my girl's blanket,  
one more day before the hot death of everything  
and the memory of you burns to black on my brain  
gorged on sun until there's nothing left, and I go blank.



**MORTIFICATION AT 7:35AM**

This morning, hungry  
mosquitoes refuse my blood;

my skin stinks of rum.

After showering,

I offer my bare back up  
from under my towel,

walk naked straight through  
the humming room: friendly bites!

## MULCH

In the month of March, my mood thickens  
like the March mud finally infused with last fall's newly dead  
tamped down by cold fingers of rain.

Anticipation draws sweat from the soil;  
From the mulch pit, the stink of rich compost  
teases beds of flowering  
bulbs. Slowly, by means of accumulation and decay,  
the pit makes rich soil from rank waste,  
feeds formal gardens and vegetable plots,  
wild vines that strangle, and nettles that sting.

In the mornings, fat dew drop still manage  
to cling onto the crabgrass, before they're spent  
by the rising sun, and in their evaporating moment, shine  
in the blades' curled mouths like pearls.

Not so the wetness collected in the mulch pit: it gets  
no sun to turn it into crystal; but its moment of color  
beams

longer – at the ends of azalea stems  
and hibiscus branches, of loquat sprays and late  
blooming creepers – beams longer without fear of  
evaporation...

But, wait: that comes later. First comes the  
accumulation

of rot spread even or  
mixed  
into the earth. My mood thickens this  
month, mulched  
by my own sickness, and by  
memories  
of the friends this month made  
mulch.

Lord, I'm still waiting for the seeds they feed to sprout.

In the month of March, my blood quickens  
with the crackle of seeds split underground by the heads  
of new shoots. Maybe the mind needs mulching over and again,  
like a garden, so as to not spoil  
its fertility. More likely the mind is a mulch pit, tossed  
whatever shit, and expected to break it down  
slowly, by means of accumulation and decay,  
to make feelings and opinions, to make wisdom and taste –  
all the while containing and concealing the rot  
that feeds everything.

No matter, then, hard times or sadness: The damage  
done, the dead cells strewn over my mind, will make it more potent

given time. I'll spread my layers of finely-  
 ground nightmares mixed with rotten fantasies of girls  
 over my allotment's set  
 of potential seedlings – watch them poke from the debris  
 well nourished, hungry for more dead. Maybe all  
 problems,

everyone's, are mulch made and allowed to  
 accumulate  
 according to their needs for fertilization.

Seeds fed well enough to burst into shoots  
 are luckier than most seeds, luckier than the  
 mulch pit—

and you, over whom I spread my mind's mulch  
 today, are luckier than I. But your blooms are  
 temporary,

and when they go brown they'll make good  
 mulch.

Still, I'm waiting for my seeds to push some color out.

### PLAINSPEAK (APPROACHING HAMILTON)

These days many tongues stammer,  
and many more aren't ready to speak plainly  
to our i-pod and bike-helmet muffled ears.

Between cars, we the young commuters  
who don't wear our music, hear snatches  
of talk radio grandstanders, fashion Rasta  
chanters all glossed up for FM, brimstone  
from the AM band evangelicals,

and only when we weave our way  
out from the bands of four-wheeled vehicles  
can we breathe in the Atlantic.

Maybe we'll even start believing  
our island's hymn: Bermuda is another world...  
But we can't hear it playing anywhere.  
When we reach the city, just more stutters –  
from the streets, from the House of Assembly,

from parks where men spend enforced early retirements  
shit talking with warm Elephant beers, and from the bars  
and cafes where some patrons like to waste air on misquotations –

more stutter-stutter-um um um-um...  
more stutter-stutter-um um um-um...

We the young commuters act like we got no time for um-um  
or lying tongues, we with coconut brains  
who won't let anything through our hard-shell helmets  
until they're crushed or bored through by sharp metal,  
we who refuse to hear. Not that it makes us better,

not that we never um-um stammer and pause  
under the influence of divergent thoughts.

Sometimes it's the lying tongues who object  
to us, turn around and lash us for the simplest of things,  
but what can be expected of these kings-of-the-rock  
when every day our storm season gets darker,  
promises tempests that might wash them off.

## FRONT STREET, HAMILTON

Under white tarp sat the tourist horse carts  
 drivers and horses leaking sweats,  
 their numbers thinned by progress/death.  
 Most of the tourists stayed on the cruise ship  
 in the restaurants, on deck, or by the pool.  
 Hamilton Princess Hotel loomed, pink and half-empty,  
 down the road on the rich west end of town, beyond the shops.

In the House of Assembly, some government or another slept;  
 Not dreamless sleep – they did have visions: *charity and handouts,*  
*how to smooth things over with various constituencies:*  
*that rut jumped by kids on bikes since the beginning of time,*  
*those leaky fountains in need of filling then paving over,*  
*the needs of special essential executive officers*  
*and the labour-wrecked smiles of your neighbours.*

The carriages kept plying for tourists, most people ignored.  
 But money-men – three governments – bent backwards for them  
 and pulled out all the stops, changed the school system  
 up for the jobs they wanted from us, said if we qualified  
 we'd be first picked. But we're lumped in with any other island  
 in their minds: tourists and international businessmen don't care  
 where they get their hit of sun and lax tax. That's why I use my breath.

**LEXICON**

Anglo-Creole Anglophile (n.), Anglophone Caribbean:

Anti (black + apartheid + capitalist + colonial),

Anticommunist, anti-dancehall : antiessentialist.

Anti-establishment antifascism! Anti-intellectual anti-imperialism!

*Antillanité!*

(anti)racist (anti)slavery

+ (anti)violence

---

Apartheid a priori (*no italics*) : art historical (practice)

**GRAFTING**

Took one fat little foreign citrus stalk,  
took one fat little foreign citrus root,

laid their rough bodies on the table  
pocked with cracks and blade-marks  
where I do my work,

cut each of them deep,

razor down to their guts,

then bound them together, belly to  
belly, and waited for something to grow between them,

making sure to cut one's branches as shoots  
so that it kept to the root,  
and the tree grew sweet oranges  
without showing rough-lime.

## HUMAN AS SKIN GLOVE FILLED WITH DUST, GROWING PLANTS FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES

Head heels and digits first, you plunge  
bones into skin, socks, hat, gloves, plunge always  
in all directions, whether your body stays  
outwardly inert or whether you lunge  
into your work, fill dirt in flowerpots,  
busted dust packing dust: your own lot  
and everyone else's, nurserymen,  
you've worked so much overtime your snout's black.  
You've stood up and bent down so much your skeleton  
rattles when you inspect the lot.  
The cracked notes you sing in your parched throat  
more truly belong to you, because they come from  
inside your skeleton. Present  
yourself, announce, denounce, and lay yourself  
out with them as covering soil or bare  
harsh light – both aid fertility – spare  
no skin, shoot, nor raindrop, no skeleton.  
Your human body lunging  
between plants on hot black tarp, industrial  
flowers still wet with fertilizer. Jump  
from dust. Pray the skin to hold. Enjoy these blooms  
(try not to breathe the fumes),  
but pass them on quickly. Too much  
of your own dust gone on those vivid growths.



**PEN VS FORK**

Of the pen and the fork, the pen's the sharper –  
but far less adept at killing hunger.

Of the pen and the sword, we all know the rest –  
but the sword lives visceral, tastes  
hot blood and pops breath from living lungs  
while the pen tastes ink and follows breath and tongue

as wind-spirit, interloper, empty hall and jacket left on hanger,  
motel on frontier  
beyond which nothing ventures. Empty. Nothing gives  
way for words, words are weightless way-stations,  
buoys dangling deep moorings –  
their locations shift for the weakest of breaths.

Meanwhile a flimsy white plastic fork  
can polish off a quarter-pound of flesh,  
slicing sword-like, then write this poem  
in leftover layers of hot-sauce.

**LEADBELLIES**

Leadbellies, we, bellies built for rum  
and Trinity Chicken takeaways and Shabazz Bakery steak-ums  
and burgers from Dorothy's in Hamilton  
or Fish n Tings round backatawn or Misty's up Somerset's  
fried delights laid between slices of whole wheat bread,  
dripping with grease and secret sauces,  
strongbellies built for whole cardamoms,  
sherrypeppas in winnegar dripped into rum-spiked chowder,  
ironbellies that can hold down anything:  
What secrets hid behind the rumwall  
we tore down. What secrets hid behind  
our meal, we threw away with the bones,  
spat them into dark bushes. What secrets  
got wiped off our mouths with napkins left stains.

**SICK**

Sick with the latest stomach virus to hit the island,  
I slept naked  
window open  
surrounded by buckets.

Maybe it was the fevers  
or the tree frogs,  
a mosquito-mosquito or the distant motor  
whir of passing bikes and boats,

but I could swear I heard the dry season drawing  
moisture through the membranes  
of leaf skins, plastered limestone walls, and my own pores.

## TWO POEMS ABOUT LOVE

1

Capleton says *she good in her clothes*,  
 his philosophy and logic  
 connect to etymology: to undress  
 is to spoil and to spoil  
 is to disarm. I've spoiled myself before her,  
 put off my coat; how can I put it back on?  
 She will not disarm me, will not disarm,  
 so we face off, loaded weapons  
 waiting to draw and wave our threats,  
 so we face off, I without my coat  
 and she good in her clothes.

2

There's mad fork lightening over the sky right now,  
 making me wonder about the safety of sitting in a window.  
 Spring burst late, battered flowers down—  
 tank rain floods back-road with oleander blooms and flat toads'  
 pink and brown guts, some stuck fast to the tarmac and drowned  
 while the lighter, more dried-out ones float slowly, follow the flow  
 of water over stone, around what rivulets and potholes allow  
 their progress downhill to collect with other flotsam at the crossroads:  
 bottle caps choked by sand, bits of palm  
 leaf and stem, unknown plastics and green beer bottle glass:  
 broken bits sloughed from the surface of the hill.  
 Thunder reminds me of the sky: The sea sends down these waters  
 to wash away weak rock, reclaim as drift  
 everything not too heavy or too anchored to be floated.

**I WOULD, BUT**

I would drop love lines like pistachio shells drop below the perpendicular  
line drawn by the tin horizon  
of your cracked high window frame.

I would squeeze liquid from these verses I dream for you, make word-tinctures  
the exact flavor of my tongue's  
sprung riddims and coastal dip-downs,

I would ferment for you: bay-grape, cedar berry, palmetto heart. But  
it's been months since you vanished,  
dry season. My throat's getting sore.

**MOSAIC****(I)**

Green skin, lacquered against salt spray.

Red veins bisect each inch, expand  
and thin out into invisible capillaries.

Fan leaves of springtime baygrapes.

Many shades of layered soot over  
vegetation colours.

Light under the trees.

One, two, three, four, five patches of gold  
ignite the dirt and dead leaves.

Skin: Yellow/brown&coral, roughed with one  
or two black flecks: plucked hairs/stubble.

Cobalt veins run straight, pulsate at junctions,  
cross a little pair of bones. Her wrist.

Chequered black/white, perfect squares,  
billow and bulge, rumple and dangle,  
buttoned together with mother of pearl  
tile overlaid.

His shirt.

Long curved stones cut paper-thin and tapered,  
tips polished for hooks,  
hang the carcass dangling from the baygrapes,  
catching sun above the dead leaves.

Turquoise dust patches in the background:  
distant sea. Topaz her eye,

his empty.

The carcass is a lump of white diamonds.  
Drips rubies between them.

**(II)**

Blue chips everywhere,  
lacquered ocean,

foreground of green,

the carcass draining, organic  
matter, fattened rooster-  
brown ceramic.

He stoops,

cups  
his hands as if to catch

precious blood.

**(III)**

Silver for the rails, silver for the bells and needles,  
a light application of peach on plaster for the walls,  
no blue for sky: moth wings arranged  
into neat horizontal columns,  
each four-wings-thick, make ceiling tiles.

Pink hibiscus, white hibiscus, blue hibiscus; fully dried out – the nurses  
and the doctors mill around,

their numbers still being adjusted: some days they look newly added,  
others they drop off, aren't replaced. Carcass invisible,  
implied by crushed rose quartz misting uniform petals.

**(IV)**

A night sky black with very small chipped obsidian,  
smoked roll-ups for polluted starscape spread over  
Rizla and BIC lighter skyscrapers,  
matchbox tenements and silver Zippo mansions.

His lips: two blood orange slices, dripping.

Her fingers: twisted sticks, knuckles of stone, paint-chip fingernails.

They sit on couches bent from straws and toothpicks,  
he leaning back, her arm retracting, freeze-frame.

Open roof above them raining ash.

**THE OLD WHITE BASTARD FIXES A VOTE!**

In his workshop lined  
    with ledger-books and glass decanters  
    containing various strong drinks,  
The Old White Bastard tinkers  
with a youth-vote laid on his worktable.

    He twists its bolts, he pulls the choke  
    and nearly floods it,  
    he winds it up  
    and lets it run out unguided.

He runs it until it begins to hum.

    Then he takes it gently into his  
old white arms,  
    cradles it  
while injecting his song into its hum –

    and if it makes another tune,  
    he clubs it,

cuts its mouth into a smile and calls it spoiled  
and throws it in the wastebasket,  
uncounted.



**THE OLD WHITE BASTARD RUINS EDUCATION ONE LITTLE BIT OF DEAD SKIN AT A TIME!**

Dead skin cellssloughed from his arms

in misty cataracts  
of dust flood the  
room.

The air glints, many windows  
bathe the desks in sunlight,  
the clock ticks over  
by the door. The dry-erase

markings on the whiteboard  
twist into faces,

leering, drool at his students  
from behind his back like  
he doesn't notice  
how they mock the kids' struggle

to take accurate notes  
before they distort

too far, gone to bald totems  
and dismembered symbols:  
mute war on the eyes.

The Old White Bastard batons

a sleepy student's desk  
with his meter stick.

Lesson plan: switch off, submit,  
forget everything else  
except the exam.  
So easy, no need these days

for blunderbuss or cuffs.  
He demands silence.

Hacking phlegm from his airborne  
waste-skin, students struggle  
to breathe quietly.  
The whiteboard figures snicker

at the kids' discomfort.  
The clock wrestles time,

tries to push forwards, plastic  
hands bent against time's weight.  
No-one dares to speak.

# IV

## OUTLAND

“Thy way is the sea, and thy path in the  
great waters...”

**THEME FROM WALCOTT**

Why not go sit off with the dying Khlebnikov,

ringed by three kiskadees pulling worms,  
ringed by imported human beings of equal number,  
including me, looking over  
our shoulders for the sun to turn shadow  
and blacken the bay's promise of ambergris?

Why not send us to court when you reach here from Virginia,

before you've soaked in the terror  
of this island's demonish night-songs,  
knowing that you've already vanished into  
memory like Khlebnikov, beyond time like Khlebnikov,  
for those who slipped away from your sad-face horizons

and into the clouds, leaving you to build a world?

**WASTE, HOURS AND LANDS**

Staring at the ceiling, waiting for it to open,  
reveal the stars the shine behind the cracked plaster,  
as if they marked my destiny. Shadows on the alabaster walls  
open and close phantom mouths, not one word spoken  
by them though, ghosts now – their voices all broken,  
although some nights they do howl. While the shadows  
try to speak, I move my lips also,  
because maybe they'll help me to convince those  
ceiling cracks to pull apart and bring the stars closer

so I can feel the void above us rush down to meet me,  
take this breath that speaks through me  
and squeeze me until there's nothing left of it.

**MORNING, WHIRLPOOLS AND SHALLOWS**

Around our disused chimneys, circle lost swallows; above the pail  
of dog shit - scooped, still wet, from the yard - circle young flies.  
The moon's circumnavigation of the garden leads cool mornings  
to the skin of my eyelids. I circle in my mind: your nipples, our partings  
and re-couplings. Your eyes spin through deep sleep,  
make whirlpools inside that suck up sights and sounds, and spit them  
on the skin of your eyelids. Everywhere, electrons  
orbit nucleons - and the world sings. Who can prove it wrong?  
Who can scratch out the librettos of the endless rounds  
sung by each fractal chipped from the universal timepiece,  
each new voice begun, begun, begun? Who denies the cyclic filling  
and un-filling of ventricles and intertidal pools? The stillness  
of your body against mine's a lie. Rosaries your lips sometimes  
mouth in sleep. Heaven passes. Our safe bed turns toward the light.

**WEAPONS LESSON**

In the ragged last gusts of hurricane season,  
his favourite, my father teaches me to make  
two bush weapons: pipe-bomb and Molotov cocktail,

the former a gathering of ingredients  
and theory, the latter a real demonstration:  
soak rag, half-fill an empty corona with gas.

The burning bottle smashes on the cement floor  
below us, sloshing molten gold over the future  
kitchen of a neighbour-to-be's skeletal new build site,

dropped from the top of a staircase leading to nowhere.

## SALLY BASSETT DAY

In a hideous outfit this sunrise,  
the main road curls a bloody-lipstick smile.

Morning warbler – sing!

Cops swarm over the lips like flies, inspect,  
vomit paperwork, soul in the bushes.

Morning warbler – sing.

Soul in the bushes calling out curses,  
words nobody understands. Fire chants,

Sally Bassett days.

Chant for the days of men and women burned  
at stake that their fires might be repaid,  
but these days youths fire on each other,

These Sally Bassett days.

A few police linger, uniforms spotless,  
one of the neighbours starts to wave traffic  
around the orange cones. The EMTs  
and ambulance driver pack up  
for a slow drive home, *stttttttttttch*,  
painting the hillside houses blue and red  
as they go.

Good Friday kite, fly!

The neighbourhood still hums with devotions  
in the sky. Children will still play outside,  
these Sally Bassett Days of fever, June  
with a few Good Friday kites still humming  
in a paper choir greeting the morning,  
sacrificial.

Good Friday kite

humming in the dead ear  
love-bitten by the main road's smile,  
clearing the gun-sound from both ear and road,  
humming after the dead ear's rolled away.  
The road smiles, wishes it could lick its lips.

Today will be a Sally Bassett day.

**DARK GLASSES 1983**

Nobody on this earth, nobody can escape  
velocity: my father, strong in dark glasses  
one year before my birth, now yellows and curls up  
along with the imago of himself

that vanished around the bends of many orbits  
behind him. The earth spins, the wind weathers our skins,  
we age, we age – you and me along with him –  
we hurtle into deep space,

live so quick our lives look like stills. Only our hearts  
get motion sickness, only they can feel the pull  
of atmosphere on our bodies cutting through  
the emptiness we're always rushing into

that threatens, always, versions of final impact.  
We fear our motion and the motions of objects  
larger than ourselves: speeding buses, meteors,  
tornados and the world of water

that might crush us, but we can't adjust our tangents  
or the courses run by others, can't slow  
or speed up – only ride our terrible vehicles  
to their termination points. That's why I hold

tight to anyone who's able to anchor me  
fast in flight—vainly: our shared velocity  
only quickens with combined mass, besides  
our destiny has always been to spin.



## MEMORY AND PRESENCE

Broken open, his little-boy nutsack bled into his private-school uniform Bermuda shorts while caught lizards strained against grass nooses and other children claimed wet brown toads and hordes of roaches as their own, naming and playing with them as if nothing beyond the walled world of recess existed at all. The red spot thickened on the khaki and dripped, groping down one of his thighs. All of us still laugh about It years later (when he's not around to hear), tell strangers how he's got one nut. Half-man. Permanent damage. I don't mention how his teenaged cock probably throbbed when he thrust his tongue between my cheerleader girlfriend's willing lips out behind the Wednesday-night tourist market, how she went days and weeks without telling me, how his homophobe (turned out later, gay) friend tapped my back in church and asked if I was still seeing the girl and grinned, all teeth, or how our mutual close friend, the same kid who'd kicked him in the nuts, had her mouth the same first night I did — earlier or later? — who knows? We're still close nowadays, watching foreigners write their names beside ours on contracts and signs, certificates of marriage and incorporation. They sign not knowing the blood that binds us all on this island, the blood and knowledge of blood: We hold firm together generations, even while we tear each other open, scramble up over each other and whisper each other's secrets— Better to be hurt by our own than by outsiders. Better our myths than their ugly lights. I remember ripe Surinam cherries crushed on a white concrete sidewalk, to speak the truth, and nothing more than commotion and panic and little-kid glee at the damaged scrotum, but did I see, did I witness the act for real? I just see those cherries, now: those crushed Surinam cherries, but who knows? Who knows if it was season, or if there was harsh sunlight to make their foot-crushed paste glisten and stink of sugar? Why does rain creep into the panicked bustle of school uniforms surrounding the victim in the quadrangle? Why does the Bermuda cedar bend in the wind while sprinkling fragrant shreds of leaf like holy water on the scene — why do I see it like that? Long time, now, myth now — isn't remembered right by anyone, memory between known and improvised. Like landmarks people use around these parts that don't exist no more: Canadian Base/Nine Beaches, El Palio, Sandys Hardware Store, Trimmingham's— we know they're now a lost hotel, apartment block, Western Union, and HSBC, but we remember their old selves, don't bother learning not to call them by the names of what was there: no sense learning. In this village, it's getting harder to stay open: I'd only just started calling Thel's 'Purple Cow' when it closed and turned— to sand? No, turned to— who knows now? Nowadays me and the guy that landed the nut-splitting kick compare notes on mutual things while working in each other's gardens, fattening tomatoes and weeding around his Bermuda carrots. Then we go coastward, or to a high part

of Scott's Hill, and stare out into the ocean at a place where no-one knows you,  
out where we've both sailed; before we came back inland, turned by blood.

**ARTEFACT IN THE FLATTS VILLAGE AQUARIUM**

I was a coral cell  
back when a meteor fell  
out of the Cambrian sky,  
pushed up tidal waves

and boiled  
in the primeval sea  
ripe with new life,

pungent and pregnant.  
Phantasm in a split rock,

filed and labelled and safely  
locked away  
after years in sand,

I enjoy the cool and wait,  
smiling my bone-smile.

## PEACOCKS AT THE AQUARIUM GARDEN CANTEEN

Lost, lost, – stuck half prancing/half shrieking  
at this mishmash ecosystem, trapped

by high fences and impassable turnstiles –

they're prone to puffing up, swelling feathered bird-throats.

of the flies alighting	(The way you finger your dress after kissing the expensive fizzy water bottle's cold lip, makes me jealous of it and more still you don't even notice while you spread your menu.
---------------------------	---

Their progress over dress, bottle lip,  
and bottle, lost wanderers stopping  
only to drink and eat and vomit,  
obliterates your razz of lace and feathers.)

Semitropic daytime. Moist office-wear  
curls a lunch-hour-sweaty testicle  
tendrils around faux iron filigree chairs,  
wafts under poincianas where its bitterness  
stings deep in the strutting birds' nostrils.

blood with aftershave, perfume with infection stink, hair gel with scalp grease, toothpaste with gum-blood, lipstick with plaque –	They're jealous, the peacocks, of human cosmetics. even more so those mixed with human substances – because in this garden they realize they're useless, beautiful without the spoilage nature affords, because the pizzazz of feathers drowns out their shrieks.
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## **RONALD MCDONALD WEIGHS OUT A POUND OF FLESH ON THE AMERICAN BASE-LANDS, 1990**

Every army needs its mister nice guy. He paints his killer lips vermillion.

No locals; today's not their day for gaining access to the base-lands. His place is limited to personnel tonight, one of many back-home amenities provided onsite just in case fast food in Bermuda ain't safe for America's best men.

In the bowling alley across the road, beside the chain-link perimeter fence, there's no-one. Base-stuck soldiers know it's not dangerous to go eat and drink local,

safe enough to go and do anything, whenever allowed. So Ronald gets by

on sentimental value, to remind the crowd from on-base of their home landscape – just like the wide road, ample sidewalk and cheap personnel-only supermarket. Things also tick over on the locals' days, when they're let in to taste the fillets

of processed beef and chicken denied to them by the island's anti-franchise laws. Ronald McDonald smiles. He knows why the public don't protest his stay, so long as he and his comrades purvey access to the same comforts they enjoy.

Undressed, he's not so big even as the day job in uniform makes him look, and less people think of him with watering mouths when he's not in costume, so Sgt. McDonald feels put out. In the restaurant late night, he wipes off his smile.

**NOON AT TOM MOORE'S JUNGLE** *(after Neville Dawes)*

They say we have no rivers on our island. The canal don't count,  
but they still speak too soon: or have you never seen a rivulet  
gush in or out from underneath our island with the changing tide  
or - starting off small, maybe - filigree winding lines through pink sand  
back into the sea. But these don't make rivers, you say? Well, maybe –  
but still the water moves deep through our rock and too bad if it's salt  
half the time the rock's struck: the echo still answers back, wets us both.

**POLLINATED, NOT POISONED**

Rolling, legs akimbo, it might look stuck,  
but these spasms in flowers are second nature to the bee  
who, comfortably dusted, rises over water,  
wind battered, brushes against buds (involuntary release  
of pollen), flies whirlpools of uneven  
circles then straightens its antennae and locks-up to stab  
heavenward, bisecting the flight-path  
of the evening BA to Gatwick. In lieu  
of flying with them, I offer to you this verbal DJ  
mash-up of prayer, seed and breathing, so you can see  
my vision, know that which I can't tell:  
Not words like these, but sea-, casuarina-, and mosquito-speak,  
unvoiced sounds our mouths make, your own breathing and the throb  
that comes and goes in places under our skins.

**A LITTLE BOOK MAKES SECOND LANDFALL**

The little book's pages  
had been half-eaten by  
all manner of sea monsters—  
eels and rabid mermaids,  
parrotfish and groupers—

When the tide dislodged  
it from the reef,  
and it shed pages  
that dissipated, caught  
on other reefs, or drifted  
constant.

But now what's left of it,  
still attached to a spine,  
lands in the shallows,  
accumulates a thin layer  
of slime and sand  
while it waits  
for someone to find and read  
from its fragments,  
make meaning.



**RESPONSE**

Kind shell, where do I press to transmit?  
Kind shell, transceiver (you must be), can't you pick up  
and fling my voice back under nautical  
miles of trenches, sea tree forests,  
mountains like ours that break surface where sand  
dunes climb up and stiffen where they stand,  
still enjoying the sea view in spite of  
their quarried-out sides,  
Sahara-red intestine exposed.  
Kind shell, you scratch and rattle  
but won't help tell me what catastrophes  
have happened, you unsafe radio.  
Thank God I'm no small craft in distress,  
I haven't learned to tell when you send warning,  
much less to speak into your open void  
where claws once curled. I still fear  
one might spring out and clip  
and clip my ear for daring to listen, my lip  
for speaking and disturbing it,  
I angerer of crabs that guard and encrypt  
all transmissions into click-language.

**NIGHT, SHALLOWS**

*The moon's so goddamn big tonight, let's go overboard.*

Impossible to resist, I'd always park the car,

and remember Weldon Kees and make a pact with myself

not to drown like he probably did – body never found.

Swimming out, my friends joked about what might bite them

but I was more worried about never stopping, approaching

and approaching the moon and leaving a silver trail with my kicks

until I seized up, sank to the starfishes. Both goals too airless,

but for the use of special apparatuses – space suits, SCUBA gear-

invented by people who felt the pull stronger than I did, who let it inspire them

to invent, rather than do nothing but examine the urge. Not me, not any of us

we were all urge and low on forethought, aimed out to the black line in the distance

and went

until fear took us back.

In the shallows now, I feel comfortable knowing

I could also drown here.

## NON-EXPLANATIONS: THREE+ CENTURIES OF THE OLD WHITE BASTARD

It's not that the Old White Bastard's  
skin is white-

it's that his heart is white  
with soldering  
luciferlight.

In eighteen-ninety-seven, he  
cups a sun-blotched hand  
over a young breast just  
to catch the fear-flutter  
in the woman doing his washing, she  
a butterfly he would love  
to crush under a pin  
between her coloured wings.

It's not that the Old White Bastard's  
eyes are blue-  
it's that his skin is not:  
gives him trouble when he tries to play  
aryangod.

In nineteen-ninety-seven, he  
adjusts  
his crotch and bubbles tech-stock  
in a crack-pipe,  
sky high      sky high

It's not that the Old White Bastard's  
bloodline's regal-  
it's that his peasant blood  
runs hot for blood,  
pride once stung.

In two-thousand-and-seven, he  
convinces everyone  
to take part in the next election-  
themed pantomime.

It's not that the Old White Bastard  
likes his work-  
it's that he deceives, covets, and drains dry  
those he loves,  
and that he loves those he dominates –  
nothing and nobody else.



## **NEGATIVE SPACE**

“and thy footsteps are not known.”



**SARGASSO**

I sleep awake, mouth full of salt,  
limbs floating against you, feel you wrap  
around my ankle, pull me into

your drift-knotted plaits: the only part  
of you not fully sunken.

They've grown quick these few years since,  
wide as the sea that swallowed you,  
and their stink fills these brine-soaked hills.

Night on the horizon: shark oil clouds  
silence the birds nothing on my mind  
but scouring waves keep me dreaming:

Sargasso

shed and delivered to the beach head,  
twisted around lost plastics.

**THE WORLD WITHOUT**

A black hole will pull you in and rip you to shreds,  
delete you forever, like God closed his lips over your name  
and swallowed;

Is that how we're set to go: The fabric folding over us,  
pulling us through his guts?

You clipped the trumpets from the Easter-lilies' stems,  
so I brought some with me  
to offer the angels.

Nothing descended to take them up and play,  
but over a distance and through the twisted lanes, I heard  
the soundings of darker instruments.

Our fate was written  
on the petals that jostled, stained, and crushed each other flat  
under the weight of their collective offering –

Critical mass:  
too much gifted to God spoiled our gift, stoked holy hungers.  
So the black hole;

Is that how we're set to go: World without tucking us into itself,  
smoothing over our last wrinkles?

**ECHO IN LIMBO**

Her brainwaves still beat against the rock of the world,  
 bounce off whatever's too solid to absorb them  
 and split

until they're so slight

they barely

ripple –

but sometimes they still hit me from strange vectors:

One breaks my temple, one slithers into my lungs,  
 one pats my stomach, another stabs my groin.

She's laughing from the past, at the traps she laid

years ago

snapping me now. Years ago she dreamed a sky this purple could be a jellyfish  
 encircling

the world in its most colorful inner layer

before opening its night mouth; when she mastered  
 descrambling seashells' catchments of mangled voices  
 to pick out any wisdom rattling inside, she smashed them  
 so no-one else could blow out their secrets;  
 when she sat on the grass she stroked it flat-handed  
 like the head of a child or an elder;

In short: she knew her ancestors,  
 her descendants.

In new fields, I recognize her echo.

On new blocks, I recognize her echo:

audible,

although her molecules spread

thin ash over the globe and mostly in my mind

as I run run run run run run stuck in the epicenter of this limbo looking for deep  
 water to

dive in

down deep, pick through the sonar tickings of the dead  
 but I can never recognize their languages. Elsewhere, her.



**STONES**

The stones refused to skip,  
dropped under black water.  
Sinking stars, each limestone pebble  
pulled surface water  
down with it, cooling it  
in deep, sunless water.

We are lucky, we  
who ride this water;  
let us pray no stone drops near us,  
stirring whirlpools in the water  
underneath us. Or if  
it must be, let the water  
rip us to shreds, quickly.

**PURE MAN OUT / WRITE A LITTLE LIGHT**

Pure man  
out town tonight,

pure man out town tonight - I'm warning you now -  
parked all along Front Street,

their squad cars' paint gleaming  
like metallic cheese sandwiches  
and their two-way radios  
buzzing against their breasts,

signals swirling into harbour salt,

dropped communiques and patches  
of static mixed with scratchy dispatches  
describing suspects and incidents.

If you stay out don't cross them,  
if you stay out don't let them find the words  
you hide before you can transmit  
free-form, without their evil devices:

Write a little light and cast it  
off far as you can  
project - true fire -

and when nothing signals back

but the ugly glare from the man's lights, man's tapped baton songs  
whispering knives, or some biez

remember the word's shadow fills and darkens  
everything, that you are that which answers  
with rhythms, with sights.

**WRITER'S BLOCK, GUILT**

Writer's block, guilt, *write*  
*cursive, try to write*  
*it out, my child, try*

to write it out my child my child

my child is in the sea,  
Sister Sargasso hear me,  
my child is in the sea.

**SMALL, SACRED**

Unhook your windows.  
Swing out your front gates.

Flick out your lights.

Slide back your latches.  
Switch off your alarms.

Say a small, sacred poem – potent charm:

I'm frightened, but speaking.

Speech equals breath,  
equals salvation.

Afraid?

### JOHNNY BARNES GAINS CRITICAL MASS (BLACK HOLE APPROACHING!)

His smile <sup>o</sup>—p—e—n—<sup>s</sup> so wide that passing mopeds,  
coups, and even the occasional GP vehicle,  
slip inside.

The morning mist spins.  
Shadows come to life and memories stir  
up from concrete blocks and casuarinas,  
join the dirty vortex

with oversized-pipe two-strokes,  
competing to be heard  
with two-second bites of radio  
and gulps of fumes.

Fumes wreath Johnny's I-love-yous.

On delivery, his kisses  
should spin and exit,  
their invisible marks carried  
away on their targets,  
but today they hold their orbits,  
accumulating along with  
vehicles and objects.  
Boats from the harbour—  
small ones at first—  
float up to the roundabout,  
circle suspended,  
above the fish that follow under their hulls from habit,  
fins swishing against the tarmac, bleeding.  
Johnny opens his mouth,  
sucks in hard,  
uproots and swallows his statue.  
It rattles in his stomach,  
more and more distant. Palmettos and hapless ducks  
get drawn in to the maw.  
But his blackhole smile's gained a taste for bronze,  
spins the roundabout,  
sends twisters out. One comes back  
with Sir George Somers, so Johnny eats him  
feet first, last piece of him into Johnny's smile  
his outstretched palms.  
One comes back with Sally Basset,  
Jonny's smile gets wider:  
as he absorbs her burn  
his vacuum kills the flames.

One comes back  
with a cage of Desmond Fountain's children,  
so Johnny swallows them  
and the cage in one.  
One comes back with a collection  
of historic plaques that bend at insane angles  
as they slip between his clenched teeth:  
*too much, surely this is too much?!* he thinks,  
but his inward draw won't stop.  
So he shifts the island under him,  
smiles and absorbs whatever pleases him  
from its orbit.  
For now Johnny's got some control,  
can stave off the unthinkable,  
total absorption.  
His wave slows but doesn't cease  
and he keeps on blowing kisses  
best as he can.

## THEOLOGICAL QUERIES + DIGRESSIONS

*Is God not known by obscurity?*

Look up: seas of light purple  
foliage ripple, mute as death.

*Is it possible to move between the realms of seen and unseen?*

Kill me with your brilliance.

*Can you, too, grow light from handfuls of seed?*

True brilliance kills structure.  
Nobody will remember.

*Who padlocks the Garden of Dreams' front gate?*

Outside, boys too young to vote  
burn stacks of tires on the road.

*Why do men follow my wife with their eyes, ignoring the commandment?*

People seek the way to swim  
back to God: explore, explode.

*Where in these islands can honest people pray?*

God spreads in the fires of  
Molotov cocktails, brings peace.

*What mood of lighting do angels prefer?*

Deep sea fish use light to kill.  
They like to be the brightest.

*How does getting hot on holy wine feel?*

The cheese opens my nostrils.  
Birds always bring sadness.

*Would my slight shoulders fill Saint Julian's robes?*

roast.

Go home, roast your Sunday

In the end, all shall be well.

*Will God empower us to fight evil?*

The airport's only trashcan.  
Legacy of bombs.

*Does God fly angel-drones through winter nights?*

Middle-aged men lie on cold  
beach sand, dreaming of zebras.

*The cards laid on the table say you're dead?*

Friend, that wasn't a question!  
I'm part of you, a dead part  
long switched off, still answering.



\*

Blacker than the discoloured phlegm  
I spat out after a night of breathing  
in the air at the patio  
bar, colder than the ice refusing  
to melt in my hair-of-the-dog  
dark (no stormy) set on the window  
just beyond the slight drizzle's reach,  
it is the absence of both light and heat.  
If heaven's distant, then let's hope  
heaven's less distant than it: it grows  
and pushes out the boundaries of  
fearful, nounless, nothingness enclosed  
by its bottomless open mouth  
stretching to contain the emptiness of full dark  
and potential light. We hide from it on Earth;

In night-cloaks we drink, smoke, forget  
that it's approaching or that we approach it  
by slow daily increments,  
both the living and dead. Not one cockroach  
will survive this, no tom-bomb  
can match the erasure it wreaks, no bent  
cityscape ever looked so bleak  
as this placeless place beyond death or sleep.

I wonder if the opening  
I feel behind my ribs now is a small  
answer to that vaster nothing –  
but what difference does size make  
when dealing with absences?  
One null set matches another. Gusting,  
the wind spins crumpled fast-food bags  
like planets drawn into a gyre. Time lags.

**MEDITATION ON TIME WITH TERRA COTTA FIGURINES (A POEM THAT EVISCERATES ITSELF)**

In the winter-grey sky, time gets blocked. No reading on you, sundial clock. In the cold, nobody's slow enough to enjoy dumb outdoor objects. Terra cotta figurines watch you try to read the time, watch without eyes, their smooth orange sockets unable to blink.

Between the summer-bright walls, time gets blocked. No sundial for reading inside, no batteries in the goddamn clock, outside hot, hot, hot. Not that the terra cotta mind. Their blind eyes take on heat and watch your body loll, half-naked, on the couch inside.

If I don't mention seasons, throw down their shivers-and-sweats-time-markers, will anyone remember my ideas? Notice the figurines surrounding us, decide for yourself whether you smash them or pay homage. When time decides to take time off, will we believe it unless our watches stop?

Does the idea of a *reading* on the clock bubble up to suggest all human times are marked narrative parts, to imply time must come to end in resolution?

The terra cotta may glower, but pay them no mind. Has time already ended – maybe the last time the time was read?

How many times has time ended; how many times has the narrative been read? Will we paint and re-paint our walls summer-bright colours until the reading stop re-reading? Who reads time? Will they read the same way they did last time? Will there be a last time?

In the preceding stanzas, time gets blocked. In the following lines, the terra cotta figurines surround one of their own, dash out its blind eyes.

Time's not concerned: it sees nothing, and knows without needing to watch.

**DRIFTWOOD WARNING**

Coral growing on shackles shivers,  
flesh fish-bitten. Bubbles soak violet  
cuts made by distant hulls.

Sister Sargasso's song surfaced!

*shoreline shoreline shoreline*  
*come in, sure line*

Who's calling?

Driftwood bubbles up shivering warning,  
driftwood hacking shivering warning—

One of Sister Sargasso's dropped signals!

Beware: just below surface,  
worse than broke glass bottles,  
spines hang suspended poisonous,

test your feet if you dare:  
Lionfish-infested ecstasy.

Away driftwood drifts, warning  
vanishing with Xotal's thousands of fry.

**SUDDENLY, THE SEA SPLITS OPEN REVEALING A FOREST OF MINIATURE SEA-TREES THAT GROWS UNTIL EACH TREE DWARFS EVEN THE BELCO SMOKE-STACKS. FISH FLOP DEAD UNDER THE CANOPY. STRANGE GRUNTS AND RUSTLES FROM ENDLESS PLOTS OF SEAGRASS, SQUAWKS FROM THE TREETOPS. IT'S NOT EXACTLY THE OCEAN FLOOR REVEALED AND MAGNIFIED - MORE AS IF A NEW WORLD HAS BEEN SPAT UP OUT OF THE OCEAN. IT GETS DIFFICULT TO BREATHE. SOMETHING PUSHES ITS WAY OUT FROM THE BUSH: THE WOLF-HEADED POET ADDRESSES THE GENERAL PUBLIC!**

*And now I offer my report, little ones, come listen while I tell it to you present tense first person.*

*People gather where the dock parallel to Front Street cuts a corner to the ferry terminal at Albouy's Point, looking down at the Wolf-Headed Poet who stands confidently in the deep rocky gully that was once Hamilton Harbour.*

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** *{stock still, addressing the general public, still eyes yellow, hair matted with casuarina berries}*

Who's got the nerve  
to stand up to the sea,  
to rage in flames  
at cold aquamarine?

Who's got the nerve  
to beat the water back,  
to rip the thick brine  
from the unseen?

**Member of the General Public<sup>79</sup> dressed in pink Bermuda shorts with blue blazer and socks pulled to the knee:** No bruh, I could not do that...

**Member of the General Public wearing grey tracksuit:** Let's just see  
what the guy has to say,  
shall we?

**Member of the General Public dressed in pink Bermuda shorts:** Well, excuse  
me!

**Member of the General Public in grey tracksuit:** Just sayin, let the guy speak...

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<sup>79</sup> The gathered cross section of the general public watching the wolf-headed poet from whom the authors of this report have garnered responses represents a range of ages over thirty-five and income levels consistent with national averages for their age groups calculated using various economic indicators. It appears that the observer charged with gathering their descriptions was perhaps overly attentive to sartorial concerns, to the point of obscuring their actual appearances.

*{The wolf-headed poet howls with a sound more like a conch shell blown by one of those old timers who can really make them things sing. He gestures towards his chest, on his arm “rage” tattooed pointillist style with sea-urchin spines and the ink from some kind of aquatic lifeform.}*

I rage this ocean more than any wave –  
 tear verses from the guts of fish or drowned  
 animals; their thoughts still echo deep in my mind  
 and flash in my sonar vision of this memory ocean.

#### **Members of the General Public: What?**

**Member of the general public, looking splendid in nothing but light yellow shorts and dark huntsman of the deep’s green socks:** What do you call yourself?

**Member of the general public, elderly yet stately in skull emblazoned hoodie and purple slacks folded just above spotless aquamarine and purple Nike airMAX (*looking spitefully at the first member of the general public*):** PUT YOUR SHIRT ON BIE!! (*looking markedly more peacefully at yet another member of the general public*): What’s his name? Where does he stay to? Is he a Bermudian or is he from away—

**Wolf-Headed Poet (interjecting):** Some people call me Anubis. They honour me as a god of the dead and offer me sweet incense, so I kill them. Some people call me St. Guinefort. They honour me with flowers and wreaths and prayers for the rescue of their loved ones, so I kill them. Some people call me Xotal. They honour me as a god of the dead, so I kill them. Some people call me St.Christopher. They honour me with flowers and candles and prayers for safe passage over the waters I stalk under, so I kill them.

Joke’s on them: I’m not one of their saints or gods; never even met one.

I’m the greatest singer of my generation. I’m the greatest writer, my echelon’s deeper  
 than your submarines or philosophers can dive. I’m saltwater crushing metal.  
 I’m pressure crushing minds. I’m the wolf who hunted underwater too damn long;  
 you’re all on my menu. See me on East Broadway tomorrow, I might eat you.  
 See me on Front Street tomorrow I might eat you. See me on Angle Street  
 tomorrow  
 I might eat you. See me on Radnor Road tomorrow I might eat you.

Listen to me flash my jaws in the sun again, that’s right, listen!  
 Listen to me howl like a conch shell and vomit out bits of your babies’ bones.  
 Give me twenty-four hours. I’ll poet back the ocean, deeper this time – fold it over  
 this whole island.

**Member of the General Public<sup>80</sup> sitting on vintage Mobylette:** This biy's crazy. What's with that mask he has on?

**Member of the General Public sitting on Kymco People GTI 125:** No don, that there's his real face.

**Member of the General Public on vintage Mobylette:** No - no, stop your nonsense; maybe he ain't crazy but that is a mask definitely. Chewstick's down on Front Street now. Maybe it's performance poetry?

**Member of the General Public on Reiju RS3 125:** Then where's the sea gone to?

**Member of the General Public on vintage Mobylette:** Tidal wave?

**Member of the General Public watching from rooftop:** .....ain't no water for miles....sand blowing in the distance; I can see today's cruise ship way out there stranded in sea-trees with its smokestacks sticking up.

**Member of the General Public wearing NASCAR cap:** The fuck's going on?

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** Like I told you: first I'll have my fun on dry land, then I'll fold the ocean back down over your whole island. No, better yet! - I'll keep the ocean out there,

and replace everything from here to North Rock with your own little sea of blood.

Either way you're all gonna drown and become salt hog,  
hanging up in my sea garden.

Either way,  
you're all gonna drown and become salt hog  
hanging in my sea garden.

Didn't you listen when I told you what some people call me? No problem, I'm called more names than those you missed or already forgot. I'll elaborate:

Some people call me reckoner,  
because I wait at the horizon with my jaws open and swallow the sun.  
Some people call me Styx Boatman,  
because they think I speak for the dead or lead them through water.  
Some people call me Saint Christopher,  
because I resemble the patron saint of travellers.

But you could call me La-La, because I'll eat your from your intestines to your lungs when the world ends.

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<sup>80</sup> At this point the aforementioned observer seems to have momentarily shifted their focus to an equally frivolous concern with bikes.

And you could call me Theodore, because I like that name so much it might actually be mine –  
but I'm not any of those people, friends!

**Member of the General Public Wearing New York Cap:** Is this guy a prophet?

**Member of the General Public Wearing NASCAR Cap:** Is he implying that the world's ending now?

**Member of the General Public Wearing Marlins Cap:** If you ask me, he's a pretty mug prophet. Either that, or a brilliant poet.

*Trucks roll up fast and disgorge Bermuda Regiment troops.*

*They climb on top of their vehicles and onto the roof of the Ferry Terminal, point their guns over the crowd down and down into the gully where Hamilton Harbor used to be, covering all paths.*

*Thirty-seven rifles aim specifically at the Wolf-Headed Poet's wolf head and human heart.*

*An officer climbs out and pushes his way to the front of the crowd.*

**Regiment Officer:** Now look here, boy - those are Bermuda's own territorial waters that you have parted and tucked away somewhere. What have you done with them? Put them back! Put them back at once, or we'll shoot!

*The Wolf-Headed Poet howls at the top of his lungs for exactly one minute and thirty-seven seconds and the thirty-seven barrels of the thirty-seven rifles aimed at his wolf head and human heart rupture and crumple with a whistling sound like flutes that sustains itself in the air for approximately one minute and thirty-seven seconds after they crumple.*

*The Wolf-Headed Poet howls at the top of his lungs and the all of the other rifles providing cover rupture and crumple with a whistling sound like flutes that gets louder and higher-pitched to the point that it makes the soldiers' and members of the general public's ears bleed a little.*

*The Wolf-Headed poet howls and the public restrooms at Number One Parking Lot explode in flames.*

**Member of the General Public Wearing NASCAR Cap:** Well, this is just, just, unacceptable.

**Regiment Officer:** Stop this immediately! I'll take you with my bare hands if necessary.

*He pulls his handgun and advances, firing off rounds before the Wolf-Headed Poet has the chance to howl again.*

*Bullets hit the Wolf-Headed Poet in his belly, in his arms, in his chest and in his groin, but he doesn't fall down or howl or even move – just grins while he stands there bleeding into the soft sand.*

*Then he leaps forwards onto the dock, and in one motion does a flip mid-air and bites off and swallows the officer's whole head.*

*The officer's headless body keeps running and firing the gun for a while before it collapses, twitching and jumping like an asphyxiating fish.*

**Regiment Soldiers:** *{elongated<sup>81</sup>}* Oh, fuck!

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** Captains of industry come and bow before me! Generals and commanders of armies – you don't want to see your cities flooded!

**Soldier:** No generals on this island, sorry.

**Member of the General Public Wearing New York Cap:** Not much in the way of industry either, boss – unless you mean the insurance industry?

**Member of the General Public Wearing Sequined Gown:** And they've pretty much all left too, must have heard you coming! And, this place here's the only city.

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** Then why do I smell him here - The Old White Bastard? Why does his stink so permeate this place if it's not worth something to him?

**Member of the General Public Wearing Marlins Cap:** Now that just sounds plain racist if you ask –

**Member of the General Public with Big Spliff:** *{cutting him off}* No, no – you know who I think he means, not some actual white guy - but *{whispers in member of the General Public Wearing Marlins Cap's ear, then vanishes behind the crowd}*

**Member of the General Public Wearing Marlins Cap:** *{suppressing laughter}* Oh no ha yeah I think he could mean that guy, really he –

**The Old White Bastard:** *{cutting both off, parting the crowd}*: Now, who's talking about me so damn disrespectfully?

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** You! You! Because of you I've wandered dazed out in that ocean and all over this globe for hundreds of years! Because of you I lost my wolf body! Because of you I lost my poet head!

**The Old White Bastard:** I think you're being highly unreasonable, clearly you don't know the details of that day – I could have been your wolf head's last meal or your

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Musson Da Menace



human stomach's first taste of human flesh. Would you have liked that? Aren't you glad I hid and left you to the fish?

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** I know all about eating human flesh – there was plenty down there – but it's better when it's fresh.

*The Wolf-Headed Poet rushes the nearest member of the general public, picks him up and cradles him like a baby, then tears into the man's stomach and roots around in it with his long wolf snout until half the intestines dangle out almost to the cigarette butts and dust on the dock.*

**Member of the General Public Wearing Deep Green Bermuda Shorts and Navy Blazer with Intestines Dangling from Crisp Designer Shirt:**

Aujacqgsqscuesaalacwanjacoqueuslacwanii *{crying}*

*The Wolf-Headed Poet tosses the partially disembowled member of the general public aside, and licks his hairy lips.*

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** *{addressing crowd}* Who's next?

**Premier of Bermuda:** As the premie— *{the Wolf-Headed Poet bites off his arms}* – aaarrh! Aah! Aah!

**Leader of the Opposition:** Clearly a bipartisan approach is requi— *{the Wolf-Headed Poet bites off his feet}* –aaarrh! Aah! Aah!

**The Old White Bastard:** Goddamn dog, you broke my two best toys!

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** *{looking up from his meal of the Leader of the Opposition's left foot to address the crowd}* Who's got the nerve to come help me surround this island with its own little sea of blood? I can promise it'll heal global warming, amongst other planetary and societal ailments!

*{approaches the Old White Bastard and whispers in his ear}*

Come meet me at Crow Lane tomorrow morning  
if you want to stop this dismembering and devouring –

I'll be trampling  
on the little patch of purple flowers  
there by the roundabout.

**The Old White Bastard:** I think you're being highly unreasonable; surely you don't understand all of the variables? Do you think I care who you devour or dismember? *{rolls eyes}* Best of luck to you sir. As they say here, check you later!

*{With a bang and a puff of white smoke, he vanishes.}*

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** *{addressing crowd}* Did you all hear that? You can blame him for all that happens now, if anyone! *{rushes crowd, runs circles around them while biting pieces from them one by one}* Nobody leaves this city now! Tomorrow I'll

refill the sea from Crow Lane out to the harbour and beyond with your blood, magically expanded! It'll do such good for the environment! Be proud!

*But two members of the general public remain outside the Wolf-Headed Poet's circle of containment: One late-riser who saw the missing sea and walked all the way down the docks still clutching his box of breakfast cereal, and one man who'd been there the whole time but mostly hung back behind burning a big spliff, since everyone else was distracted.*

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** That doesn't even make coherent sense.

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** The guy's fucking crazy.

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** What does the environment have to do with anything?

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** I dunno; the guy's crazy. Clearly he breathed through gills for too long, with the ocean squeezing his brain. Look: We're the only people left in town who he hasn't bitten pieces off of yet; let's get the fuck out of here and maybe we can do something.

*The duo start to pick their way east through town, looking over their shoulders every now and then.  
Silence in the streets except for birds...*

**Birds:** *{strangely malicious}* Ka! Nekhbet! Threatening! Nekhbet! Ba!

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** What can we do? He seems invincible.

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** I guess you don't ever wake up early - or go through the roundabout most mornings, seeing as you must live in town?

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** How could you tell?

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** Never mind all that; you know Johnny Barnes?

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** Johnny Barnes who stands and waves to traffic at the roundabout? Who doesn't know him?!

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** Ok, so that's the one.

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** I don't mean to discourage you ... but what can he do?

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** Well, since recently old Johnny's changed. Folks say if he lets one word out from his mouth now, or even smiles, it could mean the whole block around him gets sucked into some kind of void inside of him.

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** I think you need to pass me the spliff, mate...

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** Do you have any choice but to humour me?

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** Fine, I guess no. Let's go.

*They make for East Broadway and the roundabout by Crow Lane Park.*

*Way down the road, old Johnny Barnes is still running into trouble – A while back, his smile became a black hole sucking in everything around the roundabout where he hangs out, so he's been trying to keep his mouth shut, uses a large-print sign to say his usual I-love-you's while he waves with one hand and keeps the other over his face. He doesn't leave the roundabout at all these days – he doesn't need to, his body so adapted to this environment that it draws sustenance from the air full of car fumes like some kind of sentient air-plant benevolently latched to the kerb.*

*The two members of the general public run up on Johnny.*

*At first he thinks it's another attack from haters of his mission to tell this whole damn island how good he feels about them every morning, so he braces for impact and almost slips open the black hole trying not to gasp.*

*When the members of the general public offer no threat, Johnny visibly relaxes.*

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** Good morning Mr. Barnes, don't be alarmed. I know you're busy greeting people today as usual, but do you know what's going on just up the road in town? Look over from the roundabout – see where there should be water? Some guy up there stashed it off from us, way out beyond North Rock, so he can make a pool using our blood! Oh and he says he hates guys. You're the only chance I think our island has right now *{glances at Johnny's blocked mouth}*, given your – um um *{he pauses}* – special talent.

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** Johnny we need your help. He's coming down this way tomorrow at dawn. His head is like some kind of big evil wolf or dog. Can we count on you to tell him that you love him, to hug him and open your smile wide?

*Johnny looks shocked for a second; then his eyes take on a more serious expression as he looks at these members of the general public in a manner that seems to say, "You boys must be smoking rocks."*

*But the sea is clearly gone – and as he looks into these random people's eyes, the trickle of blood from the Wolf-Headed Poet's devouring reaches down East Broadway to the roundabout, and already the traffic going into town has stopped and the Regiment has started setting a perimeter up around the city.*

*So the look in Johnny's eyes switches up to say, "You can count on me," as he squeezes both members of the general public in a tight hug. His natural draw nearly keeps them stuck to him.*

**Member of the General Public With Big Spliff:** *{to Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes}: Why did you tell him that the wolf man thing up the road says he hates guys?*

**Member of the General Public With Box Of Frosted Flakes:** *Well I figured either being Johnny Barnes he hates haters, or being Johnny Barnes he wants to give a hater extra love – either way his smile should open up and pull that thing in and crush it, then seal off.*

*The two members of the general public leave Johnny Barnes in his usual spot and go hide behind the bushes at Trimmingham Hill. They wait there, afraid to venture out.*

*Up the road the sound of the wolf-headed poet howling goes on all day. More explodes: cars and trash cans burst, even trees spontaneously combust in their planters. HSBC, NT Butterfield, The Supreme Court Building, OBA Headquarters, Alaska Hall - all crumble and their rubble starts to whistle the mysterious tune sung by the crushed rifles. People stay awake as the sun goes down, keep themselves locked in with the lights out and everything set to silent.*

*At night, the howling goes silent too. The troops watching the perimeter set up around town peer nervously down the winding roads they guard. Even the tree frogs have gone quiet. Fog rolls in from wherever way out beyond North Rock it is that the sea still spins liquid with Sister Sargasso's song. Water evaporated from the bodies of dead fish and other marine life flopped in the gullies and hills where there was once ocean mixes with the fog and stinks in everyone's lungs. It gives them visions in their sleep that seem to go on for years, and in these dreams they hear the strange whistle that sounded with the crushed guns.*

*When the sun comes up, the horizon looks like a gigantic wolf head vomiting fire. In the distance, a column of people hiking for land from the stranded cruise ship pierces the mist.*

*Cars driving alongside the steep cliffs that were once hidden by water wake Johnny from his slumber at the roundabout. He dares not yawn. Following his usual routine,*

*he cups his hand over his mouth and picks up his "I LOVE YOU" sign. He truly misses saying those words. All the better that he gets to say them today, to hell with the risk.*

*In spite of the sun, mist obscures the roads that spoke out from the roundabout. The Wolf-Headed Poet emerges from the hidden distance of East Broadway, his jaws dangling a human head by one or two inches of spine protruding from severed neck.*

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** With this skull of blood I shall anoint the spot where Sally Bassett burned! With this blood I shall anoint the spot where your souls were lost! With this blood I shall anoint and refill this cursed Sargasso Sea!

*The Wolf-Headed Poet approaches the roundabout. Seeing Johnny Barnes, he changes course slightly and approaches the old man with measured apex-predator footsteps. Johnny Barnes waves his 'I LOVE YOU' sign.*

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** {sniffing at Johnny Barnes} What does that say?

*Johnny stays silent, lips locked, but keeps his hand away from his mouth.*

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** What does that say?

**Member of the General Public With Box of Frosted Flakes:** {Watching from the bushes}: So he can spout off reams of poetry, but he can't read?

**Member of the General Public with Big Spliff:** Shhhhhh!

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** What does that say?!?

*Johnny beckons for the Wolf-Headed Poet to come closer, as if all the old man can do is whisper in his ear. The Wolf-Headed Poet sees nothing to fear, so he snarls and bares his teeth just in case old Johnny tries something as leans in close...*

**Johnny Barnes:** {whispering with a smile} I love you.

*As Johnny's whisper enters the wolf-headed poet's ear, so does the incredible pull of the black hole in Johnny's smile. The Wolf-Headed Poet doesn't feel it at first, but before the words are done with vibrating his cochlea, wax and blood start to float out into Johnny's mouth. The floating trickle of fluid becomes a steady stream from the Wolf-Headed Poet's ear; something bursts inside and the stream of blood and wax and fluid becomes a torrent of brains rushing into Johnny's smiling mouth.*

**Wolf-Headed Poet:** What does this mean? What do - {his words become screams}

*Johnny does his best to restrain the Wolf-Headed Poet's flailing body as its wolf-head drains into him and crumples like a juice-box. Then he swallows the smashed wolf-head whole along with its human body that still fights until finally compressed into the nothingness of Johnny's black-hole gut. Johnny sighs with relief, but now he*

*can't quite close the hole – something rustles from the behind the nearest light post: Observer to a final fault, the Old White Bastard spins screaming from his hiding place into Johnny's smile. So does the nearest park bench, and an unsuspecting news crew from TV9. Everything around him clings on to this world for life. Finally, he manages to seal his smile off - for the moment. But the black hole still pulls from inside of him; it won't be contained by Johnny's body forever.*

*In the distance, the familiar blue waters of the Sargasso begin to gently fill in the spaces from which they had been driven. The sea-trees shrink back to their normal sizes, and the fishy mist begins to recede.*

**Member of the General Public with Big Spliff:** *{emerging from the bushes}*: The joke's on you, Wolf-Headed Poet! You won't be making no new sea from our blood!

**Member of the General Public with Box of Frosted Flakes:** Wait, wait, hold up – do you hear that sound?

*They might not know her voice exactly,  
but as the water fills back in around the island  
both members of the general public can make out Sister Sargasso singing from the deep.*

**Sister Sargasso:** The joke would have been on the Wolf-Headed Poet anyway: The sea's already blood, at least this one: It shows up at sunset to remind us of its of its skeletons: We drink rain evaporated from their depths; maybe it contains some trace of them.

*Yes. Maybe it does. Remember her song, if not this report, little ones.*

**THE SUN'S DYING HYMN**

Lord, I've tasted and now taste this water as I taint it red while setting,  
reflected in the sea's trillions of tiny mirror particles  
after scattering through layers of cloud. Lord, I taste it: this water's full  
of lead or iron – or – no, Lord: this water's full of bones, most with forests  
of beautiful polyps growing on top, Lord, polyps of brain coral

cooled by the slight whoosh sent their way by waving fan coral, unnameable  
varieties of coral, beautiful heaps of calcified bone and  
ship-killing reefs their pedestals; Lord, this water I will taste a hundred  
million times over – ocean stew, fish stock tempered with blood. Is this, too,  
your holy water, Lord? Passing over, licking it with flame-tongue and

caressing the contours of its shorelines and dwellers, am I, too, blessed?

**DAUGHTER OF SUNS**

You once told me you had descended from the stars  
and I believed you without asking any questions,  
waded after you  
knee deep in water  
that laughed and shifted, masked sea-urchin spines  
and manowarstings under heaven's black reflection.  
I would have never believed a word you said  
if it weren't for the harbour jangling  
and the plane you boarded  
vanishing above it  
into the mix of water, space, and causeway lights.  
Now I grind soil you'll never see again under my heels,  
now the megaships moored at Dockyard seem to mock me for  
my ignorance. For some reason, I still trust the strange pattern  
of reality you plotted out for me, still try  
to follow you to stars  
via the sea.



**STAR/SIREN**

The net of stars all vanished but one red half-  
star. When the sun rose, she was still close to earth,  
still a naked flame in cold salt mist.

I watched her zap the sea until it boiled,  
thrashed beneath the heat of her red rays,  
stuck my fingers in her light, gripped her  
so tight she turned my hands red then slipped out

of them; now I'm stained by her, third degree.

She floated out to sea and off into the sky,  
I followed her path all day as she sailed  
farther and farther from the cold, damp clay  
clumped and bound to my tough-skinned brown feet.

Sometimes the sea threw things at me: plastic  
milk crates, bits of lumbar. Planet Earth's edge  
dipped ahead, but water wouldn't give way to heavens.

I followed her path all day as she sailed,  
colder and colder as our distance grew,

and as she slowly came back down to Earth  
exactly in the place she's always been,

I was behind her, struggling.

Dreaming of palmettos in the cold  
    far from my island, I swim into a riddim,  
let it enter me and freestyle until I'm warm,  
    unthinking, tickles in my ears –  
many voices  
    a few I know, most I don't remember,  
all from my sister Sargasso deep,  
    spirit-speak,  
fuck  
    lying in tongues.  
I breathe the broken freshness  
    of allspice leaves,  
sing and spit these words she sends,  
    fit them to my riddim:  
    Then I can stay above the chop.



**NOTES**

The poems entitled 'THEME FROM WALCOTT' are improvised rewritings of Derek Walcott's poem 'Preparing for Exile' from *Sea Grapes*

'EVENING IN A NEW BERMUDA' incorporates text from V.S.Reid's *A New Day* Knopf: 1949. pgs 3-11; 370-371

'DAUGHTER OF SUNS' improvises on a theme from Wilson Harris's *Tree of the Sun*

Poems in this collection appear in:

*SX Salon*

*Lighthouse*

*World Literature Today*

*Moko*

*Beatdom*

*Sargasso*

*Tongues of the Ocean*

*The Rialto*

*Onion (Publication of the English Department at Lingnan University, Hong Kong)*

*Numero Cinq*