MIGRATION and REFUGE

An Eco-Archive of Haitian Literature, 1982–2017

JOHN PATRICK WALSH

Contemporary French and Francophone Cultures

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Introduction
Tè glise, Continents à la dérive
Haiti between Shifting Continents, Past and Present

> Faille: cassure des couches terrestres accompagnée d'une dénivellation tectonique des blocs séparés. Telle est la définition neutre, froide, classique, d'un phénomène géologique finalement assez fréquent et assez répandu. Phénomène qui pourtant en silence, millimètre après millimètre, fraction de seconde après fraction de seconde, se déroule à des kilomètres sous l'écorce terrestre. Phénomène inconnu pour la grande majorité des Haïtiens mais connu de certains d'entre nous qui avions choisi de l'oublier. Et puis, somme toute, la terre nous paraissait tout à fait ferme sous nos pieds. Alors pourquoi s'inquiéter? Parce que ce métabolisme lointain et silencieux est d'une lenteur telle qu'il peut servir d'alibi à l'oubli, de prétexte à la passivité, d'excuse à l'ignorance.
>
> Yanick Lahens, *Failles*, 31

Writing in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, Yanick Lahens contemplates life on fault lines. In the passage cited above, from *Failles*, the book published later that same year, Lahens comes to terms with the collision of human and geological time and space, and the apparently sudden awareness brought by the earthquake: the Earth moves beneath us. And yet, if the great majority of Haitians were unaware, some knew, Lahens admits. The "distant metabolism" of the

planet is too slow to appear on human radar, Lahens implies, thus making it easy to forget. In this short chapter, entitled "Continents à la dérive," Lahens makes a key argument about the consequences of passivity and ignorance. The earthquake exposed a crosshatching of social, economic, and political fault lines. Like shifting tectonic plates, these networked forces are largely invisible, yet their visible effects, she contends, are equally as devastating. The failure to see these rifts is owed, in large part, to the different speeds with which they move. "Si la lenteur des phénomènes souterrains nous a forcé à l'oubli," she writes, "c'est paradoxalement la vitesse de ceux qui se déroulent en surface qui nous contraint à l'esquive et nous conduit donc au même déni" (*Failles*, 33). This paradox moves between *oubli*, or the passive forgetting of geological fault lines, and *déni*, the willful denial of political fissures. If the earthquake was caused by slow-moving plates that destroyed the natural and built environment, spectacularly, in seconds, political decisions, enacted relatively quickly, have consequences with a long afterlife. In either case, she suggests, the refusal to face up to reality ends in disaster.

Lahens's reflection on conflicting speeds of geological and political bodies in Haiti can be compared to what Rob Nixon has called "slow violence." "By slow violence," he writes,

> I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all … [It] is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. (*Slow Violence*, 2)

Nixon is concerned here with damage done to natural and built environments by sovereign governments and international coalitions, as well as corporations of national and transnational reach. In the increasingly deregulated age of neoliberal globalization, political and economic powers operate with impunity, and they are largely able to do so, Nixon argues, because the harm is spread out over long periods of time.[1] Lahens contemplates political violence in a similar

1 On the invisibility of environmental harm, see Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, *Petrochemical America* (New York: Aperture, 2014). Misrach and Orff achieve an innovative collaboration between the visual arts and digital mapping technologies to examine the links between industrialization, ecological degradation, and public health. They shed creative and critical light on dangers that seep into land, water, and human bodies over time.

way. She argues that the earthquake revealed, in the most brutal way, the aftereffects of political and economic factors that, over time, created conditions of precarity and insecurity for thousands and thousands of people in greater Port-au-Prince. *Failles* presents a painstaking critique of numerous actors and entities in Haiti, in the larger hemisphere of the Americas, and across the Atlantic in Europe. All bear responsibility for conditions on the ground. Lahens suggests that Port-au-Prince and its environs were already in the grip of an attritional violence that enabled the earthquake to wreak sudden devastation. She finds that the juxtaposition between slow and fast violence also laid bare a moral fault line. As Chapter Three demonstrates, Lahens works through this problem-space in various writings of non-fiction and fiction, thus anticipating a challenge posed by Nixon. "How do we bring home," he asks, " … and bring emotionally to life – threats that take time to wreak their havoc, threats that never materialize in one spectacular, explosive, cinematic scene? … How do we both make slow violence visible," he continues, "yet also challenge the privileging of the visible?" (*Slow Violence*, 14–15). Lahens's critique of the slow violence of political power offers a way to answer Nixon's questions through what I am calling an "eco-archive." At its most basic, it denotes a body of literary texts that depict ecological change over time and its impact on matters of social and environmental justice. The prefix "eco" refers to the shared, lived space of ecological problems, between humans and non-humans, and "archive" to the accumulation of texts that reveal overlapping histories of past and present. This book develops this idea through each of the chapters below. *Failles* belongs to the eco-archive because it records the violent clash of sub- and superterranean bodies and considers the ramifications of this disastrous collision.

The most urgent forms of slow violence that Nixon and other environmentally minded postcolonial scholars have addressed in the early twenty-first century are global warming and climate change. So, too, Lahens. *Failles* brings the reader to view the earthquake and the scandalous conditions in Haiti that it laid bare as a global crisis. In fact, before she laments the "dégradation de la production agricole et de l'environnement [haïtien]" (33), she conceives of these and other deadly fault lines in planetary terms. Crucially, she writes, "Mais cette propension au déni n'est pas seulement haïtienne. A l'échelle de la planète, nous avons oublié que la terre vit. Qu'elle a un âge, qu'elle passe par des cycles. Nous avons perdu la mesure de notre âge géologique. Nous avons perdu la mesure de l'espèce" (32). It is perhaps easy to overlook

this fleeting reference to "our geological age," given that so much of the testimony of *Failles* is focused on the place of Haiti in regional, hemispheric, and global histories. But I suggest that the chapter's focus on "shifting continents" also extends to the unstable movement that can be read in the pronoun "nous" as it expands and retracts between "we Haitians" and "we humans on the Earth." When Lahens evokes a living planet and gestures to humans as a species, it is important, I think, to read a tension between Haitian and global experience. In this way, the latter is a collective, if not universal *nous*. In thinking about local space in the global context of environmental crises, Lahens is in step with a growing number of artists, intellectuals, and scientists who are all coming to terms with the fact that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has observed, globalization and global warming are now on a collision course.[2]

In addition to Nixon, another such thinker is the French philosopher Michel Serres. Following the earthquake that struck near San Francisco, California on October 17, 1989, Serres wrote *Le contrat naturel*. Comparing the geopolitical and cultural assumptions that inflect Serres's text sharpens the contrast with the historical awareness of Lahens's critical and creative imaginary in *Failles*. Furthermore, it sets up a key problem that this study interrogates throughout: Haitian writers contribute in varied ways to debates about the converging paths of human and geological histories, yet at the same time their meditations on the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism are largely neglected in these very debates about the future of human life on the planet.

Le contrat naturel opens by recognizing the physical autonomy of the planet and closes by describing how the author senses its life and alterity to humanity. In the first section, "Guerre / Paix," Serres takes another look at classic depictions of battle scenes, in painting (Goya's "Duelo a garrotazos" of the "black paintings") and literature (Homer's *The Iliad*), and realizes that, beyond the epic combat between men, another, more pernicious battle has long taken place, only one that had been hiding in

2 Chakrabarty writes, "… self-conscious discussions of global warming in the public realm began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the same period in which social scientists and humanists began to discuss globalization. However, these discussions have so far run in parallel to each other. While globalization, once recognized, was of immediate interest to humanists and social scientists, global warming, in spite of a good number of books published in the 1990s, did not become a public concern until the 2000s" ("The Climate of History: Four Theses," 198–199).

plain sight. "Faut-il distinguer deux batailles," Serres asks, "la guerre historique qu'Achille livre à ses ennemis et la violence aveugle faite à la rivière? Nouveau déluge: le niveau croît" (*Contrat naturel*, 15). The inability to see the battle scene of climate change in its entirety, Serres finds, is inherently a failure of vision. Like Nixon, he is deeply unsettled by the accumulation of battles waged against the planet. "Redoutons aussi que les solutions à court terme," he warns, " … ne reproduisent, en les renforçant, les causes du problème. Moins évidemment apparaissent les causes à long terme, qu'il faut expliciter maintenant" (20–21). Serres makes an urgent appeal to what might be called "the care of the Earth."[3] As the title makes plain, he does so with the explicit aim of retrofitting Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract. Thinking more globally, Serres envisages an alliance between humankind and the Earth:

> Dès lors, dans le monde reviennent les hommes, le mondain dans le mondial, le collectif dans le physique, un peu comme à l'époque du droit naturel classique, mais avec pourtant de grandes différences, qui tiennent toutes au passage récent du local au global et au rapport renouvelé que nous entretenons désormais avec le monde, notre maître jadis et naguère notre esclave, toujours notre hôte en tous cas, maintenant notre symbiote. (*Contrat naturel*, 67)

Serres's argument turns on the conception of radical historical breaks. After the founding of natural law, the new relationship he proposes with the Earth is conceived with a view to a future symbiosis of humans and the planet that depends on a contractual relationship. Interestingly, Serres describes the former relationship in terms of Hegel's master/slave dialectic. Lahens historicizes the political fault lines of the 2010 earthquake in the failure of eighteenth-century European colonialists and twentieth-century imperialists to "humaniser le Noir" (*Failles*, 70). For Lahens and other Caribbean thinkers, questions of climate change and the survival of the planet have always been inextricably linked to the foundational problem of slavery. In this historical light, Serres's

3 This idea lends planetarity to Michel Foucault's ethical turn, at the twilight of his career, to the question of subject formation and its "aesthetics of existence," including the constituent problems of "self-writing"; "technologies of the self"; and "care of the self [le souci de soi]" that complete the second and third volumes of *History of Sexuality*. Michel Foucault, *L'Usage des plaisirs* (1984); *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality* Volume 2, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1986), and *Le souci de soi* (1984); *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality* Volume 3, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1988).

use of the master/slave narrative to underscore the urgency of climate change is telling of the scotoma, or a kind of historical blind spot that continues to have a deleterious effect on European historical vision.[4] Serres's ambiguous language harks back to the texts of Enlightenment *philosophes*, including the man that inspired the proposal of a natural contract. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau wrote, "Man is born free, yet everywhere lives in chains." As Christopher Miller observes, "Rousseau … sounds like he recognizes the evil of slavery in this famous opening of the *Social Contract*, yet he too ignores the Atlantic slave trade, as he does throughout his vast writings, with one tiny exception. He makes slavery a metaphor for the condition of man in *modern* (which means European) society" (*The French Atlantic Triangle*, 7; emphasis in original). By "contract," Serres similarly walks a fine line between metaphor and reality. He describes it at once as a declaration of peace with the Earth, our "host" – an "armistice dans la guerre objective" (*Contrat naturel*, 67) – and an acknowledgment of the status of humans as parasites.[5] As Ian Tucker argues, Serres ponders the "materiality of the human condition" ("Sense and the Limits of Knowledge," 149). But he also reminds his readers of a relational shift in which the human threatens to destroy the host planet.[6] In the end, the philosopher takes on the role of an ecological man, *homo ecologicus*, who, having felt the earth move beneath him, becomes aware that he is but "une trémulation de néant, vivant dans un séisme permanent" (*Contrat naturel*, 190). Unlike Lahens, who struggles to write after the earthquake, Serres communes with "la Terre spasmodique" and, in a moment of ecstasy, is ready to sign a pact with the planet (190).

4 I borrow this use of scotoma as an inability to see and acknowledge a traumatic past from Réda Bensmaïa in *Experimental Nations: Or, the Invention of the Maghreb* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Bensmaïa writes, "It is quite surprising to see just how many taboos still exist when it comes to France's history of colonization in Africa, the Middle East, and especially the veritable scotoma that exists in relation to the history of the Algerian War" (39).

5 In the context of preserving and sharing wilderness areas, Gary Snyder also raises idea of natural contract. "The commons," he writes, "is the contract a people make with their local natural system" (*The Practice of the Wild*, 31). See also Christopher D. Stone, "Defending the Global Commons," in *Greening International Law*, ed. Philippe Sands (New York: New Press, 1994), 34–49.

6 For an introduction to the interdisciplinary background of Serres, see Stéphanie Posthumus, "Vers une écocritique française: le contrat naturel de Michel Serres." *Mosaic* 44.2 (June 2011): 85–100.

Serres and Lahens respond to the planetary power of earthquakes with similar questions, yet they arrive at strikingly different conclusions. Playing on Galileo's supposed utterance "*Eppur si muove*! [And yet, it moves]," or the radical proposition that the Earth moves around the sun, Serres mobilizes the Italian's challenge to papal authority to argue that scientists of today are once again in a similar bind by having to convince contemporary authorities of the looming catastrophe of climate change. Behold, Serres declares, "la Terre s'émeut [the Earth is moved]" (*Contrat naturel*, 136). As Bruno Latour explains, it "has become – has become again! – an active, local, limited, sensitive, fragile, quaking, and easily tickled envelope" ("Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 3). For some, Serres flirts with what is generally referred to as "deep ecology," or a vision of the relationship between humanity and nature that is "ecocentric" rather than anthropocentric, or nature mastered by humans.[7] As Jonathan Krell demonstrates, this is a simplistic reading of Serres's position. Furthermore, Maria Assad has argued that it would be a mistake to overemphasize the figurative dimension of Serres's text. "*The Natural Contract*," she writes,

> first lays the foundation for a rigorous scientific-judicial appeal to its postmodern reader. Only then does the vision of an as yet unrealized world created on the basis of a natural contract between the Planet Earth and humankind move the author to passionately poetic expressions, equally serious in their intent. (*Reading with Michel Serres*, 153)

I would also add Latour's parenthetical remark that "*The Natural Contract* is first of all a piece of legal philosophy" ("Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 4). But, while Latour generally praises the earnest originality of Serres's thought, he signals the fatal flaw of its central proposition of a natural contract. "What seems impossible, however, in Serres's solution," Latour continues:

> is the quaint idea of establishing a new social compact with all those quasi-subjects. Not that the idea of a contract is odd … but because in a quarter of a century, things have become so urgent and violent that the somewhat pacific project of a contract among parties seems unreachable. War is infinitely more likely than contract. (5)

7 See Luc Ferry, *Le nouvel ordre écologique. L'Arbre, l'animal et l'homme* (Paris: Grasset, 1992). The book includes a sustained critique of Serres. For a concise account of their differences, see Jonathan Krell, "Michel Serres, Luc Ferry, and the Possibility of a Natural Contract," 1–13.

Latour's reflection on the urgency of the last twenty-five years – nearly the same time as that between *Le Contrat naturel* and *Failles* – highlights the divide in literary–philosophical responses to earthquakes in places as far apart as Haiti and California. Both Serres and Lahens ponder the difference of geological time that irrupts during an earthquake, and both consider the relative incapacity of humankind to grasp the slow but devastating problem of climate change. However, if their texts coalesce around the problem of time, they diverge markedly with respect to the political dimension of space. Serres may have laid awake in fear of the aftershocks in Palo Alto, but he did not have to confront the scale of death and destruction that Lahens witnessed in Port-au-Prince. Both Serres and Lahens experienced geological events, yet the earthquake in Haiti was a disaster not solely because of something that happened "naturally" – some act of God or Mother Nature – but because of the social conditions on the ground. Estimates of deaths in the earthquake in Haiti vary widely, with the Haitian government putting the toll at 316,000 and a group commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development issuing a report with a much lower number, somewhere between 46,000 and 85,000. However, after calling into question both of these estimates, Robert Muggah and Athena Kolbe conducted several household surveys and came up with the figure of 158,000 fatalities in the six weeks following the quake.[8] These important disputes in accounting notwithstanding, all of these figures are unprecedented in Haitian history and pale in comparison to the sixty-three deaths recorded in California. In other words, their man-made fault lines were worlds apart.[9]

It is unquestionable that certain populations are more vulnerable than others to earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods. The implications of the disparities in the effects of earthquakes in California, Haiti, Chile, and Japan have historically fallen under the critical purview of social scientists attuned to the problem of difference that has also long been a focal point of postcolonial studies. Comparing Serres and Lahens reminds

8 See Athena R. Kolbe et al., "Mortality, crime and access to basic needs before and after the Haiti earthquake: a random survey of Port-au-Prince households." *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 26.4 (2010): 281–297; see also Robert Muggah and Athena Kolbe, "Haiti: Why an accurate account of civilian deaths matter." *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 2011. http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/12/opinion/la-oe-muggah-haiti-count-20110712 (accessed September 20, 2017).

9 In the Chilean earthquake of February 2010, which measured a magnitude of 8.8, 525 people are reported to have perished.

us of the gap between the environmentalist concerns of European and North American writers and those in the Caribbean. As many critics have pointed out, after years of a (relative) mutual lack of engagement, environmental and postcolonial critiques have found some common ground.[10] In this regard, Mark D. Anderson's critical perspective in Latin American studies is instructive. In his important study of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, Anderson argues that the concept of "natural disaster" can be understood only in relation to a norm that is socially constructed and then mediated and reappropriated through cultural and political means.[11] *Failles* can similarly be situated as a form of "disaster writing," in that Lahens considers how the earthquake made visible the social and political norms that have historically colluded to keep Haiti on the edge of precarity. Yet, unlike Serres, who adopts a satellite's view of the Earth to take in the "plaques humaines immenses et denses" (*Contrat naturel*, 35), Lahens is moved as much by the global threat of the earthquake as by the scenes of devastation in her local environs. The difference between the Haitian experience of disaster and what it means for the view of the globe from above creates palpable tension in the pages of *Failles*.

Lahens and Serres grapple with the place of the human in this age of ecological reckoning, but they approach this human/planetary conjuncture from different angles. As Nixon shows, this is the fundamental problem of the Anthropocene, or the name for a new geological epoch, the Age of the Human, first proposed and debated in scientific circles. Given the devastation of the earthquake in Haiti, followed by several others around the globe, a slew of massive hurricanes and five-hundred-year floods, and the increased attention to global warming and climate change, it might appear logical and unquestionable that the Earth has entered a new age. And yet, the growing gulf between the rich and poor, as well as the seemingly unprecedented crisis of migrants and refugees, tells another story about the state of the globe. As Lahens suggests, it is not just continents that are *à la dérive*. "A crucial imaginative challenge is facing us," Nixon stated in an address to the Modern Language Association:

10 See Graham Huggan, "'Greening' Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.3 (Fall 2004): 701–733; see also Ursula K. Heise, "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism." *PMLA* 128.3 (2013): 636–643.

11 Mark D. Anderson, *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 28.

> How do we tell two large stories that seem in tension with each other, a convergent story and a divergent one? Set against the collective story about humanity's geomorphic impacts that will be legible in the earth's geophysical systems for millennia to come is the story of the human species, a much more fractured narrative … . In terms of the history of ideas, what does it mean that the Anthropocene as a grand explanatory species story has taken hold during a plutocratic age? How can we counter the centripetal force of that dominant story with centrifugal stories that acknowledge immense disparities in human agency, impacts, and vulnerability?[12]

In this speech, Nixon at once rehearses and expands upon the questions, cited above, that he had raised earlier in *Slow Violence*. In *Failles*, Lahens opens a profound engagement with an accelerating Anthropocene by critiquing generalizing narratives that erase particular histories of different modes of being human and of thinking ecologically.

Taking the comparative analysis of Lahens and Serres as its point of departure, this book argues that Haitian literature has long anticipated epochal thought with stories from the eco-archive that challenge the neocolonial and neoliberal political economies that undergird the dominant narratives of the Anthropocene. A range of texts, fiction and nonfiction, historicizes the intertwining of political and environmental problems brought to the surface by the earthquake by recalling previous disasters and imagining stories in their wake. Along with Lahens, several Haitian writers depict the imbrication of geological, political, and social fault lines to complicate the exceptional image of Haiti as a site of disaster, an ill-fated country with a resilient population. As Sibylle Fischer has demonstrated, Haiti has long been the "modernity disavowed" at the core of Western systems of thought that made grand claims about the enlightenment subject and the promise of capitalism to enable and guarantee democratic freedoms.[13] However, as the late Michel-Rolph Trouillot pointed out on numerous occasions, not only did this modernity fall far short of its declared universal reach, it would also define humanity largely in terms of economic value. Furthermore,

12 Rob Nixon, "The Great Acceleration and the Great Divergence: Vulnerability in the Anthropocene." *Profession*, March 19, 2014. https://profession.mla.hcommons.org/2014/03/19/the-great-acceleration-and-the-great-divergence-vulnerability-in-the-anthropocene/ (accessed November 22, 2018).

13 Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

it reduced Haiti and the Caribbean to the "otherwise modern."[14] By drawing on a long history of injustice, the texts examined herein evoke multiple forms and paths of migration and refuge that call into question the universalizing, future-oriented politics of earthquakes, climate change, and other ecological disasters. If the earthquake suddenly exposed scandalous conditions, the global ethical questions it raised concerning poverty, political corruption, and ecological degradation have long been treated in Haitian literature.

Framing a Haitian Eco-Archive: From Duvalier to Haiti After the Earthquake

> I said: Haitians like to tell each other that Haiti is *tè glise*, slippery ground. Even under the best of circumstances, the country can be stable one moment and crumbling the next.
>
> Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously*, 157

> Time, in short, has become less yielding, less promising than we have grown to expect it should be. And what we are left with are *aftermaths* in which the present seems stricken with immobility and pain and ruin; a certain experience of temporal afterness prevails in which the trace of futures past hangs like the remnant of a voile curtain over what feels uncannily like an endlessly extending present.
>
> David Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 6

In the aftermath of the earthquake, Edwidge Danticat recalls the Haitian proverb *tè glise*. She continues, "Haiti has never been more slippery ground than after this earthquake, with bodies littering the streets, entire communities buried in rubble, homes pancaked to dust" (157). Proverbs are timeless, yet the expression *tè glise* allows Danticat to situate the earthquake in Haitian history. In fact, *Create Dangerously*, a collection of essays examined in Chapter Four, runs from the early years

14 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot," in *Critically Modern, Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce Knauft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 220–237.

of François Duvalier to post-earthquake scenes. In this sense, time, too, appears to have collapsed, as the ruins of the earthquake conjure up the devastation of the thirty-year dictatorship. For Danticat and Lahens, the aftermath resurrected old questions that pull them backward and forward in time. David Scott's insistence on the temporality of the postcolonial era as a "stalled present" (*Omens of Adversity*, 6) is particularly apt in this context. *Create Dangerously* and other works taken up in this study exhibit the kind of temporal self-reflexivity that, Scott contends, is compelled by aftermaths, which he theorizes as the lived experience of overlapping temporalities of past and present, with but the illusion of a future. If we are preoccupied with time, Scott argues, it is because we are caught in a present that "seems stricken." In many ways, the feeling of a vexing, cyclical temporality characterizes Haitian literary representations of the Duvalier era to the present. To draw out the temporal intersections in the texts of Haitian writers, and to engage the historical awareness of this literature, this study examines a corpus that dates back to the publication of Jean-Claude Charles's writings in the early to mid-1980s and closes with Néhémy Pierre-Dahomey's *Rapatriés*, a novel published in 2017 that returns to nearly the same historical period of Charles's reporting on boat-people to imagine one such unfinished migration and lifelong search for refuge.

Migration and Refuge: An Eco-Archive of Haitian Literature frames a well-defined historical period (1982–2017) but does not isolate its primary sources in the moment of their publication. Rather, it considers the connections to be made between them by treating their abundant and diverse depictions of migration and refuge over time. *Écrits d'Haïti: Perspectives sur la littérature contemporaine (1986–2006)*, a volume of essays edited by Nadève Ménard, covers some of the same period as this book, but the variety of critical approaches taken by its contributors diverges from the Haitianist-informed ecocriticism of my study. However, both insist on a deeper historical background for contemporary Haitian literature. As Ménard asserts, "les textes réunis dans le présent ouvrage … s'inscrivent dans une certaine continuité avec les périodes précédentes" (11). While she recognizes that the fall of Duvalier was a turning point for Haitian literature, Ménard also underscores the play between continuity and discontinuity that keeps an older generation of literature in contact with the next.[15] What

15 In the preface to an anthology of Haitian creole poetry, Lyonel Trouillot concurs, "Si, sur le plan politique, la chute de Jean-Claude Duvalier en 1986 n'a

is more, although the earthquake occurred during the production of *Écrits d'Haïti*, it did not cause Ménard to revise the project. In fact, it only strengthened her resolve: "l'écriture devient encore plus essentielle," she writes (*Écrits d'Haïti*, 17). Taking heed of these insights, this book avoids assigning a group of Haitian texts to a sub-genre of "post-earthquake" literature. Even if it were to be used as a term of analysis, "post-earthquake" would have to be understood like "postcolonial," whose unstable temporality contains a present and future that struggle to break free of the past all the while they constantly refer back to it. The point is not to minimize the devastation caused by the earthquake, but rather to acknowledge that "post" is a deceptive marker. One can refer literally to Haitian literature published *after* January 12, 2010, but one must also anticipate a past that rises to the surface. From boat-people fleeing the political violence and environmental dispossession of the throes of the Duvalier regime for the beaches of Florida to internal migrations from depleted coastal areas to the rising shantytowns of Port-au-Prince during the Aristide years, and finally to those Haitians displaced internally to tent camps after the earthquake, these diverse experiences of migration and refuge occupy an important place in the Haitian literary imaginary.

The many different causes, modes, and routes of the journeys depicted in Haitian literature complicate received ideas on migration and refuge, beginning with the notion of a departure from one place that has become insecure, broadly defined, to an arrival in another, more secure place. In this apparently simple view, the emigrant becomes an immigrant. Yet the grammar betrays a more complex passage, as the present participle denotes an ongoing movement: the dangerous fleeing (from the Latin *fugere*) from a center to a re-fleeing (refuge) is an arduous becoming. To have a chance of being included in and, possibly, of transforming the place of arrival, the refugee must endure administrative, juridical, cultural, social, and linguistic barriers and processes. In the texts below, some of the migratory figures seek the rootedness to be found in place-bound forms of refuge, while others desire fluid identities that are located outside of rigid territorial boundaries. Some are brought into the folds of social and political formations and even allowed to transform these spaces, yet others are kept on the periphery

abouti jusqu'ici à des espoirs trompés … elle a quand même libéré la parole et changé beaucoup de choses en bien dans l'évolution de la littérature haïtienne" (*Anthologie de la poésie créole haïtienne: de 1986 à nos jours*, 5).

of societies that restrict the movement of strangers. The texts in question take the reader through and around a range of possible movements between migration and refuge. Throughout, I will have occasion to review histories and theories of migration in Haitian and Caribbean studies, as well as several other fields and disciplines that have developed a stake in the plight of migrants and refugees. In each chapter, close readings are mixed with and accompanied by additional poetic and critical texts. By contextualizing its central thematic pairing across multiple generations of authors and in the array of genres and narrative modes in which they write, this book considers a limited yet representative cross-section of Haitian literature.

Having set up a thematic and historical structure, I would like now to return to the idea of literature as an eco-archive, sketched above, in order to elaborate on the analytical method adopted in this book. By now, it is something of a commonplace in literary studies to borrow from the historian's toolkit and refer to primary sources as an "archive." A similar gesture treats literary texts from a previous generation as an "archival" source for a later generation. A slippage occurs in both uses between abstract and concrete meanings of "archive." Thinking about archives as official institutions, especially in the fields of Caribbean and Haitian studies, it is standard practice to begin with Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, and for good reason. This landmark study on the institutional power of archives is a canonical reference across fields in the social sciences and humanities. The oft-cited premise of Trouillot's argument is that "any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences" (*Silencing the Past*, 27). These silences, or ideas, people, places, and events, can be lost in four linked processes: the making of sources; their assembly in archives; the making of narratives from these sources; and, finally, the making of history. Together, these related components make possible some historical narratives and silence others. My approach to the silences at work in narratives on Haitian history is to examine how literature sounds them out, how it gives voice to characters, places, and stories that go unheard and unseen. Furthermore, in the absence or destruction of the kind of official archives that Trouillot considered, literary texts themselves can function as archives in more than an abstract sense. Building on the work of Lia Brozgal and Rachel Douglas, the chapters below consider the materiality of the text and processes of drafting, revising, publishing, and reprinting as inherently archival. The insights of Brozgal and Douglas have much in common

with Ada Ferrer's nuanced revision of Trouillot's central thesis on the archive as an institution of power. Ferrer writes,

> It is worth remembering that not all archives are considered equal, and that such phrases [institution of power] do not take adequate account of the ways in which the contemporary archives that historians rely on in places such as Port-au-Prince or Santiago de Cuba sometimes project insubstantiality as much as power. (*Freedom's Mirror*, 7)

What does the historian do, Ferrer asks, when the archives lose their substance? How does she find what matters? Working in various archives, Ferrer takes note of institutional disparities that lead to incomplete and inconsistent sources and unstable conditions of assembly and retrieval. If *Freedom's Mirror* is an outstanding, fine-grained work of scholarship, it is due in no small part to Ferrer's attention to archival environments around the Caribbean and Europe.

In this light, could one similarly view Haitian writers gleaning narrative truth from their surroundings? When institutions of power disseminate ideological and reductive representations of Haiti, when networks of neoliberal, religious, and humanitarian actors have the combined effect of marginalizing or appropriating local narratives, what sources do creative writers draw from to foreground "ideas of Haiti" that counter older, tired ideas?[16] This book argues that many Haitian writers turn to the environment as a source of *poiesis*, a making of meaning that shapes, and is shaped by, a social language that bears witness to silence and oppression. The texts herein, published between 1982 and 2017, are conceived as a key layer, a textual substratum, of a larger eco-archive. They attest to and reimagine the ecological and environmental settings of experiences of migration and refuge. In these works, "nature" is not taken for granted, nor is it the silent background of human conflict, as Serres wrote. The texts in this archive build on and complicate ideas of migration and refuge; they possess a critical and creative "ecological thought" that interrogates ideological appropriations of the natural world and is a witness to environmental injustice.[17]

16 I borrow this phrase from Millery Polyné, ed., *The Idea of Haiti: Rethinking Crisis and Development* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). As the title suggests, Polyné leans on Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

17 See Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

In grounding the theory of an eco-archive as an ethical and imaginative writing on the environment in Haitian stories, this book proposes a strategic alliance between ecocriticism and Haitian literary studies. This hybrid approach builds on important work in both fields. While the latter has long underscored the deep connection between literature and environment, the former had been more narrowly focused on environmental concerns of North America and Europe. However, as Ursula Heise and many other postcolonial scholars have shown, ecocriticism has undergone an "international turn" that has opened it to histories of colonial and imperial degradation ("Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism").[18] Furthermore, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, George Handley, and Renée K. Gosson have co-edited two pioneering collections on the "postcolonial ecologies" of the Caribbean, including contributions on Haitian literature and art.[19] In the field of Africana studies, Byron Caminero-Santangelo calls attention, in *Different Shades of Green*, to the tension between local, regional, and national forms of environmental justice movements as depicted in an array of African texts.[20] Finally, in Haitian literary studies, the conclusion of Martin Munro's *Writing on the Fault Line* reads like a primer for an ecocritical sequel to his impressive book:

> When Haitian novelists and poets write of the body and the soul, they are in fact evoking only two parts of a trinity that has long shaped the development of Haitian literature. The third part is the land, which is in a sense the body of the nation, ravaged and violated by the forces of natural and human history, and which is often represented as the source of the soul of the nation. (222)

By merging postcolonial ecocriticism with Haitian studies, this book pursues a critical dialogue that allows them to question each other and to rethink concepts such as "culture" and "nature," and "ecology" and "environment" that are central to both. Furthermore, and crucially,

18 As Graham Huggan shows, one could turn this around to argue for the "greening" of Postcolonial studies. See Huggan, "'Greening' Postcolonialism."

19 See *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005) and *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

20 See *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014). This work is notably published under Virginia's imprint, "Under the Sign of Nature, Explorations in Ecocriticism."

rather than applying theory to literature in a manner that risks distorting the imaginary, it offers close readings that are attuned to what the Haitian poet René Philoctète called "le langage des arbres et de la terre" (*Le peuple des terres mêlées*, 23). While ecocriticism has earned something of a reputation as a more activist form of literary criticism, this study remains focused on the literary and poetic dimensions of its corpus.[21]

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Migration and Refuge: An Eco-Archive of Haitian Literature is organized in three parts. The first part, "The Eco-Archive," develops more fully the book's conceptual and historical frame by drawing on Haitian and Caribbean thought on the environment, broadly understood, and by situating the primary texts under consideration in Haitian literary history of the twentieth century. By providing this longer historical context it aims to mitigate the pitfalls of periodization, especially the notion that the literary representation of migration or the critique of natural disaster becomes a phenomenon in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. To some extent, it is hard to avoid the tropes of "turns" and "waves," as evidenced in their prevalence in both literary and historical analysis. At any rate, this is a complex task, and not without controversy.[22] Emphasis on the salience of a historical turning

21 The circuitous path on which ecocriticism has developed, as well as the range of related yet slightly different labels used to identify it, accounts for the multidirectionality contained within what Heise and Lawrence Buell call an "omnibus term":

> an eclectic, pluriform, and cross-disciplinary initiative that aims to explore the environmental dimensions of literature and other creative media in a spirit of environmental concern not limited to any one method or commitment. Ecocriticism begins with the conviction that the arts of imagination and the study thereof – by virtue of their grasp of the power of word, story, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental concern – can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems: the multiple forms of ecodegradation that afflict planet Earth today.

To be sure, this definition is unwieldy, yet it highlights the interaction between environmentalism and literary criticism. See Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Heise, and Karen Thornber, "Literature and Environment." *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* (August 2011), annualreviews.org (accessed March 15, 2016).

22 See Steve Mentz's blog "Swervin': Modernity is not History," http://stevementz.com/swervin-modernity-is-not-history/ (accessed September 18, 2016),

point – as I will show below, either in attempts to define the magnitude of the earthquake in Haitian history by creative writers and critics alike, or in debates about the onset of the Anthropocene – risks overlooking what earlier periods can teach. And yet, a situated understanding of knowledge serves to call into question universal concepts and powers that marginalize or elide historical events.

After its theoretical and historical prologue, Part One examines several texts of three authors, René Philoctète, Emile Ollivier, and Jean-Claude Charles, all of whom navigated, in Haiti and abroad, the historical transition of the fall of the Duvalier regime and renewed violence in the early years of the Aristide presidency. From three separate geographical positions (Philoctète in Port-au-Prince; Ollivier in Montréal; and Charles between New York and Paris), each writer was caught between two different, though not necessarily conflicting, political movements of this era: the migration of Haitians along Haiti's growing diaspora and the attempt to rebuild the nation in the wake of dictatorship. While Ollivier and Charles set their fictional writings in the present, Philoctète turns to the past in his novel *Le peuple des terres mêlées* (1989), which depicts the "Parsley Massacre" of 1937, when the Dominican president Rafael Trujillo ordered the slaughter of Haitians and Haitian–Dominicans at the border of the Dominican Republic. The second half of Chapter One, "For an Eco-Archive," performs close readings of Philoctète's novel and a selection of his poetry. A founding member of two influential groups of writers and artists, *Haiti Littéraire* and the Spiralists, Philoctète was known primarily as a poet, but it is also true that his novelistic and theatrical texts remain largely unknown outside of Haiti. Not long after François Duvalier became president-for-life, Philoctète went into exile in 1966, joining fellow poets in Quebec, notably Anthony Phelps, Serge Legagneur, Roland Morisseau, and Davertige. Unlike his peers, he returned to Haiti after only six months, apparently unable to be away from the Caribbean. For Max Dominique, the collection of poems written during Philoctète's time in Quebec, *Ces îles qui marchent*, bears witness to the experience of this "va-et-vient du dedans au dehors, d'Haïti aux îles des îles à l'intérieur" (*Esquisses critiques*, 161). The attachment to the land and sea and to the wider

on the controversy sparked by Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011). See also Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization 1550–1719* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

community of islands to which Haiti belonged, but from which it was also historically isolated, is a signature of Philoctète's writing. Drawing inspiration from his environmental imaginary, the chapter continues to theorize an eco-archive as the accumulation of ecologically based knowledge that gives meaning to the ethos of living with and resisting various forms of oppression. In *Le peuple des terres mêlées*, the narrator appeals to the environment as a witness to Trujillo's genocidal transformation of the borderland.

Chapter Two, "Haitian Odysseys," turns from the possibilities of Philoctète's *emmêlements*, or the hope for mixed communities along fluid boundaries, to Ollivier's and Charles's depictions of another pairing of migration and refuge in the perilous journeys of boat-people hoping to reach hospitable shores. The chapter opens with a comparison of the authors' self-reflections on their literature in the context of the larger literary and cultural movements in which they have often been situated. It examines Ollivier's novel *Passages* (1991) alongside his non-fictional writing on migration and exile. The second section takes up Charles's essay *De si jolies petites plages* (1982), together with the novels *Manhattan Blues* (1985) and *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris* (1987). Charles covered the plight of Haitian refugees who fled the persecution and poverty of the Duvalier era and its aftermath. Published at the height of the Reagan era, when an earlier generation set out to "Make America Great Again," and when the AIDS epidemic led to key revisions to U.S. immigration and refugee policy, the book blends documentary and autobiographical modes. The chapter puts the fictional and non-fictional texts of each writer in dialogue to build on the analysis of Philoctète's *Le peuple des terres mêlées*. All three write of life at the periphery of national and international power. Philoctète plays on the polysemy of *mêlées* to evoke the harmony sought by border people whose *sang-mêlé* made them targets of Trujillo's ideological violence; Ollivier brings out many nuances of *passages* to treat two different histories of migration; and Charles reports on harrowing journeys to Floridian shorelines that, for many, lead to incarceration.

The texts taken up in Part One raise questions that remain vital to writers grappling with the intertwining of political and natural disasters that resurfaced in the 2010 earthquake. The objective of Parts Two and Three is to examine the ways that several more recent texts put the earthquake in a broader time frame and in the larger field of regional and transatlantic stories. How do contemporary texts approach the border of the literary past of Ollivier, Philoctète, and Charles? If they

draw from the well of topics and themes addressed in Part One, they also update them by interrogating contemporary forms of collusion between neoliberalism, humanitarianism, and globalization. Part Two, "Literary Witnesses," considers multiple writings of Lahens, Danticat, and Dany Laferrière. For Jeremy Popkin, the coincidence that several prominent writers and academics were on hand for the Étonnant Voyageurs festival has resulted in an undue significance of their accounts in this "era of the witness" ("Life in the Ruins," 101). Popkin suggests that the "experiences of ordinary Haitians" (102) get lost in all the attention to the writer's testimony.[23] Yet Popkin offers a reductive idea of testimony to be found in the literary accounts of Lahens, Laferrière, and Rodney Saint-Éloi, which he seemingly marginalizes as "assemblages of fragments … [of an elite] that represent the thoughts of Haiti's small cosmopolitan educated class rather than the mass of the population" (103).[24] And yet, a study that examines the greater implications of this literature does not necessarily discount the importance of the testimony of the Haitian people. In fact, how writers as "literary witnesses" portray "ordinary" lives, along with the attendant ethical questions of representation, are central concerns of this book. Chapter Three, "The Banality of Disaster," returns to *Failles* before treating several of Lahens's works of fiction. It draws out her critique of cultural, social, and political fault lines that existed well before an earthquake that rendered them further apart. Chapter Four, "The Distant Literary Witness and the Ghosts of History in the 'Other America'," analyzes Danticat's *Create Dangerously* together with her novel, *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013). For a comparative perspective on the possibilities of testimony to the earthquake from the diaspora, it also considers Laferrière's *Tout bouge autour de moi* (2011) and *L'Énigme du retour*, the novel published in 2009. The chapter then focuses on Danticat's critique of the marginalization of what she calls the "other America" – places where social and environmental injustice create the illusion of separate spheres of dwelling in the Americas.

Another of Danticat's critical and creative preoccupations is the role

23 Popkin points to Claire Payton's Haiti Memory Project as a key source of accounts in Kreyol. See www.haitimemoryproject.org (accessed October 15, 2016). Containing over one hundred audio interviews, Payton's site is indeed an invaluable repository. Another source of Kreyol voices that Popkin does not mention is Trouillot's edition of the *Anthologie bilingue de la poésie créole*.

24 Rodney Saint-Éloi, *Haïti, Kenbe là!: 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Michel Lafon, 2010).

of art, historical and contemporary, in making sense of disaster. In fact, both Danticat and Lahens turn to Albert Camus and the postwar scenes of his critical journalism, essays, and theatrical writings. Camus's public and private reflections on the "artist and his time," as well as his appeals to justice, inspire them. A complicated figure in his own time, Camus remains so today. Given the archival role of his writings in both *Failles* and *Create Dangerously*, Chapters Three and Four re-examine two central ideas – "forging an art of living in a time of catastrophe" and the artistic obligation to "create dangerously" – that Camus reflected on during two speeches in Sweden on the occasion of his Nobel Prize in 1957. Camus is split between two distinct historical moments that complicate the apparent unity of the speeches in Stockholm and Uppsala. As each credo reappears in the writing of Lahens and Danticat, the book provides some necessary context to consider how they were uttered by Camus under different circumstances. In 1945, France begins a period of national reconstruction, only to confront, twelve years later, the Algerian War of Independence.

The intertextual links with Camus reveal the archival function of the texts by the French-Algerian. Haitian writers revisit and renew critiques of an earlier generation, in Haiti and beyond, in the attempt to "forge an art" that deconstructs ideological conceptions of disaster that circumscribe Haiti. At the same time, Lahens and Danticat seek to reconstruct alternative narratives of cultural knowledge and social projects. Moreover, they offer a creative rebuilding of Haiti through an interactive process of writing non-fiction and fiction. Part Two dwells on the recurrence of passages in various texts, from the short story to the chronicle and back to fiction in the more expansive aesthetic of the novel. What happens to central themes and figures as they pass from one form to the next? Both chapters situate the texts of Lahens and Danticat in a broader history of textual forms, including the *testimonio* and *crónica* of Latin American traditions; autobiography and autofiction in the Caribbean and its diaspora; and journalistic texts of Haitian writers. The heterogeneity of these archival-type texts means that they do not conform to any one generic type. They transgress conventions of form as readily as they cross historical eras. In this way, Part Two attends to textual mediations of the links between history, politics, culture, and geology.

Part Three, "The Anthropocene from Below" treats a set of writers (Louis-Philippe Dalembert, Gary Victor, and Néhémy Pierre-Dahomey) whose fictions juxtapose the sudden power of earthquakes with the slow

burn of Haitian history. Chapter Five, "Fictions of Migration and Refuge from the Anthropocene," explores the ways that these authors (two from the diaspora and one who has remained in Haiti; two established, one newcomer) imagine experiences of migration and refuge in the wake of political and natural disaster, and reflect on the challenges that migrants and refugees pose to imagined communities, especially given the stakes of ecological reckoning for social and political institutions that support life in common. Victor's *Maudite éducation* (2012) and its sequel, *L'Escalier de mes désillusions* (2014), Dalembert's *Ballade d'un amour inachevé* (2013), and Pierre-Dahomey's *Rapatriés* cast doubt on, if not foreclose, the future of this shared humanity, with depictions of disillusionment that expose what Victor calls "la frêle beauté du présent" (*L'Escalier de mes désillusions*, 190).

The first part of Chapter Five returns to the key questions of the Anthropocene, raised above in the comparison of Lahens, Nixon, and Serres, in order to frame the ways that Caribbean thinkers have already anticipated the repercussions of debates that now preoccupy scientists around the globe.[25] Paul J. Crutzen, an atmospheric chemist and Nobel laureate for his discovery of the ozone hole, first "blurted out" the term "Anthropocene" in 2000, as he recalled in an interview with the journalist Elizabeth Kolbert, at the meeting of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), a major institute for Earth System science – a relatively new field, distinct from ecology and environmental science alike, that emerged some thirty years ago.[26] Despite the

25 A working group on the Anthropocene was formed to establish a date by consensus. *The Guardian* has run a handful of articles on this question. See https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth (accessed September 16, 2016).

26 For more information, see Stanford University department page: https://earth.stanford.edu/ess/about; see Clive Hamilton, "Getting the Anthropocene So Wrong." *The Anthropocene Review* 2.2 (2015): 102–107. For the derivation of the term Anthropocene and its history see Elizabeth Kolbert (*Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2006], 181–187). In her latest book, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), Kolbert reports the interview with Crutzen, who said that "the word 'Anthropocene' came to him while he was sitting at a meeting [of the IGBP]. The meeting's chairman kept referring to the Holocene … 'Let's stop it,' Crutzen recalled blurting out. 'We are no longer in the Holocene … '" (107–108). However, the article published in the IGBP

fact that, two years later in an article in *Nature*, Crutzen would specify what he meant by the human impact on the "whole Earth as a complex system," others have since "distort[ed] its meaning," according to Clive Hamilton ("Getting the Anthropocene So Wrong," 102–103). Hamilton's article responds scathingly to Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, who date the shift from the Holocene to the Anthropocene back to the early seventeenth century, a result of European colonization of the Americas.[27] Unlike Crutzen, who marks the origins of this human threat by the invention of the steam engine in the late eighteenth century, Lewis and Maslin go back further still, some 175 years to 1610, to set the boundary marker – what is known as the "Golden Spike," or a "an event in stratigraphic material, such as rock, sediment, or glacier ice" that defines the beginning of an epoch – for the Anthropocene ("Defining the Anthropocene," 173). As Lewis and Maslin explain, stratigraphic records are used to "delimit major changes in the Earth system and thereby geological time units, for example, the appearance of a new species as fossils within rocks, coupled with other temporally coincident changes" (173). And yet, according to Hamilton, Lewis and Maslin do not find sufficient stratigraphic evidence to support their claim of a dip in the global concentration of carbon dioxide. Instead, Hamilton writes, they weave "a complex story about colonization of South America" ("Getting the Anthropocene So Wrong," 104). Indeed, Lewis and Maslin argue that "the collision of the Old and New Worlds," also known as the Columbian Exchange, after the arrival of Columbus in the Caribbean, saw the "first global trade networks … and the resulting mixing of previously separate biotas … the globalization of human foodstuffs … cross-continental movement … of domesticated animals … [all] contributed to a swift, ongoing, radical reorganization of life on Earth without geological precedent" (174). Hamilton remains unconvinced,

newsletter lists both Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer as co-authors. See "The Anthropocene." *IGBP Newsletter* 41 (2000). As Donna Haraway suggests in *Experimental Futures: Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), the publicity surrounding Crutzen overshadowed Stoermer's role. She writes, "The term seems to have been coined in the early 1980s by University of Michigan ecologist Eugene Stoermer (d. 2012), an expert in freshwater diatoms … . The name Anthropocene made a dramatic star appearance in globalizing discourses in 2000 when the Dutch atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen joined Stoermer … " (44).

27 See Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin. "Defining the Anthropocene." *Nature* 519 (2015): 171–180.

because, he adds, "No attempt is made to show numerically that the dip changed the functioning of the Earth system or was caused by human activity, other than the mention of some historical events that occurred at roughly the same time" ("Getting the Anthropocene So Wrong," 104). Yet Lewis and Maslin's conclusion is significant for its attention to the ways in which the European presence in the Americas led to the death of somewhere on the order of sixty million people by war, famine, and exposure to disease. In the language of a scientific article, Lewis and Maslin locate the Anthropocene after the "impacts of the meeting of Old and New World populations" (175), but their data shows that it was nothing less than the most brutal conquest.

The humanist point of view on this scientific quarrel, as a new term seeps into academic and public discourse, is both revealing and necessary. As Steve Mentz has argued, scientific excavation of the past as a means of shoring up a new claim about an unstable future has great implications not only for what this past has meant to different populations but also how it continues to be manipulated today.[28] Even if Lewis and Maslin are misguided in their use of stratigraphic markers, the idea that "death, not heat, is humanity's primary historical driver" is, Mentz suggests, a "story that still needs telling." In other words, it matters how different disciplines frame the debate, one to which Haitian literature has much to contribute. In fact, Haitian history in between the Old and New Worlds has long been elided, as Trouillot, for one, demonstrated time and again. To declare the radical future trajectory of the Earth system, scientific experts still need to create a narrative that digs up sediment with a fossilized past. Literary eco-archives also record traces of the past, and much is at stake for Haitian stories in a new epoch named for a global force that threatens to erase the history of worlds migrating and colliding. Because of climate change, we may no longer be living in the Holocene. Or perhaps the question will remain unanswered, leaving human lives in transition, between two ages, the Holocene and the Anthropocene. Donna Haraway calls attention to the fact that the debates over the idea of the "Anthropocene obtained purchase in popular and scientific discourse in the context of ubiquitous urgent efforts to find ways of talking about, theorizing, modeling, and managing a Big Thing called Globalization" (*Experimental Futures*, 45).

28 See Steve Mentz, "Enter the Anthropocene, c. 1610." *Arcade: Literature, the Humanities & the World*, December 1, 2015. http://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/enter-anthropocene-c1610 (accessed October 15, 2016).

Chapter Five demonstrates how Dalembert, Victor, and Pierre-Dahomey unsettle the notion of a stable coevality, or living "in the same age."

Informed by models of postcolonial ecocriticism and by ongoing debates about the Anthropocene, the methodological focus of the chapter is to examine the ways that these texts mediate political and social histories within a longer natural history. For Victor and Dalembert, earthquakes do not reveal new insights into the planet's geological age. Yet their writings have long attended to the fragility of human, plant, and marine life in Haiti. In their latest works, earthquakes catalyze a renewed interrogation of the political oppression of Haitian lives and, in Dalembert's case, the diaspora in Italy, against the backdrop of ecological migration. In his début novel, Pierre-Dahomey invents the life of Belliqueuse Louissaint, a survivor of a shipwreck who is repatriated to an internally displaced persons camp and the precarious ground of a humanitarian future. All three novels call into question appeals to a unifying, common humanity, so often invoked in the aftermath of catastrophe, with stories that foreground an ethics of vulnerability amidst widespread inequality.

As both Mark Anderson and Marie-Hélène Huet have demonstrated, in different cultural and historical contexts, the idea of a "natural disaster" has undergone numerous semantic shifts, going back as far as the ancient Greeks. If there is a constant to be found in a history of such relative meanings, it is that both Western and non-Western cultures have generally conceived of "nature," Anderson finds, "in opposition … to the human, the rational, or some other criterion" (*Disaster Writing*, 4). This definition is central to the process of normalization, or the establishment of religious, political, and social boundaries. A "disaster" transgresses these limits; by negating them, it disorders the norms that structure a given society. By way of an etymological survey, Huet shows that "disaster" is but one of a number of terms, including "calamity," "catastrophe," and "peril," that signify a disruption of the relation between humans and their environment. "Disaster," Huet writes, "has its own distinctive origins, associating misfortune with the loss of a protective star, with being abandoned by the stars and left to one's miserable fate among countless perils and calamities" (*Culture of Disaster*, 3).

Another way to frame the literature of the writers gathered together in Parts Two and Three would be to consider how the earthquake displaced the protective star by which they had oriented their position as Haitian writers. Can literary testimony and fiction be read as "disaster narratives" that relocate and reorganize the social coordinates of literature in

contemporary Haitian society and its diaspora? This question redirects the central concern of Anderson, who sets out to understand the ways that Latin American literature has historically mediated natural disasters to political ends. To develop this claim, Anderson retraces the historical transition, generally during the European Enlightenment, and specifically following the 1755 earthquake in Lisbon, after which the fundamental issues of "danger and security" that disasters brought to the surface were interpreted less as a sign of divine intervention than as a question of probability and "calculable terms of risk" (*Disaster Writing*, 15). The rise of the concept of risk meant a decline in the church's interpretative power, and thus a gradual shift to political and commercial spheres. Risk assessment is fundamentally hierarchical because it assumes an acceptable level of precarity for certain segments of the population. As Anderson argues, "'natural' disasters are most often man-made in the sense that their catastrophic effects on human populations depend on social and economic problems of vulnerability and the unequal distribution of risk" (28).

In lieu of considering the political ramifications of the cultural mediation of disaster – that is, how the Haitian state would have reappropriated the literary imagination for its own ends – the chapter examines the ways that Victor, Dalembert, and Pierre-Dahomey contemplate the depths of human vulnerability that are exposed when catastrophe strikes. This book is thus more in line with Huet, in that it inquires how literary culture "thinks *through* disaster" (*Culture of Disaster*, 2; emphasis in original), how "implicitly or explicitly, disasters mediate philosophical inquiry and shape creative imagination" (2). Through poetic representations of time and space, each writer ponders the ephemeral beauty of the present, always in flux between past and future, and each brings his readers to imagine the frailty of human lives in increasingly inhospitable climates.

Part One

The Eco-Archive

Écrire comme si tout s'animait autour de soi d'un vaste chant, d'un feu multiple, comme si chaque objet se déplaçait, prêt à vous rendre le témoignage de sa présence.

René Philoctète, "Projet"[1]

1 This stanza comes from the "Avant-dire" that was added to "Caraïbe" in the 1995 edition, published by Éditions Mémoire. Entitled "Projet," it appeared in the 1970s in the Haitian weekly, *Petit Samedi Soir*, although the editors do not give a date of publication. Finally, "Projet" can also be found in the collection *Herbes folles* (Port-au-Prince: Nouvelle Collection, 1982).

CHAPTER ONE

For an Eco-Archive

> Ici, au moins, on n'en a qu'avec les cyclones, une petite secousse de temps en temps, la faim qui avance à grandes enjambées et finira par nous bouffer tous. Peut-être même avant l'océan.
>
> Louis-Philippe Dalembert, *L'Autre face de la mer*, 31

As a point of departure, allow me to illustrate the idea of an "eco-archive" with a brief analysis of the above passage from Louis-Philippe Dalembert's *L'Autre face de la mer*, one of his earliest works and a stunning novel of twentieth-century Haiti. Dalembert depicts the tight relation between subjective experience and surrounding land and sea as sites of communal struggle against larger political forces. Grannie, the narrator of the first section, tells the story of her family's journey, during the first U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), from Port-au-Prince across the border to the Dominican Republic, where her father took up work on a sugarcane plantation. Nearing the end of her life, Grannie marks the historical distance from this period by naming hurricanes, alleged by some, she remarks dismissively, to be "aussi fantasques et imprévisibles que nous" (31). Grannie understands so-called "natural disasters" as much for their periodic disruption of the delicate balance between human populations and non-human nature as for their capacity to delineate social boundaries between order and disorder. Grannie's narration might be read to go against the grain of what Mark Anderson refers to as a "modern grammar of disaster," or the political mediation of catastrophic events whose syntax of control includes "key concepts such as risk, vulnerability, trauma, and normalization" (*Disaster Writing*, 20). Over time, Anderson continues, disasters do not so much disrupt the normal order of things as expose historical processes that have long left certain populations vulnerable.

Grannie suggests as much when she laments that the Haitian people are said to be as "unpredictable" as hurricanes. In the Caribbean zone, the ferocious convergence of water and wind whips up a two-sided "natural" character in the people who suffer such force: they are helpless *and* resilient. Grannie is wise to these stereotypes, as she speaks truth to power with her own rhetorical move by personifying hunger and granting it an alarming agency. In her mind, this dire social condition will be more devastating than an angry ocean.

Dalembert's novel invites such an ecocritical reading informed by Haitian history. Grannie's narrative is emblematic of an eco-archive in that it draws from and reinscribes the shared space in which humans and the non-human world intersect and interact. The novel evokes a dual ethos of solidarity and struggle as it links together defining moments of rupture and displacement in Haitian history, from the Middle Passage up to the imperial presence of the United States, and from the early years of the Duvalier era to periodic journeys of boat-people. The ecological strata of sea and land depicted in *L'Autre face de la mer* can be read as a record of these migrations within Haiti and across the greater Caribbean and Americas. In this way, Dalembert embarks on a "poetics of migration" that has much in common with the ecological politics of Édouard Glissant's *Poétique de la relation*.[1] In fact, allusions to "la grande barque" (22) – regular poetic interludes in *L'Autre face de la mer* that modulate and give depth to Grannie's journeys – echo the opening meditation of Glissant's text.[2] In the evocation of the "barque ouverte," Glissant conjures the symbolic matrix of the slave ship and its crossing from all that is known to the terror and abyss of the vast unknown. The abyss is a fundamental historical experience, in that it initiates a process of worlding, or a constant flow of diversity and difference that Glissant famously called "Relation." An open-ended system of reaching out and defining oneself in relation to others,

1 See Jana Evans Braziel, "Caribbean Genesis: Language, Gardens, Worlds (Jamaica Kincaid, Derek Walcott, Édouard Glissant)," in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, ed. DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 110–126. Inspired by Glissant, Braziel writes, "I suggest a 'poetics of (eco)-relation'" (112).

2 For a comparison of Dalembert and Glissant, and particularly their poetic reflections on "insularité," see Victoria Famin, "*L'Autre face de la mer* de Louis-Philippe Dalembert ou les récits de la dualité caribéenne," in *Écrits d'Haïti: Perspectives sur la littérature haïtienne contemporaine (1986–2006)*, ed. Nadève Ménard (Paris: Karthala, 2011), 177–188.

Relation theorizes the ushering in of a transatlantic modernity that continues to shape patterns of migrations today. "Nos barques sont ouvertes," Glissant writes, "pour tous nous les naviguons" (21).[3]

In the francophone Caribbean, the precursor of Glissant is Aimé Césaire.[4] Césaire's seminal *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* contemplates the journey back to Martinique by bearing witness to the colonial devastation of the island's ecology. The poet scans the horizon of "anses frêles"; "ville plate … étalée … inerte … incapable de croître selon le suc de cette terre, embarrassée, rognée, réduite, en rupture de faune and flore"; and "mornes faméliques" (*Cahier*, 8–11). The *Cahier* reconfigures a representation of place by way of an archipelagic subjectivity, or a Glissantian "drive," both affective and ecological, that, as Jaime Hanneken has written, informs and modulates the poem's rhetorical energy.[5] One of the great feats of the *Cahier* was to deconstruct the myths of colonial rule in the Caribbean, clearing space for future poets. The legacy of the slave trade and slavery has led to foundational poetic expressions of ecological thought in the Caribbean of the twentieth century, notably Kamau Brathwaite's "the unity is submarine"

3 For the influence of Glissant's metaphor of the "open boat" on Caribbean works of autobiography, see Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 77.

4 An anglophone contemporary of Glissant is the Barbadian writer George Lamming. As Michelle Stephens points out in her reading of Lamming's collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1960] 1992):

> Glissant shares the same geographical imagination as George Lamming, who, much earlier, in 1960, before the turn to globalization and diaspora, conveyed an archipelagic understanding of the relationship between the Caribbean and the United States. Lamming remarked, "America is very much, with us now; from Puerto Rico right down to Trinidad. But America is one island only; and we are used to living with many islands." Here, Lamming, like Glissant, asks us to think about the continents of the Americas as islands, as parts of island systems.

See Michelle Stephens, "What is an Island? Caribbean Studies and the Contemporary Visual Artist." *Small Axe* 41 (July 2013): 10–11. Stephens cites Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (New York: Allison and Busby, 1984), 154.

5 See Hanneken, *Imagining the Postcolonial: Discipline, Poetics, Practice in Latin American and Francophone Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), especially Chapter Three, "Édouard Glissant's Archipelic Thought and Second Nature."

and Derek Walcott's "the sea is history" – both of which serve as epigraphs to Glissant's *Poétique de la relation*.[6] The historical depths of Glissant's poetics of Relation underscore the precarious, unfinished passage between migration and refuge. Studies of migration in the Caribbean, and Haiti in particular, have long insisted on historicizing contemporary patterns of displacement. In his rich yet underappreciated work *Négriers d'eux-mêmes*, Jean-Claude Icart begins by recognizing that labor migration is always tied to the global flow of capital, and that these twin engines of capitalism have worked to create uneven political and corporate networks.[7] As the title makes clear, the phenomenon of Haitian boat-people – the subject of Icart's largely sociological study – harks back to an older form of capitalist traffic. Yet, as Icart insists, the *négrier*, the vessel of this ignoble trade, continues to haunt the twentieth century. One of the enduring merits of Icart's essay, published thirty years ago, lies in its diachronic approach to the movement of people, goods, and ideas. The refugee's journey is at once worlds apart from colonial missions of "discovery" and religious conversion, yet also historically tied to the accumulation of capital that began in the long era of the Atlantic slave trade.

Joël Des Rosiers also takes a long view of Caribbean migrations. Like Icart, he signals his intention to historicize a range of Caribbean biographies and intellectual trajectories in the title of his book, *Théories caraïbes: poétique du déracinement*. As he makes clear in its epigraph, Des Rosiers draws on an old meaning of "theory" as a "députation des villes de Grèce aux fêtes solennelles d'Olympie, de Delphes et de Corinthe, cortège, défilé, groupe d'hommes en mouvement."[8] He continues: "La

6 Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man in Space and Time." *Savacou* 11–12 (September 1975): 1–11; Derek Walcott, "The Sea is History," in *Collected Poems 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992).

7 Jean-Claude Icart, *Négriers d'eux-mêmes: essai sur les boat people haïtiens en Floride* (Montreal: CIDHICA, 1987).

8 Citing Anatole Bailly's *Dictionnaire grec-français*, Des Rosiers uses "théorie: du grec *theôria*" in a way similar to Christopher L. Miller in *Theories of Africans* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990). In his approach to francophone African literatures, Miller argues for a cautious use of literary theory, one that contrasts Western abstraction with the material understanding of the ancient Greek meaning. It is in this spirit that he cites Yambo Ouologuem's description of those "lamentables théories d'hommes, de femmes, et d'enfants," in *Devoir de violence*, as a reminder, Miller writers, that "any link can be a link in a chain of enslavement. Europeans have been making 'theories' of Africans for centuries"

multiplicité des cultures entraîne celle des récits. Ces figures du récit ne sont ni gratuites ni insignifiantes; l'imaginaire de la migration peut nous offrir une intelligence du Monde. Il peut surtout nous permettre la traversée des enracinements sans nullement y adhérer" (*Théories caraïbes*, xiii). For Des Rosiers, literature creates knowledge that speaks to the unsettling yet meaningful crossing between uprooting and attempts at rerooting. In a poetic passage that echoes Glissant – indeed, he invokes Glissant later in the book – Des Rosiers writes, "j'appelle théories caraïbes les groupes d'hommes en larmes, nègres marrons affolés d'amour qui, d'une rive à l'autre, jettent leur langue nationale dans l'eau salée, dans la bouche ouverte, sans fond, de l'abysse" (xvi). Throwing their "national tongue" into the abyss, these historical maroons are an ancestral link, Des Rosiers contends, to today's Caribbean immigrants, whom he calls "marrons modernes" (122).

Des Rosiers argues that literature sheds light on these migrants as agents of postnationalism. He attends not only to immigrant writers, especially those "Gouverneurs de l'hiver," or Haitian writers who fled a tropical dictator for the colder yet democratic climes of Quebec, but also to the subjects of their migrant writings, people displaced by imperial forces and the globalizing economies they created. Yet Des Rosiers couches his reflection on the seasonal ironies to be found in the texts of multiple generations of Caribbean migrants mainly in terms of the multicultural encounters that give rise to postnational identity formations. In this respect, he attends to the vexing geopolitical problems that continue to arise in the periodic migratory waves that flow over national boundaries and the cultural and linguistic territories within.

But what about the environmental spaces that subtend Des Rosiers's displaced "theories" of Caribbean literary history? By way of an answer, let me return to Dalembert's *L'Autre face de la mer*. Grannie's recollection of her family's journey along the *traite verte* to the Dominican Republic is conveyed not in terms of the difference of cultural encounters but in the relationship between humans and the land. Known as the "sugar migration," this trade began at the turn of the twentieth century, with the presence of Haitian workers in cane fields in Cuba and then in the Dominican Republic.[9] Apart from *traite verte*, the language of this

(*Theories of Africans*, 24). Theorizing cultural production cannot pretend to rise above traditional, local contexts.

9 See Icart, *Négriers d'eux-mêmes*, Chapter Two.

trade is Spanish, as Georges Anglade has pointed out.[10] Grannie's father would have been a *bracero*, a Haitian cane worker. Anglade and Icart describe the seasonal nature of migrant labor on sugar plantations, which increased significantly as a result of policies implemented by the United States prior to and following its occupation of Cuba (1906–1909) and, shortly after, Haiti. As Valerie Kaussen writes, "the sugarcane plantation is a crucible of the world system that provides the conditions for a collective movement that would be pan-Caribbean and even global in its implications" (*Migrant Revolutions*, 102). Grannie and her family never reached the global horizons of "the other side of the sea," but they were implicated in the regulated borders of the sugar migration. Her story, which moves back and forth between her voice as a young girl and the memories of an elderly woman, captures both the river and mountains of the frontier and the armed soldiers who patrolled it. As the narrative begins to intertwine the natural and the political, its description of migrant labor reveals the active power of the non-human environment:

> Papa trouva très vite une embauche dans une plantation. Il n'y a pas de sot métier, grommela-t-il comme pour se justifier. De l'aube à la nuit tombée à couper la canne, au milieu de grosses fourmis rouges qui dévoraient les jambes, de feuilles dont le rebord, plus tranchant qu'une lame de rasoir, lacérait les bras et le visage. (*L'Autre face de la mer*, 35–36)

In this passage, Nature is alive with devouring ants and lacerating plants. Crucially, the text foreshadows the political violence that will be brought to migrant workers and their families, transforming them, in Grannie's expression, into "le gibier à abattre" (42). By way of metaphor, the novel materializes the brute oppression of migrants. By reimagining humans as animalized prey, the text reveals how language naturalizes the violence of political power.

As this brief analysis of Dalembert's novel demonstrates, writers draw inspiration from the symbolic and material links between language and environment to compose texts that represent ecologies of Haitian experience. The chapter develops this central claim in three parts. First, it reviews cultural and political antecedents of environmental thought in Haiti and the greater Caribbean as an essential background for successive generations of writers. Next, it articulates a

10 Georges Anglade, *Rire haïtien* (Coconut Creek, FL: Educa Vision, 2006).

theory of literature as an "eco-archive" that governs and structures the textual analyses throughout this study. As conceived here, literature records the transformation of the environment through the imaginary, while at the same time accumulating and inscribing, like an archive, overlapping temporalities of past, present, and future. In this way, building on David Scott's theory of generational memory, I suggest that to contemplate and imagine the environment is also to think about temporality. Dalembert's depiction of Grannie's lived experience of hurricanes and hunger over time exemplifies generational memories of environmental injustice. Finally, the last section performs a close reading of Philoctète's *Le peuple des terres mêlées*, a novel that, like *L'autre face de la mer*, depicts the clash between nationalism and migrant communities tied to the sugar industry.

Eco-

"Environment" and "ecology" are far from universally understood terms, and it is imperative to consider their cultural inflections and historical contexts. Before returning to key expressions of ecological thought in Haitian and Caribbean literature, a review of North American and European uses can provide comparative depth and texture. In academic circles, the two terms are understood in a general sense but have also been conflated in misleading ways. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell provides a useful primer to the field of environmental criticism, to which he appends a glossary of etymological permutations. "Environment" (from the French, *environner*, to surround) refers to physical surroundings, "natural" and "built," whereas, Buell explains, "ecology is the study of the interactions between organisms and the environment" (*The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 139). While the former is anthropocentric (humans interacting with and dominating plants, minerals, and animals), the latter has primarily been understood as the science of the interconnected relations between non-human entities. As adjectives, however, each has undergone a semantic shift following cultural inroads into scientific debate. On the one hand, there has been a move away from ecology as the privileged laboratory of life scientists to the cultural domain. On the other, the idea of the environment as human-centered has yielded somewhat to eco-oriented perspectives, especially in the fields of animal studies and posthumanism. While these changes

have opened the door to new ways of thinking, they have also led to slippage between "environmental," "ecological," and "Earth system," all of which have been susceptible to an erroneous synonymity.

Greg Garrard has made a clarification between scientific and cultural domains of ecology that remains instructive. Leaning on John Passmore's earlier distinction between problems in ecology and ecological problems, Garrard concludes, "To describe something as an ecological problem is to make a normative claim about how we would wish things to be, and while this arises out of the claims of ecological scientists, it is not defined by them" (*Ecocriticism*, 6).[11] Garrard structures his book on a series of large-scale metaphors (pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, and so on) that draw from problems of ecology in order to reflect on their cultural implications. His reading of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is exemplary: "The great achievement of the book was to turn a (scientific) problem in ecology [the toxicity of DDT] into a widely perceived ecological problem that was then contested politically, legally and in the media and popular culture" (6). Garrard thus clears space for his central claim: "environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection" (*Ecocriticism*, 16). Such finesse notwithstanding, the appropriation of scientific discourse in literary and cultural studies remains the subject of heated debate.

Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology* is a notable instance of a quarrelsome intervention. Phillips provides an intellectual history of ecology by reviewing scientists' difficulty in getting beyond its popular origins as a natural utopia characterized by balance and harmony, as well as defining its object of study in relation to evolutionary theories predicated on instability. According to Phillips, the greater problem lies in the capaciousness that literary scholars have ascribed to it in the absence of a more secure scientific position. Phillips takes issue with Buell's seminal book *The Environmental Imagination* because, he finds, it "seems designed to help determine the future shape of ecocriticism's research program [but] does nothing to resolve the theoretical imbroglio of ecocriticism, which is clearly one of the author's goals" (*The Truth of Ecology*, 159). The charge that Phillips levels at Buell – beginning in the introduction and unfolding in the better part of the fourth chapter – is that the attachment to realism reduces literary analysis to

11 Garrard cites John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 44.

an ecomimesis, one that betrays a disdain for theory's insistence on the problems inherent to representation.[12]

Phillips's contentious tone created quite a stir. In his review of another important work of ecocriticism, Scott Hicks bemoaned the "bombastic complication of the term [ecology]" ("Review of Kimberly N. Ruffin, *Black on Earth*" 486).[13] Phillips is aware of his provocation but argues that it is made in the spirit of a necessary concern for "rigor and precision" (*The Truth of Ecology*, 76). The thrust of the argument is that literary critics get in over their heads by eliding the critical differences between scientific and humanistic inquiry, and they do so by simplifying textual representations of the world. For Phillips, it is precisely the failure to observe the difference between analogy and metaphor that "leads to a gross misunderstanding of ecology … and a correspondingly gross overestimation of the nearness of ecological thinking to poetic and other modes of essentially comparative thought" (76). Analogy can be illuminating, he continues, but tends to end up in "metaphor, or an obfuscating equation in which the differences between terms have disappeared completely" (76). Ultimately, Phillips argues, knowledge of the world is bound up in the imperfections of language and in the messiness of representation. Frankly, this conclusion offers a hazy idea of "truth" residing somewhere between the poles of natural realism and social construction. It is more convincing, I suggest, to give "the testimony of scientists the benefit to be had from doubt" (*The Truth of Ecology*, 82). For Phillips, however, this means prioritizing a pragmatic approach to ecology over epistemological truth.

These exchanges are evidence of the controversial and unstable place of the prefix "eco" as it shifts between cultural and scientific discourse. Often pushed to the margins of this academic dispute is the underlying desire to rethink the basic terms by which different peoples experience their relationship with non-human life and the earth itself. In ways pragmatic *and* epistemological, Haitian and other Caribbean writers inflect these debates with their own poetic and testimonial doubts concerning the lack of attention to the links between ecological problems and colonial and imperial histories. In this perspective, Haitian literary imaginaries are a textual link to the

12 Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism* can be read, in part, as a response to what Buell sees as Phillips's uncomplicated understanding of mimesis.

13 See also John P. O'Grady's review of Phillips in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 10.2 (2003): 278–279.

socio-economic framework of the "environmentalism of the poor." This catchy expression, coined through the collaborative efforts of Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier, follows the efforts of various peoples to defend their way of life in both rural and urban spaces.[14] In *Varieties of Environmentalism*, Guha and Martinez-Alier cover a wide range of topics over more than twenty years, from the Chipko Movement in the Indian Himalayas in the early 1970s to urban planning in Barcelona and to the environmental consequences of the North American Free Trade Agreement, signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico in 1994. These studies investigate problem spots around the world, but the book nevertheless makes a distinction between "rich" and "poor" that has been read as a clear geographical separation between North and South. As a result, Martinez-Alier's attention to class, and especially to people who rarely identify as environmentalists, loses its specificity in the contrast drawn by Guha, in subsequent essays, between the "ecology of affluence" and the "southern challenge."[15] This is perhaps the unavoidable result of a joint production between a Spanish economist and an Indian historian more attuned to the post-imperial legacies of his native land. Nevertheless, most critics locate the "environmentalism of the poor" on the map of the "Global South." To a great extent, this makes sense on the basis of colonial history, but it risks a simplified representation of global populations and the continued uneven distribution of resources. In other words, it perversely sustains a hierarchy between North and South as homogeneous regions of the globe. As Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee writes, "Guha and other like-minded theorists seem to forget the essential feature of global capitalism – its tendency to develop pockets of extreme wealth and vast swathes of poverty simultaneously on local, national and global levels" (*Postcolonial Environments*, 32). Haitian stories fit into the geopolitical paradigm of the "Global South," but their portrayals of flows of migrants and refugees into increasingly heterogeneous populations also collapse neat divisions between North and South.

The Haitian texts in this study complicate the geographies of the "environmentalism of the poor." Read as an eco-archive, they also

14 Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier. *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (London: Earthscan, 1997).

15 See Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

allow for an update of the older idea of *littérature engagée*, or the aesthetic form as a concrete political resistance. By considering the implicit environmental critique of the writer, it is possible to treat the literary imaginary as a kind of environmentalism, a textual partner to the environmental justice and social advocacy that motivates other projects, on scales large and small. Without downplaying the real differences between literary and political voices and acts, it is possible, I think, to consider a more expansive idea of environmentalism that allows for a comparison of the writing of Edwidge Danticat and the scientific research of the marine biologist Jean Wiener, a 2015 recipient of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize.[16] After studying in the United States, Wiener returned to Haiti in 1989 to discover the extent of the damage done to marine ecosystems along the coast that he had visited in his youth. As he related during the prize ceremony, local fishermen would tell him, "We used to be able to fish for a half day and feed our family for two weeks. Now we fish for two weeks and feed our family for a half day." In 1992, he established the *Fondation pour la protection de la biodiversité marine* to help local communities restore marine habitats and to develop sustainable practices with a view to economic welfare. As the Goldman press release points out, Wiener knew "that Haiti was the only Caribbean country without any official Marine Protected Areas" ("2015 Goldman Prize Press Release"). Eventually, in July 2013, the government recognized his years of hard work and designated the first area, on the southwestern coast, followed six months later by a second on the northeast coast.

Wiener's scientific activism begins with the awareness of loss, a reality that Danticat captures in the tale of Nozias, the fisherman of *Claire of the Sea Light*, the novel that I take up in Chapter Four. Nozias's decision to send away his daughter, the eponymous Claire, is grounded in environmental and economic deprivation. The narrator reports Claire's attention to her father's concerns:

> Lapèch, fishing, was no longer profitable as it had once been, she would hear him tell anyone who would listen. It was no longer like in the old

16 See "Jean Wiener: 2015 Goldman Prize Recipient, Islands and Island Nations," http://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/jean-wiener/ (accessed July 18, 2016), hereafter "2015 Goldman Prize Press Release"; see also "L'Haïtien Jean Wiener parmi les six héros du monde de l'environnement." *Le Nouvelliste*, 23 April 2015. http://lenouvelliste.com/lenouvelliste/article/143930/LHaitien-Jean-Wiener-parmi-les-six-heros-du-monde-de-lenvironnement (accessed July 18, 2016).

> days, when he and his friends would put a net in the water for an hour or so, then pull it out full of big, mature fish. Now they had to leave nets in for half a day or longer, and they would pull fish out of the sea that were so small that in the old days they would have thrown them back. But now you had to do with what you got. (*Claire of the Sea Light*, 9)

It is striking just how much the novelist and the marine biologist are on the same page, so to speak. Wiener and Danticat move between past and present, and each calls attention to the fragile symbiosis of human, marine, and plant life. In different yet related ways, scientists and writers take hold of an island ecology that also inscribes its deprivation on their work. In this sense, it is possible to read Danticat's novel as a poetics of environmentalism, or a work of the imagination whose making of meaning transforms its surroundings and the lives of those it sustains. Wiener and Danticat both address the erosion of Haitian shores and depletion of resources. These deteriorating conditions are a modern environmental crisis, yet their causes have a much longer history. To offer but one example, deforestation, the subject of recurring debates, has been traced back to French colonial practices.[17] Scholars have debunked myths that have held sway in various narratives that appeal to the Western (U.S. and European) popular imaginary by reducing more complex environmental stories to simple themes and misleading iconic images.

For another source of this history, one could also look in older layers of the eco-archive by turning to earlier generations of Haitian writers, who have left an invaluable literary legacy of materialist representations of overlapping ecological and political problems. As Max Dominique has demonstrated, the diversity of literary movements in twentieth-century Haiti, particularly the early to middle years, cannot be overstated. In his attempt to chart a periodization of writers and journals, Dominique finds that various movements have as many themes and political ideals in common as not. He writes, "L'opposition entre les poètes de la *Revue indigène* et leurs prédecesseurs immédiats, ceux de *La Ronde*, paraît à bien des égards surfaite" (*Esquisses critiques*, 22). Taking a cue from the way that Dominique rethinks received ideas on Haitian

17 See Sherrie Baver, "Hispaniola's Environmental Story: Challenging an Iconic Image." *Callaloo* 37.3 (2014): 648–661; see also Laurent Dubois, "Who Will Speak for Haiti's Trees." *The New York Times*, October 17, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/18/opinion/who-will-speak-for-haitis-trees.html (accessed November 5, 2016).

literature, I would like to take an ecocritical look at *indigénisme*, the literary movement that arose in the late 1920s, and Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944), the most well-known novel associated with the movement's blend of modernist poetics, nationalism, and internationalist Marxist politics. It is equally important to consider how this novel and the movement that Roumain helped define expose underlying cultural and political assumptions of ecocritical thought in the North American contexts cited above. Roumain's masterpiece continues to occupy the dual mantle of the Haitian "peasant novel" and the great *roman de la terre*. It is often read as a kind of *éloge du pays natal*. Its peasant hero, Manuel, is a prodigal son who comes back to his village, finds the lost source of vital water, and creates a possible future for two communities embroiled in an internecine struggle. Yet, as Valerie Kaussen has argued, Roumain's novel and greater contribution to indigenism owed less to the rehabilitation of a national culture from under the boot of U.S. imperialism than to the "massive migration of Haiti's peasantry both into the city and over the borders separating Haiti from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and other locations in the burgeoning U.S./Caribbean empire" (*Migrant Revolutions*, 27). Kaussen's thesis on migration as definitive of the lives and literature of the *indigénistes* – whose cosmopolitan upbringings and genuine interest in the Haitian folk were not necessarily mutually exclusive – informs the multiple layers (rural and urban, land and sea) of the eco-archive.[18]

The U.S. occupation lasted almost twenty years and was undoubtedly a watershed for the political and environmental history of Haiti. However, readings that have framed indigenism as a literary homage to the Haitian hinterland, a cultural protest of U.S. hegemony, have led arguably to two corresponding misperceptions: first, that *La revue indigène*, the monthly journal of literature and art founded in 1927, would reflect a nationalist movement based on the idea of rural authenticity; and, second, that the writings published in the journal would constitute the vanguard of a modernizing literature to come. The former can be summarized, Kaussen argues, as the "classic" reading of indigenism, or the critical tendency "to analyze *indigénisme* rather exclusively in terms of the racial and nationalist literary *prise-de-conscience* that

18 See also Kathy Richman, "Militant Cosmopolitanism in a Creole City: The Paradoxes of Jacques Roumain." *Biography* 35.2 (Spring 2012): 303–317; and Andrew Leak, "The Nonmagical Realism of Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 23.1 (2017): 135–159.

focused on 'authentic' (and thus anti-cosmopolitan) themes associated with the newly identified national *indigène*, the Haitian peasantry with its African cultural retentions" (36). As for the latter, it has been amply documented that Roumain and his colleagues must be situated as part of an international modernism, connected to writers and artists in the greater Caribbean, Africa, and the Americas.[19] However, even if one were to attribute a nationalist ideology to the *indigénistes*, one would first have to acknowledge that any such resistance had to come to terms with a Haitian countryside that had been decimated after more than a decade of occupation. In fact, by the time of the first issue of *La revue indigène*, U.S. marines had already put down the *caco* rebellion in the north; had already killed scores of peasants and forced thousands more into labor camps; had taken control of the border with the Dominican Republic; had rewritten the Haitian Constitution to allow for foreign ownership of land, thereby expelling thousands of Haitians; and had redistricted, remapped, and rerouted much of the map of Haiti.[20] In short, the *indigénistes* inherited environments, urban and rural, that had undergone drastic change after years of development and agricultural projects under U.S. control.[21]

In this context, it is indisputable that the inaugural volume of *La revue indigène* defines "indigenous" in environmental terms. In his

19 See Celucien L. Joseph, *Thinking in Public: Faith, Secular Humanism, and Development in Jacques Roumain* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), especially Chapter One, "Global Thinking and Thinking Globally," 25–85; see Richman; in a broader francophone context, see Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). In her analysis of early Haitian constitutions, Sibylle Fischer argues that the particular claims of race and national identity in certain clauses and articles must be read in the context of the transnational politics of Haiti's founding. She writes, "This, I would argue, is the genealogical story of twentieth-century indigenist nationalism in Haiti, which gave a political and cultural articulation to the opposition against the American occupation in 1915 and in a unique move makes a certain kind of pan-Africanism the backbone of national resistance against American marines" (*Modernity Disavowed*, 241).

20 See Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Brenda Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992).

21 See Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, especially Chapter VIII, "Under the Gun," 101–120; see also Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions*, 110–111.

programmatic preface, Normil Sylvain conceives "un retour à la sincérité et au naturel, au modèle vivant, à la description directe, un parfum plus accentué d'haïtienneté voilà qui semble caractériser notre jeune poésie."[22] To be "natural" here is to defy U.S. racism by shedding the "insulte du mot indigène," (9) and thereby recuperating Haitian identity through poetry. Sylvain also professed a desire to reconnect with the people of greater Latin America, and thus his initial proclamation of a "natural" indigeneity is already situated within preceding and contemporaneous migrations. And yet, as evidenced in the journal's publication of a chapter of Jean-Price Mars's *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, the pioneering socio-ethnographic study of the Haitian folk, "indigenous" unmistakably referred to an idea of a core Haitian identity to be found in the communal life and work in the countryside.[23] Referring to the French philosopher Jules de Gaultier, Price-Mars denounced a Haitian "bovaryisme collectif," or the "faculté que s'attribue une société de se concevoir autre qu'elle n'est" (10).[24] He continued, "par une logique implacable, au fur et à mesure que nous nous efforcions de nous croire des Français 'colorés,' nous désapprenions à être Haïtiens tout court, c'est-à-dire des hommes nés en des conditions historiques déterminées … " (10). For Price-Mars, elites had internalized their alterity, a product of an exoticizing colonial gaze that dehumanized the Haitian people and their traditions. Despite their international connections, the *indigénistes* asserted that the "natural" response to an imperial condition was to reclaim popular roots. As Price-Mars argued, the imitation of French language, art, religion, and other cultural and environmental modes of being was a form of self-denial that reinforced the colonial view of the folk as primitive other. In the attempt to praise the originality and spontaneity of local cultural forms, indigenism was just as much a resistance to the U.S. occupation as it was an uprising against the alienation engendered by an even longer French cultural colonization. In many ways, it was a search for authenticity that humanized cultural difference through an environmental ethics.

In *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the ethos of solidarity with the land and among fellow inhabitants of Fonds Rouge is under duress. The "natural"

22 Normil G. Sylvain, "Chronique – Programme." *La revue indigène: Les arts et la vie* 1 (July 1927): 9–10.

23 Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle: essais d'ethnographie* (New York: Parapsychology Foundation, 1954 [1928]).

24 Price-Mars draws on Jules de Gaultier's *Le Bovarysme* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902).

vivacity of the countryside that Sylvain had praised is quickly dying. The land is parched; the villagers eat little more than soup thickened with corn that usually went to feed livestock; and an extended family has split into two feuding camps. Yet there is hope in the figure of a migrant, an apparent stranger who brings with him the knowledge, skills, and desire to revive the land and the communities that share it. It turns out that this stranger is Manuel, a native son who returns after fifteen years of cutting cane in Cuba to rally the people to the common cause of their labor. This complex character incarnates Roumain's vision of the possibilities of revolt by way of an international Marxism, a migrating politics that would serve as a guide to local knowledge. Over the years, critics have called attention to the novel's narrative structure and logic, to the religious symbolism behind Manuel's ultimate sacrifice for the future of Fonds Rouge, and more recently to the gendered hierarchies of its representations of the land.[25] It is equally important to understand how the environmental politics of the novel is informed by local, regional, and international flows of migration.

Roumain and his compatriots shared an inward focus on Haiti and an outward-looking, pan-Caribbean perspective.[26] It is perhaps easier to see this duality with the benefit of hindsight: that is, to read retrospectively the texts of a group of writers so focused on the future. If critics have argued for differing interpretations of indigenism and other literary movements, all agree that they have left a legacy of resistance to the brutal deformation of Haitian lands. Their struggle to redefine

25 For a representative sample of the diverse approaches to Roumain over several decades, see Michel Serres, "Le Christ Noir." *Critique* 29 (1973): 3–25; Roger Dorsinville, *Jacques Roumain* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981); Maximilien Laroche, *La littérature haïtienne: identité, langue, réalité* (Montreal: Leméac, 1981); Beverley Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1985); J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1998); Celia Britton, *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

26 Munro makes a similar observation in his analysis of the writings and politics of Jacques-Stephen Alexis. He identifies a conflict between the inward pull of resistance to Duvalier and the outward movement of exilic migration. See Martin Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrière, Danticat* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).

what the land means to Haitians who rebelled against occupation foretells Edward Said's assertion, in *Culture and Imperialism*, that colonization and decolonization are essentially struggles over land. Said argued, "Underlying social space are territories, lands, geographical domains, the actual geographical underpinnings of the imperial, and also the cultural contest … The actual geographical possession of the land," he continued, "is what empire in the final analysis is all about" (78). Colonial plunder and the slave-based economy of the sugar plantation, followed by additional forms of indentured labor, caused the *dépossession* on which Glissant based his political and theoretical project of *antillanité*. And, while Glissant rejected any tendency toward cultural authenticity in favor of a creolizing Relation, his "esthétique de la terre" lays out a theory of renewed attention to Caribbean lands and to the possibilities of local production and consumption. As such, it owes a great deal to previous counterdiscursive movements such as indigenism.

Spanning some fifty years, Glissant's writings loom large in the effort to theorize an eco-archive. Readers can follow the development of recurring themes and figures from the earliest texts, including the epic sweep of the fiction, to the more abstract essays of his later years. I have discussed above the fundamental, historical place of the abyss of the Middle Passage for his theory of Relation. Glissant also reflects on the monumentality of Caribbean landscapes as sites of memory in the absence of textual archives. He conceives of "Relation" as a way out of the generalizing sameness of a French universalism that constituted itself as superior to its tropical others. In *Postcolonial Ecologies*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley read in both *Le discours antillais* and *Poétique de la relation* an expression of "wariness" of the "universalizing impulses of the global" (*Postcolonial Ecologies*, 28). Glissant's suspicion of departmentalization leads to a damning critique of the neocolonial model of assimilation, through which the French government would serve as a tutor to overseas citizens. In the French neo/colonial family romance, histories of race, culture, sexuality, and gender are subsumed under the banner of republicanism. For Glissant, this is a hierarchical politics of identity based on the ancient model of the sacred root. Instead, he called for difference and variation, rhizomatic branches that, he claimed, could not be enchained in theories of the universal. The intolerance of the universal to multicultural and multilinguistic difference betrays its definitive violence. The "aesthetic of the earth," then, is an existential struggle led by what Glissant calls "une vision écologique

de la Relation" (*Poétique de la relation*, 160). It is a poetic and political program of resistance in three ways: "le rapport à l'entour naturel, la Caraïbe; la défense de la langue populaire, le créole; la protection de la terre, par mobilisation de tous" (160). These methods suggest a defensive posture, an insistence on self-sufficiency and an "ethnotechnique" (167) that turns away from the world. Yet such an interpretation ignores the equally insistent pull of Relation to the outside, its inherent capacity to migrate into larger cultural flows.

Glissant's Relation exemplifies a delicate balance of poetics, theory, and politics held together by an ecological thought. Taking an expansive view of his œuvre, Carine Mardorossian has argued that it "provides a useful bridge between environmentalist and postcolonial considerations today" in that it reconciles the conservation-oriented ethics of the former with the "incontrovertible question of the relationship between language and landscape" that has defined the historical and political focus of the latter ("Poetics of Landscape," 988). Mardorossian reads Glissant's "creolized ecologies" as a critique of manichean conceptions of nature and culture. Yet "écologie" and "environnement" are terms that Glissant uses with some apprehension in *Poétique de la relation*, because, he explains, they "paraissent si oiseuses dans ces paysages de la désolation" (166). In its semantic and political capaciousness, "ecology" risks an uncomfortable association not only with universalism but also with some mystical thought. In a moving piece on her mentor, Valérie Loichot points out, "In his late work, Glissant increasingly replaces the word *paysage* (landscape) with the French word *entour*, which establishes a continuum between the natural environment and its historical surrounding" ("Édouard Glissant's Graves," 1016). This discursive shift is illuminating, Loichot suggests, because "Glissant's *entour* is simultaneously natural, cultural, poetic, historical, and political" (1017). In this reflection, Loichot provides an apt summary of the eco-related terms I have worked through thus far. In the end, *entour* speaks to a politics of ecology that, Glissant insisted, "concerne les peuples décimés, ou menacés de disparition en tant que peuples" (*Poétique de la relation*, 160). He affirms a poetics grounded in histories of migration across the Atlantic and around the Caribbean.

-Archive

> There is a common function of landscape in Glissant's works and generally in post-slavery cultures where trees and plants act as witness to a past with no written archive.
>
> Valérie Loichot, "Édouard Glissant's Graves," 1016

> Quant au mot 'archive' il est synonyme d'ordre. Mais je parle ici *d'archives du littoral*, ce qui nous sort de tout ordre archicodé et nous introduit dans un espace mouvant, dans une logique discontinue, fluctuante, brisante, surgissante, éclatante.
>
> Kenneth White, *Les archives du littoral*, 9

As Walcott and Glissant have shown, Caribbean literature and theory give voice to histories drowned at sea and buried in the land. Yet these texts are more than an "archive" in any conventional sense. The abundant scholarly activity on the archive as both "object and concept," as Lia Brozgal has observed, means that "we are certainly in a position to diagnose an epidemic of archive fever" ("In the Absence of the Archive," 34). Building on the work of many scholars, and especially the two major figures of Foucault and Derrida, Brozgal proposes a two-pronged argument. First, as political power authorizes and curates the conservation of institutional knowledge, as well as the historical memories that take hold within the official domain, it simultaneously suppresses other stories. In this void, literary texts work outside such guarded purview, Brozgal continues, to "inform identity, culture, and knowledge" (35). Second, more than simply historical records of the past, fictional narratives reimagine a range of experiences considered to be peripheral or secondary to historical events but that undermine archival authority by representing what is obscured from public view.

Brozgal is interested in the ways that power is invested in hierarchical spaces and in unsanctioned forms of knowledge that contest official versions of events. Building on Derrida, she calls these unofficial sources an "*anarchive* … a set of works that evince an archival function and that, together, produce an epistemological system in oppositional relationship to an official archive" (50, emphasis added).[27] As Brozgal acknowledges,

27 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

the notion of the "archival function" of literature is an abstraction, one that is inspired, in part, by Derrida's analysis of the spatial, technological, and psychic dimensions of the archive. Brozgal briefly refers to Derrida's analysis of Freud's (anti)thesis of the death drive as a potential destruction of the archive's power to reveal and conceal knowledge. Instead, she suggests a productive tension between official archives that instantiate and conserve authority and literary works that oppose such rule by inhabiting and expressing other spaces and repressed memories. To be sure, literary texts may be housed in archives, public and private, yet Brozgal is concerned with cultural production on the outside as an "alternate form of epistemological activity at work during … archival silence" (35). Taking up two novels on the massacre of Algerians on October 17, 1961, she proposes to examine their "archival function" (45) in relation to redacted accounts of French authorities. Borrowing from historian Antoinette Burton, Brozgal elaborates: "The term denotes the way in which a novel (or any cultural text) may be understood as functioning like an archive, that is, by proposing 'traces of the past collected individually or haphazardly'" (45).[28] Yet she goes on to make a key distinction:

> whereas Burton refers to cultural objects as *being* archives, I prefer to conceive of their archivistic attributes as a *function*, a gesture that allows their specificity as cultural texts (literary, in this case) to signify, thus underscoring the importance of analyses that account for their aesthetic and formal, as well as historical attributes. (46, emphasis in original)

At the risk of simplifying, literary texts are more than static documents gathering dust in cardboard boxes. The focus here on function betrays the influence of Ann Laura Stoler, who framed her analytical approach as "archiving-as-process rather than archives-as things. Most importantly," she continues, "it looks to archives as condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources" (*Along the Archival Grain*, 20). For Brozgal, literature, too, runs on what Stoler calls the "pulse of an archive" (19). Through the beat of epistemic anxieties, it creates stories of subjective, aesthetic, and political perspectives with varying degrees of connection to October 17.

28 See Antoinette M. Burton, "Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories," in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

Brozgal's work in the contested field of French–Algerian colonial memory is not likely to reduce archive fever anytime soon. In fact, it has also spiked in Haitian literary studies with Rachel Douglas's innovative analyses of Frankétienne's play *Melovivi* and Yanick Lahens's *Failles*. Chapter Three takes up her reading of these texts as an archival-like process in the wake of the destruction of other physical repositories in the earthquake. For now, I will simply point out that, like Brozgal, Douglas turns to Derrida, and specifically to the idea of Haitian writing *en mal d'archive*, to argue for the "archivisation" at work in Haitian literature in the wake of January 2010:

> Archival and rewriting impulses highlight a preoccupation with Haitian archives in written works that seek to produce them textually as well. In the Haitian context, these archive stories and rewriting practices are at their most highly concentrated because the stakes and the scale of the destruction are more widespread and catastrophic. Caribbean writers, especially in Haiti, had always been archivists preoccupied with 'saving the word' long before the earthquake struck and the cultural search and rescue began. ("Writing the Haitian Earthquake and Creating Archives," 389)

Douglas seeks to ground Derrida's abstractions in the materiality of the scriptural and textual practices of Lahens and Frankétienne.

Whether fiction or non-fiction, literature exposes unequal structures of power (Brozgal) and the literary form functions as an archive itself (Douglas). Both arguments are a refreshing update to Foucault's *Archéologie du savoir*. Foucault conceived of the archive as a mesh of discursive practices made meaningful over time by emerging "systèmes qui instaurent les énoncés comme des événements … et des choses" (169), composing and governing larger formations of knowledge. "L'archive n'est pas non plus ce qui recueille la poussière des énoncés redevenus inertes et permet le miracle éventuel de leur résurrection," Foucault continued, "c'est ce qui définit le mode d'actualité de l'énoncé-chose; c'est *le système de son fonctionnement*" (171, emphasis in original). Foucault's well-known theory was in the service of a methodological explanation of historical analysis, one through which he argued for a discontinuity between the discursive possibilities of past and present. Yet the archive has a hold on the future, Foucault implies, because "à la fois proche de nous, mais différente de notre actualité, c'est la bordure du temps qui entoure notre présent … " (172). The interplay between rupture and continuity and the idea of difference as constitutive of

the current moment are enduring concepts of Foucauldian thought. Nicholas Birns encapsulates just how much Foucault remains indispensable to contemporary theory. He writes, "This interest in cultural transition, in the eddies between one *episteme* and another, is an aspect of Foucault that is as liminal as it is political, as interested in borders as it is in defining centralities" (*Theory after Theory*, 73). Picking up on Birns's ecological metaphor, I would add that situating Foucault in the swirling current between fields of knowledge is also to read his search for social justice, especially as the production and storing of knowledge is still carried out through uneven networks of political and corporate power.

Foucault and Derrida have influenced all manner of cultural, historical, legal, and information technology theorists. Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook underscore just how much the archive operates as the "central metaphorical construct upon which they fashion their perspectives on human knowledge, memory, and power, and a quest for justice" ("Archives, Records, and Power," 4). The social construction of institutional archives, Schwartz and Cook argue, also winds its way down to individual creation and safekeeping of private documents. "Like archives collectively," they explain, "the individual document is not just a bearer of historical content, but also a reflection of the needs and desires of its creator … " (3). As archivists, Schwartz and Cook are well positioned to write of the emotional bond generated in the archives (public and private), and by now the notion of the "affective archive" has become a robust area of research.[29] That tangible documents produce psychological and even physiological responses from both those who create and those who consult them complicates Foucault's theory of knowledge production in larger, normalized discursive formations. Yet the attention to affect is also an acknowledgment of Foucault's great influence on theories related to liminal spaces of subjectivity and to questions of gender and sexuality more broadly, at the same time as it reflects the desire to go beyond the discursively constituted subject.

The eco-archive of Haitian literature inhabits and is inhabited by subjects that dwell in rural and urban spaces, and that also traverse land and sea in search of refuge. Its function is to call forth spaces that are

29 See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); see also Anne J. Gilliland and Marika Cifor, eds, "Affect and the Archive, Archives and their Affects." Special Issue of *Archival Science* 16.1 (March 2016).

subject to ideological and political deformation but are also capable of undermining such power. Given the general connotations of "eco" and the corporate takeover of this prefix, I cannot stake an original claim to the term. However, I have in mind a different kind of interface than the risk assessment app developed by a Scandinavian company that allows users to "map, prioritise and minimise chemical hazards in the workplace."[30] I am also thinking in a way that diverges from the resource management function of information technology systems that "archive" data, or remove it from a computer's hard drive to secure storage off-site. Instead, I theorize a literary corpus that evokes an ethos of living in an environment on the wrong side of the equation of calculated risk. These are texts that depict the damage wrought by political and economic policies and practices deemed socially accepted as a necessary hazard.[31] Brozgal conceives of a literary anarchive that channels the relationship between literary ethics and political power. There is common theoretical ground here with Anderson's thesis of literature as a necessary cultural mediation of the political reappropriation of natural disasters. What is more, Brozgal proposes the figure of the anarchon, the critic who participates in the production of knowledge, "less as a guardian and more like an interpreter … " (51). One hears the echo of Danticat's "immigrant artist at work," who imagines a symbolic ethos of individuals and communities, and the cultural processes that give meaning to the land on which they live.

Whereas Foucault's archaeological method historicized discursive formations that change over time yet hover around temporal edges, the eco-archive is a witness to the play of rupture and continuity in time and space. In the absence of written archives on experiences of migration amidst political violence, economic hardship, or natural disasters, Haitian literature fills a void with depictions of *entours* that speak in more hushed tones. As Loichot suggests, it is as if trees and plants whisper secrets to those who listen. Moreover, this literary anarchive considers its borders with the texts of earlier generations. I

30 See http://www.ecoonline.com/Eco-Archive/ (accessed July 18, 2016).

31 A different project might turn here to the sociological theory of the construction of risk, and especially the "risk society," as coined by the late Ulrich Beck. See *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999). On Beck, see Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, Part Two, "Planet at Risk" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 119–203.

have examined elsewhere how, in her novel *Saisons sauvages*, Kettly Mars reimagines the guiding themes and figures of literary ancestors, including Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, Alexis's *Compère Général Soleil*, and Marie Vieux Chauvet's trilogy *Amour, Colère et Folie*.[32] Writers of today reflect on ecological thought from one generation to the next, as well as on the various representations of changing environmental conditions. Dalembert's *L'Autre face de la mer* performs this cross-generational reflection within the text itself in a narrative structure in which Grannie's descriptions of the sugar migration and the concomitant transformation of Port-au-Prince are in dialogue with her grandson's contemplation of environments devastated during the Duvalier era. The archival function of both Mars's and Dalembert's novels lies in the way the different experiences of their characters resonate with the untold stories of scores of historical migrants and refugees, as well as their extended families who stayed behind.

René Philoctète: Eco-Archivist

> Les réfugiés mesurent du regard leur terre, voudraient la baigner du parfum d'eau, d'écorce, de feuille, auquel ils aujouterait du sel. Pour la force. La pureté. Ils comptent les toits qui pousseront; une école pour la liberté, un hôpital pour la compréhension, des syndicats pour le travail, une église pour l'amour.
> Et savent qu'ils ont un monde à construire.
>
> René Philoctète, *Le peuple des terres mêlées*, 147

The eco-archive is an elemental link between literature, history, and world. Often part of the background, "le monde muet," as Michel Serres writes, "les choses tacites placées jadis là comme décor, qui n'intéressa jamais personne, brutalement, sans crier gare, se met désormais en travers de nos manigances. Fait irruption dans notre culture" (*Contrat naturel*, 16). In Haiti, this world irrupts as a witness to a tumultuous past. Literature records, depicts, laments, and interrogates the imbrication of natural and political disasters. By "elemental," I do not mean to convey simply the sense of resembling the raw elements of earth, air, fire, and

32 See John P. Walsh, "Reading (in the) Ruins: Kettly Mars's *Saisons sauvages*." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 20.1 (Spring 2014): 66–83.

water that sustain these events.[33] At its most basic, literature represents "natural" forces, but various postmodernist critiques – and going back further to Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* – have sought to deconstruct the myth of Nature untouched by human hands. "En un mot [naturel]," Barthes wrote in the 1956 preface, "je souffrais de voir à tout moment confondues dans le récit de notre actualité, Nature et Histoire, et je voulais ressaisir … l'abus idéologique qui, à mon sens s'y trouve caché" (9). Just as ideology hides behind the evocation of landscapes as pristine and wild, political and economic policies and agreements remain out of view of the degraded environment. The literary imagination exposes ideology and elicits an emotional response, creating an affective dimension that is just as much about the intertwining subjectivities of writer and reader as it is their relation to the physical matter and entangled elements of all life on Earth.

Philoctète's *Le peuple des terres mêlées* is an exemplary work of fiction that inspired the theoretical speculation of the eco-archive. In the opening paragraph of his preface to an anthology of Philoctète's poetry, Lyonel Trouillot underscores the "élément nativiste dans sa poésie" (*Poèmes des îles qui marchent*, 7), in the sense not of a nationalist bent but rather of the primacy of the material world. One of the most influential Haitian writers from the 1960s until his death in 1995,[34] Philoctète was co-founder of both *Haïti Littéraire* and the Spiralists. He is most well known as a poet, who praised a vision of a diverse yet unified Caribbean.[35] "Caraïbe" (1981), was republished shortly after the poet's death in 1995. Outside circles of Haitianists, this epic poem, like much of Philoctète's corpus, remains relatively unknown. The poem begins with a vital question about the poet's place in the islands where the Caribbean meets the Atlantic:

> Jusqu'où porter la voix dans cette fête des vagues, l'arrogance de la chlorophyle, le siège des étoiles, dans ce culte à perpétuité du soleil, le va et vient des ailes, dans ce tumulte des peuples en vrac livrés aux rites des

33 For a materialist approach to ecocritical theory, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert, eds, *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

34 See Lyonel Trouillot, "Préface," in *Poèmes des îles qui marchent*, by René Philoctète (Arles: Actes Sud, 2003).

35 Philoctète was a prolific writer across several genres, including theater, short stories, and the novel. Most of his works were published in Haiti and several at his own expense.

croyances millénaires? … Tant de couleurs, de palmiers, tant de rythmes, tant de hanches, de volupté: la générosité du poème sombre dans la folie de ce grand bal masqué atlantique. (13)

The poet initially celebrates the diversity of the natural world, its aquatic waves, flora and ever-present sun, intertwined with a mass of people, whose disorderly arrival appears only to add to the "folly of this great Atlantic masquerade." Yet the people were delivered [*livrés*], which hints at a forced passage and thus augurs an ominous history. "Jusqu'où porter la voix" is a refrain that gives the poem its forward momentum, a cadence that leads the poet through the dark history of the Caribbean. Like Walcott, Philoctète knows that the sea carries history. "La mer portait la cargaison par les cadavres d'astres," the poet laments, "le sombre accord des coques avec la flache des flétrissures; toute une race à têtes d'homme … toute une race à raison d'homme, avait échoué dans le bétail" (19). And yet, the poet seeks not only to find himself but also to walk through this history, and he travels around the Caribbean, across time, to grasp this "âge Caraïbe, âge d'homme! où chaque branche porte le vœu de la racine! âge nouveau! dont chaque pierre témoigne de l'épopée de la sueur!" (50). As with so much of Philoctète's œuvre, poetic language has a material presence, endowing terrestrial and maritime objects with testimonial authority. As Marlene Daut remarks, "Philoctète, too, appeared to believe in the transformative power of poetry, in particular, to restore, create, and forge … 'freedom, development, [and] humanism … '"[36]

In his analysis of "Caraïbe," Max Dominique observed, "le poète marche dans cet 'âge Caraïbe' et, renouvelant le geste d'Alexis ou la 'triple greffe' de Phelps, assume dans l'exultante nomination tout l'héritage indien, africain, occidental" (*Esquisses critiques*, 90). The critic situates Philoctète among fellow writers and poets and underscores the diasporic fabric of the poem. In this regard, he contrasts the dizzying proliferation of references to historical figures and geographies – what he calls Philoctète's "art du foisonnement" – with the exilic writings of Anthony Phelps (88, 90). One can also appreciate just how much

36 See Marlene L. Daut, *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 389. In the epilogue to her book, Daut examines Philoctète's play *Monsieur de Vastey* (1975). Quoting in part from an interview Philoctète gave in 1992, Daut envisions the play through a Glissantian lens as a critique of Haiti's "colonial relation as necessarily global … " (183).

Philoctète was enamored of Caribbean *entours* by reading "Ces îles qui marchent" (1966). Written upon his return from Quebec, the poem is another epic-like celebration of Haiti and the greater Caribbean. Initially, the poet comes in from the cold: "Je reviens fatigué des giboulées du Nord," he writes, "Le soleil que j'ai bu est froid comme la mort." Then, personifying the land, he is ready to rejoice in its warmth: "il faut dans ton corps / ô ma terre / que je sente ta chaleur me soûler comme une aurore!" The poet identifies himself as "Simidor prodigieux," recalling the reveler from *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, whose drumbeat provides the rhythm for the workers of the *coumbite*. Having adopted this persona, the poet walks through the land with a song that intertwines environmental and social histories.

Like the poetry that preceded it, *Le peuple des terres mêlées* is an ode to the search for unity. As Ulysse Pierre Louis remarks in the preface to the novel, it ought to be read as a "fresque poétique … truffée d'images étincelantes" (*Le peuple des terres mêlées*, 7). For his part, Dominique calls it a "chant du peuple de la frontière" (*Esquisses critiques*, 161–162). Both critics call attention to the ways that Philoctète experiments with time, language, and narrative technique to unsettle generic convention. The question of form is illuminating of Philoctète's visionary art, yet so is the representation of migrants with little use for political borders. In fact, it is not until the novel's conclusion that the narrator asks, "Sont-ils Haïtiens? Sont-ils Dominicains?" (147). Because of the persecution suffered by these people, the narrator refers to them as refugees, who "have a world to build together." Having fled to Montreal in the early years of the first Duvalier regime and, later, having witnessed boat-people fleeing the second, Philoctète uses "refugee" fully aware of its historical and symbolic weight, in the Caribbean and beyond, to describe those in need of protection.

Given the intense media focus on today's global refugee crisis, a brief parenthesis is useful here to consider the legal, political, economic, and humanitarian contexts that have shaped the meaning of "refugee" throughout the twentieth century.[37] In fact, as April Shemak has pointed out, "the term 'refugee' can be traced to seventeenth-century France when it was used to describe French Huguenots who fled to England

37 See Liisa H. Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495–523. See also Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11.3 (August 1996): 377–404.

to escape religious persecution when Louis XIV in 1685 revoked the Edict of Nantes" (*Asylum Speakers*, 5).[38] Yet events of the twentieth century – chiefly, both World Wars and decolonization movements – led to a series of political and humanitarian actions that would grant the term institutional meaning. The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees resulted in international agreement around an official definition that emphasized a fear of persecution and the impossibility of finding safe haven in one's home country. However, as Shemak reminds us, owing to its contentious history of protectionist measures regarding immigration, the United States refused to sign the accord until 1967, when the UN reached a new Protocol. Preliminary codifications of refugee status, as well as subsequent revisions to both international and U.S. law, were limited to largely European-focused ideas of displaced persons.[39] Therefore, ostensibly abstract juridical notions were always susceptible to political manipulation. Jean-Claude Icart explains, "Aux États-Unis, la politique vis-à-vis des réfugiés s'est longtemps confondue avec la politique d'immigration … Dans l'octroi du statut de réfugié, les États font donc souvent intervenir des choix idéologiques, en plus de considérations relevant davantage de leur politique d'immigration … " (*Négriers d'eux-mêmes*, 70). Scholars of Haitian history have highlighted the evolution of policies and laws enacted in the United States, as well as the concomitant rise of camps and detention centers, to check the flow of immigrants and refugees from Haiti, Cuba, and elsewhere in the Caribbean and the Americas. "Over the years," Michel Laguerre writes, "the US government has developed an elaborate scheme of control mechanisms – *a regime of control* – to deal with refugees and immigrants" (*Diasporic Citizenship*, 77; emphasis in original).

In *Le peuple des terres mêlées* Philoctète contrasts the border violence

38 Shemak refers to Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

39 For a more detailed account of the codification of refugee status in the twentieth century, see April Shemak (*Asylum Speakers: Caribbean Refugees and Testimonial Discourse* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2011], 6–8) and Icart (*Négriers d'eux-mêmes*, 70–74). Shemak also considers the changes to asylum laws in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, particularly in the Patriot Act. More recently still, one would have to include ongoing revisions to the treatment of refugees in light of President Trump's travel ban and the attempt to revoke the "temporary protected status" of Haitians displaced by the earthquake.

of sovereign powers with refugees seeking shelter. One of the archival functions of the novel is to depict the humanity of those objectified or politicized by juridical and humanitarian categories. For instance, we might ask, how does the text imagine the "liminal citizenship" that Laguerre attributes to the "diasporic condition" (76) of Haitian refugees? How do its characters speak to the idea that the refugee has become the universal figure of suffering within "the international order of things," as Liisa Malkki has argued ("Speechless Emissaries" 378)? Echoing Laguerre, Kaiama Glover writes that the refugee is "a very particular sort of border-crosser: a victimized and endangered person; a surplus person – unwanted, unwelcome; a person involuntarily existing in a state of transition" (*Haiti Unbound*, 151). In the passage of the novel cited above, unhomely characters assume community-oriented tasks of measuring and cultivating land, building structures of knowledge and healing, and seeking solidarity and faith. The apparent harmony between the inhabitants and the land unfolds in a pastoral-like movement of communion but shifts to accommodate the refugees. The earth, trees, and wind seem to provide a fresh start for this fragile community, whose surroundings are idealized as a site of new beginnings after a perilous exodus. Yet this utopia is burdened by memories of environmental destruction and political violence. At the same time, it is a transitional space in which the refugees look to an uncertain future.

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Le peuple des terres mêlées conjures the massacre of mainly Dominican-born persons of Haitian descent in the fall of 1937. Still a relatively underexamined event in the history of the two countries, the "Parsley Massacre" – as it is known in the anglophone tradition; in Spanish, it is referred to as *el corte* – was ordered by the Dominican President Rafael Trujillo, with the tacit consent of the powers-that-be in Port-au-Prince.[40] For two days, Trujillo's soldiers lined up people, held up sprigs of parsley and demanded that they pronounce the Spanish, "perejil." Those Creole speakers who could not pronounce it correctly were killed on the spot. Many Haitian and Dominican writers,

40 See René Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006) for an extensive bibliography on the massacre.

including Jacques-Stephen Alexis, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Diaz, and Julia Alvarez, among others, have written about the killings. Philoctète portrays the interwoven lives of people that share a river yet are divided by political powers. He transforms an apparent border into an ecopoetic site of memory from which he draws a longer version of history. In fact, the tragedy occurred just a few years after the end of the first U.S. occupation. In this historical light, the depiction of a shared community with little regard for political boundaries can be read to oppose not only violent forms of nationalism but also the usurpation of Haitian sovereignty during and after the occupation.

Philoctète plays with the language and concepts of political power and its official archives of knowledge by submitting them to the wildly lyrical and elusive texture of his poetic imagination.[41] Passages with data on Trujillo's troops, munitions, and matériel read like administrative registers that contrast sharply with the poetic representations of the island's flora and fauna, as well as the quotidian rhythms of village life. Consistent with his poetic vision, Philoctète continues to recover an ethos of "togetherness," where "mêlées" denotes an ensemble of lands that nurture the Haitian–Dominicans who live side-by-side. In an interview, he stated that the novel "calls for harmony between the two [Haitians and Dominicans] because, whether we want it or not, the dissension and the hatred between those two peoples are, for me, but an accident of history."[42] "Mêlé" also evokes "sang-mêlé," or the "mixed-blood" people who are part and parcel of the island's colonial legacy. As Philoctète knows, this historical "living together" has meant less harmony than antagonism, and more accurately the struggle (in French, "mêlée" is a loose group of fighters; in Haitian kreyol, "mele" means "tangled" but also "confused") to be together and to share an island that has witnessed a long history of invasion and occupation of both sides.

41 In Caribbean literary history, Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992) comes to mind as a novel that also depicts fictional archives. The various notebooks of its protagonist, Marie-Sophie Laborieux, as well as those of the urban planner who interviews her, are imagined to be housed at the Bibliothèque Schœlcher. The novel also invites an ecocritical reading of what might be called its eco-historical structure, divided in four sections: *temps de paille*, *de bois-caisse*, *de fibrociment*, and, finally, *de béton*.

42 See "Interview with René Philoctète." *Callaloo* 15.3 (Summer 1992): 623–627 (624). In his foreword to the English translation, "René Philoctète: A Dream of the Triumph of Goodness," Lyonel Trouillot observes that Philoctète's "voice … was always raised against misfortune … " (*Massacre River*, 16).

Despite the hopeful conclusion regarding a "world to build," a future of togetherness would be short-lived.

At the center of the novel is a love story between Pedro Alvarez Brito, "el mulato dominicano, l'ouvrier de l'usine sucrière de San Pedro de Macoris," and Adèle Benjamin, "la chiquita negrita haitiana de Belladère" (*Le peuple des terres mêlées*, 15; Spanish in original). The couple lives in the border town of Elias Piña. Pedro attempts to organize his fellow workers against Trujillo and his two local representatives, Don Pérez Agustín de Cortoba and Don Preguntas Feliz. These henchmen are charged with carrying out the fantasies of their leader, who, from a very young age, dreamed of an "engagement du sang" (24). Sensing the ominous signs all around him on the way to the sugar factory, Pedro witnesses a truck loaded with armed soldiers. Earlier that morning, Adèle had had a premonition – "le jour du sang approche, murmure la jeune femme" (15) – and Pedro soon realizes the "mue sauvage" (26) of all layers of society:

> Tous sur la place: besogneux, professionnels, autorités civiles, militaires, religieuses, cadres supérieurs, enfants, parents, domestiques. Participation massive, totale, directe. Acceptation inconditionnelle d'un état de choses, d'un ordre d'idées. D'esprit. Les micros grésillent. On se presse sous une même carapace. On s'accorde aux crocs des mots. La rareté affecte l'abondance. La liberté s'offre des chaînes. La fraternité pactise avec le génocide. (26)

The prose begins with some hesitation but gains momentum here, just as Pedro reckons with the crippling ironies surrounding him. This moment serves as a haunting foreshadowing that contrasts with periodic radio broadcasts in Elias Piña, macabre public announcements that tally the number of fallen heads yet sign off sardonically with advertising slogans from Coca Cola, Gillette, Listerine, and others, an explicit reminder of the corporate interests of the United States. (It is worth pointing out that the U.S. occupied the Dominican Republic twice, first from 1916 to 1924 and then again in 1965, four years after Trujillo was assassinated.) These radio spots transmit Trujillo's desire to cleanse the Dominican vocabulary of the poetic metaphors of the borderland. As the head count rises, Pedro heads back to Elias Piña to attempt to rescue Adèle.

The various meanings of *mêlées* spread throughout the novel, going well beyond the nominal dream of "mixed lands" and extending to the interracial, bilingual, and transnational relationship between

Pedro and Adèle. In her close reading of the novel, Maria Cristina Fumagalli highlights these multiple layers of the transnational, picking up especially on local exchanges in transnational markets that "are posited as powerful 'everyday utopias' which, providing the opportunity for across-the-border bonds of intimacy, were instrumental in the forging of alternative individual and collective identities" (*On the Edge*, 178). On a structural level, the idea of *mêlée* as struggle encompasses the antagonistic narratives of the "langage des arbres et de la terre" (23) and the narrative of Trujillo. The chapters of the novel alternate between these two sources: the frontier utopia of Pedro and Adèle, and Trujillo's nationalistic fantasy of possession. Both narratives take off in long passages, rendered utterly surreal (and at times inscrutable) by extended streams of hallucinatory language; and both are layered with a bewildering temporality. Fumagalli underscores the oral dimensions of the text, including the use of repetition and digression in the nonlinear narrative. Likewise, Mamadou Wattara argues that Philoctète's spiralist aesthetic draws from the wells of indigenism and marvelous realism to create "une œuvre baroque au sens du penseur de la créolisation" ("*Le Peuple des terres mêlées* de René Philoctète," 108). Like Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, *Le Peuple des terres mêlées* is replete with historical, cultural, and botanical references. Such virtuosity accounts for Wattara's attempt to distill the novel by recourse to some sixty years of literary movements in the Caribbean and Philoctète's place among them. Yet this approach risks eliding the differing visions of each of the groups collected above in one sweeping conclusion.

Attention to the archival function of the novel can give analytical focus without minimizing its baroque design. How do its aesthetic features relate to its historical content? One way to answer this question is to contrast the two stories woven together by the third-person narrator, those concerning the dictator and the refugees at his border. Philoctète divides the narrator's voice such that the reader alternates between two archives. The stories continue to split as the narrator recounts events from the perspectives of Dons Cortoba and Feliz, as well as Pedro, Adèle, and even Chicha Calma, "la guagua folle [crazy taxi-bus] de la frontière" (31). One might explicate the process of splitting in psychoanalytical terms to suggest a narrative emphasis on working through the memorial dimension of the novel. The narrator would be understood to repress painful historical memories in a complex dynamic of forgetting and fantasizing. This approach can help make sense of the gradual disintegration of Adèle's mind, which brings Pedro to nickname her "Douce

Folie" (15). The text leaves clues here and there about Adèle's depression, and we learn that she is under a doctor's orders to take a sedative to calm her nerves (54, 85). Kaiama Glover situates Adèle's character in the context of Philoctète's aims as a spiralist writer. "Fragmentés et imprévisibles," she writes, "les personnages spiralistes maintiennent une imperméabilité fondamentale" ("Écrire la schizophrénie," 85). Glover argues that, by "writing schizophrenia," Philoctète reveals the mental and physical struggles of Haitians up against the long, frustrated history of an unfinished revolution. In this way, the political instability that surrounds the border communities in the novel becomes manifest in Adèle's fragile psyche.

The novel stages a lop-sided conflict between a narcissistic tyrant and a schizophrenic peasant. Trujillo orders a territorial possession that strikes down bodies of transnational communities. To evoke such drastically different ways of living on the land, Philoctète alternates between two aesthetic frames: the hallucinatory, dream-like ramblings of Adèle and Pedro and the stark language of Trujillo's political quest. Philoctète clearly revels in the back and forth movement of these narratives and, even in the more restrained, pared-down confines of the latter, he finds release in satire. The novel imagines the ways that the Dominican state records official history, including the use of palace poets. The first troubadour begins by recounting how "Le général Jean-Pierre Boyer, l'Haïtien, réunit l'Est à l'Ouest" (87), but quickly changes his tune when Trujillo is visibly displeased.[43] "Cette union avait trop duré," the poet adds quickly, "l'Est se détacha de l'Ouest. Le soleil dominicain fut plus prompt à se lever, le travail chanta mieux dans nos champs cultivés" (87). When a second troubadour steps up to sing of foreign intervention in the Dominican Republic he is sent away by Trujillo, who assumes these roles himself, and the court becomes the scene of revisionist history. In the end, Trujillo replaces poetic song with lists of weapons and matériel necessary to realize his political dreams:

> 70,100 mitrailleuse à feu de bougainvillier
> 13,250 canons de fer
> 4,316 fusils à glougous de citerne
> 400 canons de cuivre

43 Coverdale's translation reads "Boyer reunited the East and the West" (134) but the original French is "l'Est *à* l'Ouest," which denotes the transfer of the East *to* the West, suggesting the Haitian repossession of the Dominican side. This is a version of history that Trujillo clearly does not accept.

> 271 robinets d'eau sulfureuse
> 6,613 grenades à têtes chercheuses
> 10,014 baïonnettes
> 5,500 pistolets à cheveux
> 600 canons de fonte à blason du dragon
> 7,000 sabres de cavalerie … (89)

Philoctète imagines Trujillo's fantasy by qualifying weaponry in hair-raising terms that foreshadow the violence to come. Moreover, he counters the historical silence of the massacre with precise, jaw-dropping numbers that reveal the intensity of Trujillo's desire to "posséder sa terre entière … comme un conquistador" (128). This conquering spirit is so great that he obsesses over the Citadel, the fortress built by the Haitian king Henry Christophe. To possess the land is not enough; to inventory, as the text does, the seemingly inexhaustible resources at his disposal still does not cure Trujillo's "mal de la Citadelle Henry" (129).

In the absence of a national monument, Trujillo substitutes a myth of racial purity that will have devastating consequences for the people of the borderland. "Nous sommes los blancos de la tierra," he announces (51). Philoctète caricatures the racialist nationalism in the abovementioned radio ads by way of loudspeakers that impel Don Agustín to act with murderous intent. The call goes out through the radio to speed up Operation Haitian Heads in a manner that does not "poétiser l'accumulation des têtes" (55). Unable to distinguish on racial lines alone, the soldiers must resort to linguistic difference, undercutting Trujillo's proclamation. Don Agustín rips out a clump of parsley in a garden and begins to shout, "perejil!" (56). As he makes his way to Adèle, he seems possessed by his machete. Indeed, Adèle sees it coming and, in her "sweet folly," she even hears it speak. However, it is unclear if the machete speaks to her or to Don Agustín. Regardless, at this crucial point in the text, the machete appears to take on a life of its own and assumes a violent subjectivity:

> La machette de Don Agustín se lève, s'approvisionne de noirceur … renifle l'odeur du sang, pirouette, danse, se carre, s'entretient de nouveau avec la machette, coordonne, planifie, revient sur terre, gambade, folâtre, rassure la main de don Agustin, observe, raisonne, hésite: 'Suis-je faite pour couper des cous? *Que diront les herbes? les troncs des chênes? les vieux manguiers aïeuls de la Sierra*?' puis d'un coup de tête: 'Je suis maîtresse de moi-même, comme de la mort', la machette opte pour la raison d'État, la pureté de la nation dominicaine, son authenticité, sa

> spécificité, son originalité, se souvient qu'elle est chevalière des blancos de la tierra, se persuade qu'il faut que l'ocre étouffe le noir, le dissolve, afin que du Bahoruco à Monte Christi tout soit jaune, blanc … (blanc surtout) comme l'aube rameutant son peuple de clarté … Et hop! La machette decide … conclut, tombe sur la nuque d'Adèle! (57, emphasis added)

This passage disorients the reader as it moves back and forth between the first and third persons, and as the personified machete appears to speak to Adèle and to itself. It is also frightening because Adèle, who has already lost her mind, now appears to lose her head, as the machete falls on her neck. Yet the reader cannot know for sure if Adèle has perished. Later on, it is Adèle's head that take on a life of its own: "Adèle a beau vouloir reprendre sa tête, la placer sur son cou, l'enfoncer dans son cou … la tête cabriole, saute par-dessus l'enclos de candélabres, gagne la rue blanche, la rue principale d'Elias Piña … " (108). The disarticulation of mind and body seems complete.

Yet Adèle and her fellow villagers are not the only victims of Trujillo's obsession with absolute power. In the passage above, the machete falters in a moment that betrays the narrator's ecological thought and thus offers an alternative vision to Trujillo's dystopic fantasy. In the middle of an otherwise triumphant political march, the machete becomes anxious. Even as it resolves to act on behalf of the purity of sovereign power, it knows that the old trees stand as witnesses to genocide. Throughout the novel, environmental figures are targets of dictatorial power, precisely because they undermine its authority. For instance, Chicha Calma is a personified Dominican bus that transports Pedro and his fellow inhabitants of the border and communicates with its garrulous surroundings. On the surface, it represents the kind of naïve metaphor forbidden by Trujillo. For Pedro, however, an environmentalist discourse is a necessary lifeblood. As a labor organizer, he speaks of the land not simply in the language of metaphor but crucially "au nom de la sueur ouvrière" (61). The fight for the land is about transnational solidarity. Similarly, Pedro announces his love for Adèle in terms of an organic communion with the land: "Je suis l'arbre, Adèle en est l'écorce," he cries, "Nous sommes irrigués par une même sève. Les fruits qui sortiront de nous auront le même goût, même âpreté, même douceur, même persistance dans le palais, tant il est vrai que je l'ai habitée et qu'elle m'a reçu. Mais Trujillo!" (62). The passage closes with the interjection of political power that aims to destroy a way of life. Later, the novel depicts the many mixed families, who, after generations of cultivating

gardens together, now struggle to come to terms with "un mot qui porte la mort: 'Perejil!' Un condiment, roturier de potager" (93). The novel links together several communities ("Mancenille face à Monte-Christi jusqu'aux Anses-à-Pitre non loin de Las Damas") in a cartographic dimension that charts an eco-ethics of the border:

> Un immense espace de montagnes, de fleurs, d'insectes, de cours d'eaux, de rongeurs, de plaines, d'oiseaux, contenant plus de cent mille âmes, Dominicains et Haïtiens, se parlant dans un langage que seuls eux-mêmes puissent comprendre: le langage de la frontière, où entrent à la fois us et coutumes, histoire et feux du cœur. (99)

Like the "langage des arbres et de la terre," the ecological idiom invoked earlier in the text, the "langage de la frontière" does not signify a limit but rather evokes what Michel Agier has called "situations de frontière" (*La condition cosmopolite*, 25). As Agier explains, "Le rite de la frontière témoigne de l'institution de toute vie sociale, dans un environnement donné; il détermine le partage et la relation avec le monde naturel et social qui l'entoure" (25). For Agier, the border is a process of constituting relationality, one that is always *in process*. He continues, "ce que la frontière met en œuvre est à la fois un partage et une relation" (25). Fumagalli, too, underscores these positive exchanges but also observes that the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic "has in fact produced a complex 'contact zone' characterized by conflict and violence but also by many collaborative linkages, often established against the directives of the central colonial, national, and occupying authorities" (*On the Edge*, 2). Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's well-known theory of "contact zones," Fumagalli calls attention to the asymmetrical power relations at work in the space of the border.[44] "On the edge" captures well what is at stake in Philoctète's depiction of border communities that have long proposed an alternative to Trujillo's nationalist vision. Enforced by a "covenant of blood," the dictator's rule would negate the rituals of sociality that are exchanged in the uncertain yet creative and life-affirming space-time of the threshold.

The conclusion of the novel offers some hope for the future of the border. Pedro finally arrives back in Elias Piña, and, even though he is discombobulated and, perhaps, physically wounded, he seeks out Adèle. Her head finds him first, nestling up against his legs. At this point, it is

44 See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6–7.

still unclear if Pedro and Adèle are alive or dead, and Pedro cannot be sure what has happened:

> Debout au milieu de la rue principale, Pedro ne saisit pas trop bien ce qui lui est arrivé. Il vacille. Qui donc l'a frappé à la nuque? En somme l'a-t-on frappé? Il sursaute. Qui lui a parlé l'oreille? Au fond, lui a-t-on parlé? Vraiment, il se passe des choses à Elias Piña! Entre autres, la chronique de la poussière. Certes, au long de sa bosse de vie, il a connu des moments particuliers. (134)

Perhaps hallucinating, Pedro wobbles, as if the ground were moving beneath his feet. Seeking an elusive equilibrium, he continues to look for Adèle and their house. It remains a dangerous search, because machetes are still after heads, and survivors are fleeing the village for the Haitian border. Pedro witnesses a throng of people pile into Chicha Calma and, as soon as the bus begins to leave, his house comes into view, along with the sight of Adèle's body. "Mujer mia!" Pedro cries. With refugees streaming past, Adèle tries again to get her head on straight, this time with her husband's help. Pedro urges her, "Reprends ta tête" (143), a phrase that suggests Philoctète's dark sense of humor. Their reunion and the reconstitution of Adèle's body occurs just in time to allow them to escape Don Agustín by joining the exodus of refugees:

> Pedro entraîne Adèle, court avec elle, sue, s'essouffle, court jusqu'à ce qu'ils entrent dans la grande, énorme masse, hommes, pelles, bourdonnements, houes, crépitements, chaudières, cris, garance, pioches, fracas, bœufs, gorge de pigeon, femmes, brouettes, hurlements, chaises, tridents, hermine, ronflements, cabris, ronrons, matelas, vert d'eau, cliquetis, volailles, pics, murmures, olive, enfants, armoires, hottes, vociférations, ânes, indigo, grincements, réchauds, mulets, sarcloirs, vacarmes, orange, cisailles, craquements, chats, paille, vieillards, sifflements, gris cendre, fourches, rateaux, brun, qui entourent Chicha, moussent, grouillent autour d'elle. (144)

This passage is cited at length because its conveys not just the world that refugees carried with them but also the sounds and emotions of forced migration. This is a history that Philoctète wants his readers to hear and feel. Moreover, the list-like structure recalls and contrasts with the list of munitions assembled by Trujillo. Aboard the bus, Pedro holds tightly onto Adèle: "Il sent la chaleur troublée de cette femme qui réclame sa protection … Et se met à espérer que ce jeune corps reprenne un jour la lumière de sa tête avec la promesse d'une chair vagissant dans sa chair" (145).

As Adèle seeks refuge in Pedro, Chicha Calma struggles to bring the refugees across the border. The narrator adds, "Avec leurs meubles, leurs outils, leurs saints, leurs odeurs, leurs démarches, leurs chansons, leurs légendes, leur parler. Leurs us et coutumes" (145). The novel depicts the refugees crossing the threshold with rituals of community, which lends some credence to the idea that Pedro and Adèle have survived. It is also evidence that political violence cannot destroy, as Philoctète writes, "le rêve de créer les peuples des terres mêlées" (147). *Le peuple des terres mêlées* moves within and beyond this local space-time to situate Trujillo's brutality in the wider Caribbean and Americas. Trujillo's genocidal desire, seemingly at the limits of literary representation, is imagined here as part of a longer history of violence, from pre-colonial contact to the colonial era and beyond. Previous massacres, as Glover explains, "necessarily contextualize the butchery of Haitians as the postcolonial iteration of an ever-repeating historical model" (*Haiti Unbound*, 146). The novel revives layers of history that mingle in the narrator's consciousness by activating memory through Pedro's labor of the land: "La terre d'ici porte mes pas qui doivent s'entendre de l'autre côté. Dans l'autre terre, ma terre! La caciquesse visita le cacique, leur feux ont longtemps couru, d'ici à l'autre bord" (19). The ode to Taino chiefs, previous inhabitants of the island, recalls the slaughter of indigenous peoples by Spanish conquistadors. For Philoctète, making the land "heard" serves just as much to recall the extinction of the Taino, whose fires seem yet to be extinguished in Pedro's environmental imaginary, as it does to undo Trujillo's naturalization of the border as a linguistic, racial, and national barrier.

Conclusion

This chapter has articulated a theory of an eco-archive. To be sure, the space between theory and literature and between art and lived experience is an old question. As Glover reminds us, " … the reality for many of those forced to settle in these unsettling spaces is far less inspired (or inspirational) than (we) theorists of literature tend to put forward" (152). Philoctète reimagines the refugee's story by way of his spiralic conception of history. In the novel's "befuddled space-time" (*Haiti Unbound*, 152), Glover continues, "the reader is … constantly de-situated with respect to the 48 hours during which s/he knows, historically, the slaughter of Haitians took place. Time spirals without

any definitive advancement" (153). The archival function of *Le peuple des terres mêlées* does not collapse the distance between the beginning of the Trujillo era and the end of Duvalier, when the novel was written. It retrieves the *idea* of the border as a transnational, multilingual, and popular source of knowledge. Given the renewal of political division that has left Haitians, yet again, stripped of citizenship and home, the novel continues to resonate today.[45]

Among the many writers who have written their own stories of the 1937 massacre, Danticat is a close reader of Philoctète. She traveled to Massacre River as part of the research that led to the novel *The Farming of Bones*.[46] After observing the degradation of the border site, now a "so called free-trade zone [that] has been invaded by slums, underpaid workers, and labor-law abusers" (*Massacre River*, 8), Danticat witnessed the river itself and was surprised by the "tiny braid of water running beneath a concrete bridge and into the distant plains" (8). She continues:

> Where was the high current forced to engulf hundreds and hundreds of corpses in 1937? I wondered. The torrent towards which poor Haitians fled when, as Philoctète put it, death seemed so tangible that it had set up shop everywhere. However, what this extraordinary novel reminds us is that sandwiched between the two borders was a group of people who tried to build a new world, people who were as fluid as the waters themselves, the people of Massacre River. (8)

45 In September 2013 the Constitutional Tribunal of the Dominican Republic enacted Sentence 168–13, a ruling that retroactively stripped citizenship from Dominicans of Haitian descent by declaring that those born in the Dominican Republic to illegal parents were not entitled to citizenship by birth. See Tiffany Basciano, ed., "Justice Derailed: The Uncertain Fate of Haitian Migrants and Dominicans of Haitian Descent in the Dominican Republic." School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University (2015), April 15, 2016. https://www.sais-jhu.edu/sites/default/files/Final-Report-Justice-Derailed-The-Uncertain-Fate-2015-v1.pdf (accessed November 22, 2018).

46 In her translator's note, Linda Coverdale offers a justification for changing Philoctète's title to *Massacre River*. However, as Maria Cristina Fumagalli demonstrates, Coverdale thus misidentifies the river in the novel. "There is in fact no mention of [Massacre river] in Philoctète's novel," Fumagalli points out, "because it runs more than 100 kilometres north of the town where the novel is set and the river that marks the borderline by Elias Piña is in fact the Artibonite, not the Massacre" (*On the Edge: Writing the Border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015], 177, n. 70).

Danticat's movement through the physical space of the fluid border is mediated by her reading of Philoctète's novel. In other words, she processes the historical change of the environment from the literary imaginary to the reality of what she sees. She carries out a brief ecocritical analysis of *Le peuple des terres mêlées* that also helps to visualize her own aesthetic representation of a great political injustice and its environmental legacy.

CHAPTER TWO

Haitian Odysseys

> Il existe des alternatives aux mots de l'exode: à *boat-people*, quand les bateaux se raréfient sans que le flux des fuyards s'arrête pour autant; à *immigré* (qui prend acte d'un état) ou à *immigrant* (qui met l'accent sur un processus de passage univoque et définitif d'un lieu à l'autre), quand le phénomène est plutôt celui d'une migration quasiment intransitive, d'un mouvement de départ dans le déchirement et d'arrivée toujours différée.
>
> Jean-Claude Charles,
> *De si jolies petites plages*, 192

Le peuple des terres mêlées closes with a glimpse of a possible future. Did Pedro and Adèle survive along with the other refugees, and if so, what might have become of them? At the novel's end, life resumes for the people of the frontier, as daily rituals are repeated to give meaning to "tous les coins de la frontière haïtienne" (146). The refugees " … ont reçu les saints, les anges avec les mêmes offrandes, chanté les mêmes refrains avec les mêmes instruments de musique, dansé les mêmes rythmes, fait la même cuisine … Ils sont venus coupler leur vie, d'ici à l'autre bord, avec le rêve de créer le peuple des terres mêlées" (147). Despite Trujillo's violence, they continue to negotiate the border as a space of solidarity for a future in common. Compared to the bleak setting that Danticat would witness some sixty years later, Philoctète's fictional utopia appears as a distant mirage. It is tempting to consider the hopeful portrayal of the aftermath of imperial occupation and dictatorial violence in the 1930s in the context of Philoctète's life story and the historical juncture in which he published the novel.[1] *Le peuple*

1 See Fumagalli, *On the Edge*, 177.

des terres mêlées captures an aura of turmoil, fear, and violence that might also be read as a reflection of the post-Duvalier period.

The present chapter now turns its attention to the writings of Emile Ollivier and Jean-Claude Charles. Much has been written about the theme of exile in Ollivier's œuvre.[2] Likewise, critics have written about the "enracinerrance" peculiar to Charles's life and writings.[3] First coined in *Le corps noir* (1980), *enracinerrance* escapes neat definition.[4] Eliana Vagalau reads it in terms of Deleuze's rhizome and Glissant's *Relation* as a "state of permanent exile, in which roots are not to be found solely in place or culture of origin, but form along the path of one's journey" ("Jean-Claude Charles: Challenging the Notion of Global Literature," 241). Appearing in the stream of consciousness that propels the last section of *Le corps noir*, the word attempts to convey the sense of a fundamental impasse. The beleaguered writer seeks a way out of the degrading depictions and fantasies in which the black body has long been trapped. Charles writes, "où est-ce que je vais nulle part je traverse bien des lieux de l'esprit péniblement quelquefois pour n'aller nulle part nulle part c'est difficile mais j'y arriverai un jour … " (*Le corps noir*, 198). For Charles, arrival was always deferred, always in the future tense. "Délibérément oxymorique," he explained later, "il tient compte à la fois de la racine et de l'errance" ("L'Enracinerrance"). In her analysis of *Manhattan Blues*, Yanick Lahens defines the *mise en fiction* of this term in the portrait of Charles's alter-ego, Ferdinand. She explains, "Alors que l'exilé est taraudé par la hantise du retour, l'errant est avant tout celui qui,

2 See Keith L. Walker, "Immigritude: Emile Ollivier and Gérard Étienne," in *Textualizing the Immigrant Experience in Contemporary Quebec*, ed. Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 173–85; Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature*; Joubert Satyre, "Non-lieux et déterritorialisation, tropicalisation et reterritorialisation dans *Passages* d'Emile Ollivier et *Chronique de la dérive douce* de Dany Laferrière." *Voix plurielles* 5.2 (2008): 80–89; Joëlle Vitiello, "Itinéraires spacio-temporels: exil, nomadisme, diaspora chez Nancy Huston, Régine Robin et Émile Ollivier." *Présence Francophone* 58 (avril 2002): 7–19; and Steve Puig, "Quelques romans de l'exil post-duvaliéristes: le retour impossible." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 11.1 (April 2005): 57–72.

3 See Jean Jonassaint, *Le Pouvoir des mots, les maux du pouvoir* (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986); and Lucienne Nicolas, *Espaces urbains dans le roman de la diaspora haïtienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

4 Jean-Claude Charles, *Le corps noir* (Paris: Hachette, 1980), 198. The word reappears in the novel *Bamboola Bamboche* (Montreal: Mémoire d'Encrier, 2016 [1984]), 72.

à force de bouger, finit par emporter ses racines avec lui, ne les rattachant à aucun périmètre unique, privilégié ou exclusif" ("Quand l'exil devient errance," 9). A "mot-valise," it holds two apparently opposing drives, to take root and to wander. In "Ontologie d'un exil," Ollivier writes, "Le moins que l'on puisse dire, c'est que l'être humain arraché à sa terre finit toujours par s'implanter dans son nouvel habitat. Parce que créature corporelle, il a besoin de s'inscrire physiquement dans l'espace qu'il occupe" (*Repérages*, 32). Similarly, Charles suggests that these instincts of human nature operate in dialectical fashion, each one depending on and giving meaning to the other. Together, "wandering" and "rooting" define an existential struggle of perpetual migration that left an indelible mark on literary production. While *enracinerrance* sheds some light on Charles's exodus from Haiti to points north, it also informs his efforts to report on the "intransitive migration" of boat-people.

The playful originality of the term reflects Charles's professed disdain for what he felt to be the pretension of critical jargon. Trained as a sociologist, Ollivier was more at home in academic discourse. "Depuis vingt-cinq ans," he writes in the opening paragraph of *Repérages*, "je rêve d'écrire un livre qui ferait le point sur l'exil, le déracinement, l'errance et l'enracinement" (9). Instead of rejecting the limitations of these markers of experience, Ollivier sifts through them in this rich collection of essays and conferences papers. Ten years later, a second volume, *Repérages 2*, was published posthumously. Ollivier framed these wide-ranging reflections on his life experiences and the central themes of his writings – exile, immigration, displacement, foreignness, nostalgia, memory, and loss – as a dialogue with readers and the texts of his library. Like Charles, who was inspired by the visual arts, music, and dance, Ollivier made sense of his writing by way of the cinematic concept of "repérage":

> … tel est le mot qui spontanément me vient à l'esprit. Je ne le prends pas ici dans son acception propre … Je privilégie le point de vue esthétique, celui du cinéaste, choisissant et délimitant son lieu de tournage. Aucune certitude absolue ne l'habite quand il découpe en plans son espace selon les besoins spécifiques de son scénario. (*Repérages*, 28)

Rather than theoretical conviction, the storyteller's manipulation of space, language, and time matters most to both writers.

Both Ollivier and Charles left Haiti as young men. It is not so much the circumstances of their individual exiles that interest me as the ways in which these experiences inflect their literary point of view, and

specifically how the narrative structures of Ollivier's "migrant writing" and Charles's *enracinerrance* approximate the odysseys of refugees. In other words, the aim here is to examine the tight connection between aesthetics and ethics in the representation of refugees. The two writers address the detention of refugees; the political economy of tourism and hospitality in the Caribbean and North America; and policy and law concerning immigrants and refugees in the 1980s that is part of a longer history of U.S. intervention in Haiti and the wider Caribbean and that also informs the present day. In what follows, the chapter teases out the different strands of their treatments of inhospitable shores. Beginning with Ollivier, it contends that *Passages* brings out two markedly different experiences of migration between the exiled writer and the shipwrecked refugees he encounters in Krome, the detention center on the outskirts of Miami. The writer's sense of displacement eventually finds a purpose in recording the testimony of boat-people, yet such representation comes at a cost for both. In depicting this fleeting interaction, Ollivier delivers a larger environmental critique of global actors that sets in motion the naturalized inequalities between citizens, immigrants, and refugees.

A blend of documentary-like reporting, travel journal, and autobiographical writing, *De si jolies petites plages* is a raw account of desperate journeys. Charles is at pains to describe the process of reporting: "mots griffonnés la rage au cœur, images volées dans le rire, voyage-poèmes, voyage-roman, voyage-essai, mobilité tonale des lieux de passages … " (27). The text is a blistering critique of an unfolding tragedy in the Americas and a plea to humanize the boat-people. I argue that the essay reveals an ecology of incarceration, or an opaque system of courts, prisons, and camps that defines the territorial boundaries of the U.S. In darker, more visceral language than Ollivier, Charles decries the racist treatment of Haitians and deconstructs touristic slogans and images in Florida and around the Caribbean as the seductive face of an unchecked neocolonial order. He offers a poetic lamentation of the paradoxical "faux mouvement" of boat-people, or what he defines as an intransitive migration, from a torn departure to an arrival always deferred (*De si jolies petites plages*, 34). The final section of the chapter considers how the novelist reprises the phenomenon of the frustrated journeys of refugees for an extended meditation on the *enracinerrant*'s search for freedom in Reagan's America.

Passages

> Comble de la décrépitude! Ainsi, Port-à-l'Écu deviendrait la poubelle des Blancs.
>
> Emile Ollivier, *Passages*, 26

Like Philoctète, Ollivier was forced to leave Haiti during the regime of François Duvalier. He arrived in Canada shortly after Phelps, Morisseau, and Legagneur, who were part of "the first wave" of Haitian exiles, as Sean Mills points out in his superb *A Place in the Sun* (84).[5] "When Haitian exiles arrived in Montreal in the 1960s," Mills writes, "they found a city that was filled with francophone Quebec nationalism and radicalism, but it was also a multiracial city that was the home to a black population descended from slaves, as well as to more recent arrivals from the United States and the anglophone Caribbean" (85). Although this generation of Haitian immigrants could integrate, to varying degrees, into this political climate and the changing demographics of Quebec, they continued to experience alienation. As Ollivier put it, in a phrase whose temporality he would later invert (youth in Haiti; old age in Quebec), he was "a Quebecker by day and a Haitian by night" (cited in *A Place in the Sun*, 89). Unlike Philoctète, Ollivier eventually settled in Montreal for the long term. But, as he writes in his autobiography, *Mille eaux* – whose title is a play on his nickname ("Milo") – "Je suis fils de migrants, et en ce sens, ma migration ne date point d'hier. Mes veines sont irriguées des globules rouges de l'errance" (142). Errancy has been passed on like a genetic trait, and the identification with a kind of traveling biology (a genealogy uprooted) disrupts simple notions of the migrant physically "taking root" in Montreal. The title of the novel, "*Passages*," would seem to confirm the constant movement engrained in the diasporic individual, an unsettling that always accompanies the process of "settling in."

Passages was published two years after *Le peuple des terres mêlées*. Ollivier sets the present time of the novel a little more than a year after the ouster of Jean-Claude Duvalier.[6] While Philoctète superimposes a

5 See especially Chapters Three and Four. The latter tracks Ollivier's involvement with the journals *Nouvelle Optique* and *Collectif Paroles*.

6 According to Max Dominique, a genetic analysis of the novel reveals that Ollivier had been working on it since his reporting in the early 1980s (*Esquisses critiques*, 206). Dominique also points to Ollivier's short story "Epilogue pour Leyda," published in *Collectif paroles* 5 (April–May 1980).

more remote past onto this period, Ollivier anchors his narrative in the events that surrounded him. Despite the different historical circumstances of migration that each novel depicts, their multi-layered reflections on borders allow one story to be read at the edge of the other. It is possible to imagine a future generation of Pedro and Adèle in the tale of Amédée Hosange and Brigitte Kadmon. *Passages* opens in Port-à-l'Écu, a fishing village on the northwest coast, described by the narrator as an endangered environment: "terres boueuses, sulfurées, territoire de l'incertain où l'on ne sait si c'est la mer qui envahit le sol ou le sol qui s'annexe la mer" (14). In this landscape of ecological change, Amédée's lamentation, cited above, is a cry for environmental justice: "Oh the height of decay! So Port-à-l'Écu would become the garbage bin of the whites!" (26). Because Amédée contemplates the impossibility of living in a dump, he epitomizes what Zygmunt Bauman calls "wasted lives": those disposable humans at the mercy of modernity's excessive production in the north.

Passages is constructed around two separate narratives that spiral around each other to form a larger story about two disparate groups of Haitians. Keith L. Walker makes the compelling observation, by way of a Lacanian psychoanalytical model, that these "separate yet parallel" stories form a "double helix of migration and exile" that function as the "twisted signifiers of Haitian consciousness and unconscious" ("Immigritude," 174). Of the two principal narrators, the first is Brigitte, who recounts her story to Normand Malavy, a journalist and editor who has lived for years in Montreal. Brigitte and Normand have a brief yet pivotal encounter in Miami, more specifically in Krome, the infamous detention center, where Brigitte is temporarily held as a survivor of *La Caminante*, a boat that had set sail from Port-à-l'Écu but wrecked during a storm off the coast of Florida. A second narrator, almost entirely in the third person (and who remains unknown until the final pages of the novel), tells the life story of Normand, whose last name evokes the trials and tribulations of a life "forever in dis-ease [*mal-à-vie*]." Recovering from a kidney transplant, Normand has had enough of cold gray winters: "À Montréal, en décembre, janvier, et février, même la joie givre" (81).[7] Normand leaves one January morning for Miami, while his wife, Leyda, remains in Montreal, ostensibly owing to a commitment at work. Upon arrival, Normand unexpectedly runs into Amparo Doukara, a young Cuban-American of Syrian descent, who lives in Vancouver and who

7 On the passage of the seasons in the novel, see Joëlle Vitiello, "Au-delà de l'île: Haïti dans l'œuvre d'Emile Ollivier." *Études Littéraires* 34.3 (2002): 49–59.

had met Normand years earlier in Ottawa. This chance reunion kindles an affair, which is interrupted by the refugees of the *La Caminante* and brought to a sudden end by Normand's death of a heart attack. The novel alternates between Brigitte's account of a harrowing voyage and the melancholic tale of Normand's arduous existence, from a traumatic childhood to oppression under Duvalier, up through his time with Leyda in Montreal and the final chapter in Miami.

This summary highlights the narrative polyphony of the novel and its geographical arc. *Passages* would appear to satisfy Ollivier's aforementioned desire to "write a book that would take stock of exile, uprooting, wandering and taking root."[8] In this regard, one might consider the novel to be a fictional partner to the non-fictional texts, including essays, letters, and conference proceedings. In Ollivier's experience, there are affinities between the uncertainty and anxiety of the creative process and the migrant's fraught passage through liminal space. To recall, the cinematic metaphor that governs the attempt to situate and to anchor oneself – "repérage" – demands a willingness to embrace uncertainty and to eschew preconceived ideas about the *parcours* and the story that comes out of it. In her preface to *Repérages 2*, Lise Gauvin organizes an introduction of the life and writing of Ollivier around the figure of the *parcours*, precisely for its dual use as a physical itinerary and a literary theme. Moreover, as she announces in the opening line, "Émile Ollivier est l'un des rares écrivains de son époque à avoir élaboré une œuvre dans laquelle la dimension réflexive occupe une place aussi importante que l'aspect narratif" (7). The breadth and consistency of both volumes of *Repérages* make them an invaluable resource. For reasons of space, I want to focus on the keynote Ollivier gave in Tokyo, "L'enracinement et le déplacement à l'épreuve de l'avenir," published first in *Études Littéraires* and then *Repérages 2*.[9] This talk represents one of the final reflections on

8 Ollivier's œuvre is a testament to migration from *Mère-solitude*, his first novel, to *Urnes scellées*, and also the autobiographical *Mille eaux*.

9 See Emile Ollivier, "L'Enracinement et le déplacement à l'épreuve de l'avenir." *Études Littéraires* 34.3 (2002): 87–97. According to the editors of the journal, the conference in Tokyo took place in April 2002. However, Gauvin writes that Ollivier traveled to Japan during the spring of 2000, and that the third essay in *Repérages 2*, "Voyage au pays de l'inquiétante étrangeté," is a kind of travel journal based on this trip. In fact, Ollivier dates this chronicle from 13–19 May 2000. However, at the conclusion of "L'Enracinement et le déplacement" Ollivier talks about the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, on September 11, 2001. It is possible that he revised the talk for *Études Littéraires* but Gauvin does not account for this discrepancy.

"migrant writing." As Gauvin notes, Ollivier had begun to develop the theory of migrant writing in earlier texts. For the conference in Japan – the theme of which was the "Future of Civilizations: Hybridizing or Purifying" – Ollivier articulated two main points. First, he claimed that the interaction between global forces – people, capital, technologies, goods, and ideas – would bring out the adaptability of local spaces. "La mondialisation favorise ainsi la naissance d'un modèle d'êtres humains 'décloisonnés,'" he argued, "ce qui force à repenser le local, qui n'est plus un endroit géographique défini, une fois pour toutes. Le local ne cesse de s'inventer, de se déplacer dans des contrées diverses" (*Repérages 2*, 74–75). Second, he maintained that literature had a role to play as a counter-narrative to hegemonic forms of globalization. "Et si les écrivains," he pondered, "à leur tour, dans la sphère de l'imaginaire, contribuaient eux aussi à la 'production' de nouvelles subjectivités contre l'uniformisation des cultures, contre l'effacement des petites langues, contre la marchandisation de l'art?" (82). Ollivier makes an appeal to an ethics of literature, which, he continued, "a, entre autres, le pouvoir d'exprimer le réel dans toute son extension, puisqu'elle possède des facultés de dévoilement de ce qui se cache derrière l'apparence" (82).

The key figure of this theory is the migrant writer, who, moving through the familiar and the strange, in life and letters, is uniquely positioned to imagine the future, to reveal and to interrogate the ongoing transformation of place. In "Voyage au pays de l'inquiétante étrangeté," based on his time in Japan, Ollivier expresses discomfort with the incomplete sense of "lieu" (as place). He considers a more expansive vocabulary (*topos*; *utopie*; *place*; *placer*; *déplacer*; *déplacement*; *emplacement*), including different nuances in French, English, and Creole, that surrounds the idea of place and inflects its meaning with depths of time, space, and cultural knowledge. In this chronicle, Ollivier asks what it means to navigate the relation between self and other by embracing the idea of an "unsettling foreignness [*inquiétante étrangeté*]." He contemplates the implications of his remarks for questions of translation, technology, tourism, and hospitality. By emphasizing the possibilities for decentering the self to be found in Japan, and by framing the talk with an epigraph taken from Victor Segalen's *Essai sur l'exotisme*, Ollivier returns to a complicated idea of exoticism. However, displacement is clearly an ethical act, one that can feel like a burden to the migrant writer. "Je suis né en Haïti," Ollivier observed in "L'Enracinement et le déplacement," "mais j'ai vieilli au Canada. Je connais la cour et les jardins de l'empire" (82). "Appartenant

à deux mondes," he continued in Tokyo, "j'ai souvent l'impression qu'injonction m'est faite, en tant qu'intellectuel et écrivain, de jouer un rôle de médiation, de trait d'union, de passeur culturel, bref d'œuvrer à une 'poétique de la relation'" (*Repérages 2*, 83). Ollivier acknowledges an intellectual debt to Glissant, yet, as he examines the dual meaning of relation as *relater* and *relier*, he delves further into the ethical aspects of his role: "Relater en tant que témoin, à la fois celui qui observe et celui qui atteste; relater ce qui est occulté, ce qui est refoulé, oublié, enfoui … relier l'ici et le là-bas, l'autrefois, l'aujourd'hui et le demain" (83). As a *passeur de culture*, Ollivier has first-hand experience of the impact of migration on cultures and languages, and in this he confirms the outward-looking vision of a thinker like Glissant. Ultimately, he calls for a kind of writing, "dont les images migrent pour déjouer les stéréotypes" (87). Yet even though this aesthetic program appears to praise various forms of cultural and linguistic hybridity, it is also grounded as a work of mourning. Ollivier knows what is lost and what globalizing forces obscure.

The future-oriented conclusion of "L'Enracinement et le déplacement" gives it a measure of optimism. Yet it is also tinged with doubt. Ollivier speaks of the "spectre" of globalization and of the necessary limits to its "course folle" (*Repérages 2*, 89). Finally, he evokes the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, the "piliers de la ville globale" (90), and retreats from a more open stance to acknowledge the hardening of difference along lines of religious belief, cultural and economic divides. Ollivier lived but a short time into the "future of civilizations" that he contemplated in Tokyo, and so he could not have seen it devolve into the post-9/11 global wars on terror and the massive exodus of refugees. But he had already been a witness to the absolute, violent refusal to accept difference, and if this history informs the affirmations and speculations of Ollivier as lecturer and essayist, it is also the necessary *parcours* – what he calls the "humbles cheminements dans le réel" (*Repérages 2*, 89) – that the creative writer cannot do without. In the epigraph to *Passages* he cites Montaigne – "Je ne peins pas l'être; je peins le passage" – a framing gesture to the meanderings of the self in search of a place in a rapidly changing world. In his own form of "migrant writing," Montaigne's *essais* exposed many received ideas about the Old World as it began to colonize the New World. This point of departure gives focus and depth to the theme of *passages* that unfolds across multiple geographical and environmental spaces, temporalities of history and myth, and the helix-like narrative structure of the novel.

Épreuves

> En écoutant une symphonie de Schönberg, les sonorités qui s'en dégagent évoquent pour moi les bruits d'une mer agitée.
>
> Émile Ollivier, *Passages*, 244[10]

The two narratives of *Passages* converge in Miami. More specifically, they come together inside Krome. At the invitation of the Immigration Service, in the effort to put an end to certain rumors about its detainees, Normand is permitted to interview Brigitte. Ollivier stages a Fanonian dialectic in the uneven exchange between two Haitians who remain worlds apart: the former journalist who records the story is granted a freedom of movement denied to the refugee. Nevertheless, Brigitte entrusts Normand with her testimony. The eventual repatriation of the detainees is governed by the narrow definition of political asylum and by the logic of humanitarianism. They are liberated, in Fanon's terms, "sans lutte" (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, 176), by the very authorities that contributed, directly or indirectly, to their perilous journey. The release from Krome coincides with the fall of the Duvalier regime. Shortly after, both Amédée and Normand die in Miami. Therefore, the price of freedom is death and disillusionment. For her part, Brigitte wants nothing more than to return to Port-à-l'Écu. There, she tells Normand, "face à la mer, à marcher contre le vent, contre les brisants, on ressent un élan de vie, un désir de lutter, de vaincre" (*Passages*, 229–230). Despite the hardship of life at home, at least she knows the climate of her daily struggle.

The third-person narrator, who patiently unfolds these interlacing symbols of history and myth, is revealed to be Regis, a longtime friend of Normand and Leyda. Regis reports an extended conversation that takes place, more than a year later, between Amparo and Leyda. Leyda finds Normand's intervention in Krome to be an illusion, yet Regis is more sanguine, driven even, in the wake of Normand's death: "je ressens l'extrême urgence de relater à sa place l'odyssée de Brigitte Kadmon" (185). Weaving the two stories together, he is mystified that Normand and Brigitte "aient fini par cheminer côte à côte" (186). In this testimony, the novel anticipates the doubts about the theory of migrant writing that

10 As the narrator reports, Leyda felt that Schönberg was the "poète de l'horreur, de l'épouvante, des ambiances tendues" (244).

Ollivier will work through almost ten years later in Japan. In this way, the aesthetic structure of *Passages* delivers its ethical charge. The spatial and historical dimensions of migration and refuge interact in the novel to give shape to a fundamental struggle.

In his analysis of *Passages*, Walker proposes the term "immigritude," which he adapts from Aimé Césaire's conception of negritude, as a "conceptual framework" for the array of migrational experiences of diverse generations of Caribbeans in the twentieth century ("Immigritude," 182). At once a "pedagogy, an epistemology, a psychology, and a philosophy" (182), Walker proposes that immigritude encompasses the psychic and social processes by which the immigrant fashions the self in the ordeal of immigration. In this sense, immigritude also describes the ethical search for reciprocal recognition between the immigrant as Other and the host country as Self. The subtitle of Ollivier's talk, the "*épreuve* de l'avenir," is suggestive of the migrant always having to "prove" his or her being as Other. As I have suggested above, one is reminded of Fanon's famous rereading, in the last chapter of *Peau noire, masques blancs*, of the Hegelian idea of recognition in the master/slave dialectic.[11] The tragic journeys depicted in *Passages* reflect the impossible situation of migrants and refugees in spaces of hegemony. Just as Fanon decried the impossibility of recognition in a colonial world, Ollivier portrays the painful experiences of the immigrant, who desires, as Walker writes, "reconciliation, hope, and freedom" ("Immigritude," 182). Walker seems to pick up on the Fanonian resonance of the novel when he suggests that, in the end, Ollivier asks, "what is freedom, what is the price of freedom, and what does one do with freedom?" (182). For Fanon, the racism of the colonial dialectic precluded the realization of this most human condition and led to a fundamental "altérité de rupture, de lutte, de combat" (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, 180). The struggle inherent to Fanon's ethics, it could be argued, lives on in the ordeal of the refugees.

The archival function of the novel demonstrates that the spiraling stories of Normand and Brigitte begin and end with a dispossession, an ecological crisis relegated to the background, like a timeless backdrop, in analyses that amplify the exilic condition. Without downplaying Ollivier's meditation on the ontology of exile, it is possible to consider how the aesthetic components contribute to an implicit condemnation of environmental harm and prepare the ground for the more robust

11 See "Le Nègre et la reconnaissance," *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952), 170–180.

social and political advocacy that undergirds the theory of migrant writing. The downward drift of the novel begins with the plans of apparent businessmen from the United States, in collusion with Haitian actors, to use Port-à-l'Écu as a dumping ground for toxic waste. "Ces terres, même dans l'état où elles étaient," Amédée cries, "représentaient tout notre souffle, toute notre vie … Les réquisitionner pour en faire un dépotoir: ce sont nos marchés, nos moulins, notre commerce, qui seraient à jamais écrasés" (27). This speech is reported by Brigitte to Normand, and thus it comes across in the mode of mourning and is infused with her own memories of Amédée and of village life. She tells Normand: "Si vous saviez, monsieur, combien était vert notre village" (29). The villagers have a long memory of U.S. intervention, and Amédée recalls the historical resistance to pillaging carried out by the Standard Fruit Company, who changed the entire agricultural structure of the region in a sort of scorched earth campaign. This short-lived rebellion led to the peasants paying a "tribut d'incendies, de vols, de viols, de massacres" (29). Coupled with the historical injustice, the latest disaster will make Port-à-l'Écu an uninhabitable wasteland, in which Amédée can only breathe in death.

As Brigitte frames it, Amédée's dream is about the realities of the cyclical exploitation and degradation of the land. It is a dispossession caused by local governments in the grip of a global power with a disregard for social and environmental justice. Yet the precarity and suffering of the refugees aboard *La Caminante* contrasts sharply with Normand's spleen in the north. The latter's dissidence as a student in Port-au-Prince comes to a head with Duvalier's henchmen and forces him into exile in Montreal, promoted as a welcoming city, defined by its "Révolution tranquille" and subsequent hosting of the Universal Exposition and Olympic Games. Normand's long walks through the city take him to other, less hospitable places, where immigrants "trimeront dans les hôtels, serviront le poisson gros sel, le plat de porc aux bananes vertes, sous les yeux satisfaits du maître offrant l'exotisme des îles en plein cœur de Montréal" (118). As a cultural cartographer, in a process Joubert Satyre has called a "balisage de l'espace" ("Non-lieux et déterritorialisation," 85), Normand maps a counter-narrative to discourses of hospitality and tourism that extol the multicultural diversity of Montreal and reveals the underbelly of a city that instrumentalizes its immigrant population. The novel's attention to the symbolic and economic value of the exotic offers another view of a frosty Montreal.

Miami provides a change of (warmer) air, but it grants but a momentary reprieve for Normand, whose *mal de place* becomes more acute in this “lieu de passage, une terre de l’errance et de la déshérence” (66). The city offers a temporary, marginal *accueil* to the immigrant, and it keeps the asylum-seeking refugee out of sight in a holding cell. Both Munro and Satyre read the itineraries of *Passages* in terms of Marc Augé’s distinction between “place” and “non-place.”[12] Augé opposes the groundedness to be found in the former to the transience of the latter. In this schema, the airport, hotel, and detention center are richly symbolic for Ollivier as sites of fleeting encounters that expose the migrant to solitude.[13] Yet, as Munro argues, “Normand’s Montreal seems to slip between these two definitions, largely because he appreciates and identifies with its multicultural newness and at the same time seems to enjoy the anonymity it affords him” (*Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature*, 170). A similar slippage occurs in the depiction of the Florida coast. While the surrounding sea is at first close and inviting, its warm allure is quickly transformed into an agonizing scene of shipwrecked refugees. Ollivier’s attention to liminality is exemplary of his ecological thought. The novel reveals the ideological and historical layers of the environment. In this sense, the passing of *La Caminante* from Haiti to Florida evokes the Middle Passage. “Passagers clandestins dans le ventre d’un navire,” Brigitte intones during her meeting with Normand, “nous visitons non des lieux, mais le temps. Nous venons d’un pays qui n’en finit pas de se faire, de se défaire, de se refaire. Coureurs de fond, nous avons franchi cinq siècles d’histoire, opiniâtres et inaltérables galériens” (184).

Brigitte’s somber reflection on a Haitian unconscious permeates the novel. Her expression of the dangerous passage of boat-people disrupts a linear notion of time and grounds its theoretical appeal in histories

12 Marc Augé, *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992). Augé defines “place” as “triply symbolic”:

> … identitary, in the sense that a certain number of individuals recognize themselves in it and define themselves by means of it; relational, in the sense that the same individuals read within that space the relation that unites them with each other; and historical, in the sense that the occupants of the place find in it various traces of an old, former presence, a sign of filiation. (cited in Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature*, 170)

13 Charles is also taken with these transitional sites: “J’aime les lieux de passages: les quais de gare, les ports, les stations de métro, les têtes de taxis, les arrêts d’autobus. Et les aéroports” (*De si jolies petites plages*, 87).

of forced migration. As an expansive trope, a network of times and spaces that figures and refigures a complex arrangement of the local and global, *passages* can be understood as an aesthetic mode that, as Ursula Heise points out, "theorists and creative writers have gravitated toward in the search for new forms" through which to envision ecological awareness and belonging (*Sense of Place*, 64–65). "Like a collage, all the parts are connected," Heise writes, "but also lead lives of their own" (64). And yet, rather than evince such eco-cosmopolitanism, the novel might instead be read, as Max Dominique suggests, as a "méditation sur la mort" (*Esquisses critiques*, 207). The proximity of the deaths of Normand and Amédée ties together two different realities of Haitian experience. Through the overlapping itineraries of its characters, *Passages* charts the movement of people and trade between Haiti, the United States, and Canada. By portraying the destruction wrought to a Haitian village in this larger field, Ollivier depicts migration not solely in relation to theories of place and exile but also, crucially, as an ecological problem. A focus on the dialogic representation of displacement and environment demonstrates that the alternating rhythms of Normand's migrations and the journey of the villagers of Port-à-l'Écu are embedded and encoded in ever-changing relationships with the basic resources of land and water that are appropriated by political power, transforming (agri)cultural practices and economic realities.

La condition haïtienne

> Sisyphe, Noir? Il faut l'imaginer coincé.
>
> Jean-Claude Charles, *Le corps noir*, 33

This chapter proposes that Ollivier's notion of migrant writing is more theoretical than Charles's *enracinerrance*. It betrays something of the abstract comfort of academic discourse. Yet, in his travels to Japan, Ollivier was mindful of his location, in the sense of his exile from Haiti and his privileged mobility as a writer, and how history had inflected his theory of migrant writing. He spoke candidly of the decentering of the self as an ethical acceptance of foreignness. From Haiti to Japan and Canada, and many stops in between, Ollivier performed the very theory that he sketched out and modified throughout the writings collected in the *Repérages* volumes. Migrant writing could be understood as an

instance of what Edward Said famously called a "traveling theory."[14] It is a theory of migration aware of its own travel to different spaces and times, and thus of its capacity to adapt and be transformed.

Long recognized a major writer by his peers and by scholars of Haitian literature, Jean-Claude Charles has flown under the radar of popular and critical audiences.[15] Vagalau argues that this lack of interest owes, in part, to the unwillingness to include his expressed views on *enracinerrance* in any number of contemporary critical frames ("Jean-Claude Charles: Challenging the Notion of Global Literature," 245). Versed in a range of theoretical schools of thought, Charles was nevertheless unable to locate his lived experience in the grand designs of many such worldviews. In his words, "C'est au réel que je tente de coller, à un réel collectif comme à un réel intime, à l'historique et au personnel, dans un même mouvement" ("L'Enracinerrance"). As he saw it, he was neither a cosmopolitan writer nor a citizen of the world; he could not inhabit Glissant's *tout-monde*; and he was not a migrant writer. "Je suis un enracinerrant," he declared, "aucun autre terme ne me convient" ("L'Enracinerrance").

Charles's rejection of these discourses of global identity owes broadly to two historical factors that he analyzes in *Le corps noir*, namely, what he calls the invention of the black body and the fantasy of its difference. The essay is divided into four chapters, the first two of which set out to deconstruct these discursive and ideological forms of oppression and to condemn the deformed *noirisme* at the core of Duvalierist nationalism and the myths that sustained it. The third chapter then reviews a longer history of what he calls the "main de maître," or forms of authority (political, economic, and cultural), visible and invisible, that have degraded, stereotyped, and commodified the idea of blackness. The fourth chapter, "Vérification d'identité," concludes on an autobiographical note, reflecting on his own trajectory and making the case that "la seule identité qui vaille est plurielle contradictoire mobile insaisissable … " (197). *Le corps noir* is an academic exercise of painstaking research and intellectual honesty that takes unexpected detours and gives free rein to Charles's poetic and musical sensibilities. It could be argued that Charles's desire to grasp the "question noire" and to demystify it, to search for a way

14 Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226–247.

15 Charles's work will hopefully gain more attention, thanks to the efforts of Rodney Saint-Éloi and his colleagues at Mémoire d'Encrier, which is republishing Charles's œuvre.

out of what he felt to be the trap of racial difference, is at the root of all future wandering. For Charles, this quest became a life's work, one that exacted a sacrifice: "découpé, éparpillé, mon propre corps, ses conflits, sa dispersion. A ses risques et périls" (24).

Despite feeling that he wasn't getting anywhere, Charles was a well-respected journalist who traveled widely. Like the journalist depicted in his first novel, *Bamboola bamboche*, Charles possessed an "indéracinable conviction" to protest "l'ordre fondamentalement injuste de ce monde" (21). In "Notes on Travel and Theory," James Clifford observed that *theorein*, from the Greek, referred to a "practice of travel and observation, a man sent by the polis to another city to witness a religious ceremony. 'Theory' is a product of displacement, comparison, a certain distance."[16] In this sense, Ollivier and Charles were contemporary "theorists": they traveled to observe and compare the ceremonies of other cultures. Yet they reported on people whose travel can be only uneasily evoked in cultural theory. When Des Rosiers and Glissant contemplate these "Caribbean theories," it is always with a view to the misery and death that defined the Middle Passage. In his reporting on boat-people in the early 1980s, Charles is painfully aware of the history that informs not only this specific from of travel writing but also the fiction that followed. Readers of *Le corps noir*, *De si jolies petites plages*, and, later, *Manhattan Blues* and *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris* are confronted with a writer immersed in the blues. The space between Charles and the refugees he interviews never collapsed, and his travels kept him painfully close to his subjects and reminded him of risks taken with his own body. In this regard, he was a warier, more skeptical writer than Ollivier. In *De si jolie petites plages*, Charles portrays powerless "theories" of boat-people who were not allowed to witness other shores. His journeys to hidden rituals of incarceration exposed a refugee crisis that had been largely ignored. "L'exode des Haïtiens, ça n'intéresse personne," he complains bitterly on the opening page of the essay (*De si jolie petites plages*, 11). Before Icart and Laguerre, Charles denounced the injustice of U.S. policy that classified Haitians as economic refugees.[17] As he

16 James Clifford, "Notes on Travel and Theory," in "Traveling Theory, Traveling Theorists," ed. James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar, *Inscriptions* 5 (1989): 177–188. For a critique of Clifford's theory of travel, see bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 338–346.

17 Writing in the early 1980s, Michel Laguerre explains, "Because Haitian

contended, “la perception étroitement économiste de l’exode haïtien ne résiste d’ailleurs pas à la lumière crue des trajets biographiques” (192). By visiting multiple sites of detainment, recording testimony, naming refugees, and transcribing and translating their experiences, Charles gives narrative shape to stories that humanize those reduced to a dossier number. He offers representation, in the dual sense of a portrayal *and* a speaking for, and thus makes heard a form of oppression “à bas bruit” (*De si jolies petites plages*, 22). He declares, “Il y a des désastres tranquilles” (23). *De si jolies petites plages* aims to “lever le black-out insupportable sur un naufrage collectif” (17). With the reference to the “collective shipwreck,” Charles draws a direct line from the Middle Passage to boat-people of the twentieth century. “Lever le black-out” is a repeated call in Charles’s writing to end silence and censorship that demands testimonial evidence.

The interviews with prison wardens and detainees constitute the essay’s dialogic base. It features dual testimonies: that is, of the experiences of individual boat-people and of Charles himself. Leslie Péan finds that Charles could have paid more attention to histories of emigration during the beginning of the regime of François Duvalier. Yet the text is furnished with historical analysis, statistical information, literary references, and poetic reflection. Not unlike Ollivier’s novel, these overlapping narratives give structure and rhythm to a multifaceted critique of histories of immigration and race; the role of the military in the interdiction of migrants; the complicity of bureaucratic agents of prisons and detention centers; and the hidden ideology of tourism. These are primary topics not only of Haitian and Caribbean studies but also, more broadly, of the interdisciplinary studies of refugees, immigration law, hospitality, and humanitarianism. The representation of refugees has been the subject of

immigrants are officially considered to be economic rather than political refugees, the majority have been denied political asylum” (*American Odyssey: Haitians in New York City* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984], 10). Scholars of Haitian and Caribbean studies have long critiqued the distinction made between political and economic refugees. See Carolle Charles, “Political Refugees or Economic Migrants? A New ‘Old Debate’ within Haitian Immigrant Communities *but* with Contestations and Division.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25.2–3 (2006): 190–208; Jana Evans Braziel, “Haiti, Guantánamo, and the ‘One Indispensable Nation’: U.S. Imperialism, ‘Apparent States,’ and Postcolonial Problematics of Sovereignty.” *Cultural Critique* 64 (Fall 2006): 127–160; and A. Naomi Paik, “Carceral Quarantine at Guantánamo: Legacies of US Imprisonment of Haitian Refugees, 1991–1994.” *Radical History Review* 115 (Winter 2013): 142–168.

numerous interdisciplinary studies, and so, in what follows, I focus on the spatial and environmental subtexts of the essay.[18]

A Carceral Ecology

In *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, Michel Foucault begins with a meticulous description of the public execution, in 1757, of Robert-François Damiens, for the crime of parricide. The brutal punishment of Damiens is set in stark contrast to Foucault's well-known thesis on the disappearance of the public spectacle of torture. Torture inflicted by sovereign power was replaced, he argues, by multiple forms of political power that surveilled and disciplined docile bodies, including prisoners, students, soldiers, and so on. The state's ability to produce normal citizens by way of a technological and social reformation of the body was more efficient, Foucault contends, than the deterrence of crime through the physical destruction of criminals. More pervasive than punishment embodied in legislation, newer penal institutions were "complètes et austères" (233); in lieu of the public executioner, the "petit fonctionnaire de l'orthopédie morale" (16) undertook the more patient work of correction, aided by the visual omnipotence of the panopticon. Taking the penal colony of Mettray as his primary source of study, Foucault demonstrates how reform-minded punishment was spread out in five models (the family, the army, the workshop, the school, and the judicial). Incarceration became a cellular form of isolation and re-education that produced normal bodies. "Dans la normalisation du pouvoir de normalisation," Foucault concluded, " … Mettray et son école font époque" (303).

At first glance, *Surveiller et punir* is a breviary for the writer visiting Haitian refugees in sites of detention. In fact, Charles cites Foucault several times in his analysis of Greer-Woodycrest, an institution in Millbrook, New York, where children were sent after having been separated from

18 In the context of Haitian and Caribbean studies, see Shemak, *Asylum Speakers*; see also Cooreman, "'La Mer, la plage, l'épouvante': l'imaginaire des boat people haïtiens dans la littérature caribéenne anglophone et francophone." *L'Esprit créateur* 51.2 (Summer 2011): 34–46; on the mass "spectacle" of refugees and on the lack of voice in humanitarian narratives, see Malkki "Speechless Emissaries"; see also Paik, "Testifying to Rightlessness: Haitian Refugees Speaking from Guantánamo." *Social Text* 104 (Fall 2010): 39–65.

adults, when U.S. officials were unable to identify the latter as the parents of the minors in their charge. The Director tells Charles that, compared to Krome, Greer is "avant tout un programme d'éducation et d'acculturation" (*De si jolies petites plages*, 63). "Après le camp, le campus," Charles quips to himself (62). If Mettray was the site of "une orthopédie sociale," Greer was "une entreprise d'orthopédie culturelle. Dans son projet comme dans sa pratique" (64). Unlike *Surveiller et punir*, *De si jolies petites plages* does not include architectural drawings or geometrical sketches of detention centers; yet because of his collaboration with the Spanish filmmaker, José-Maria Berzosa, on *Un homme dans la tourmente*, the documentary series produced with the French television network, Antenne 2, Charles allows viewers to witness "les enfants de Millbrook."[19] Like Foucault, Charles attends to the spatial configurations and designs of power that infiltrate bodies. In a passage worth citing at length, Charles surveys the new environment created at Greer:

> Les arbres: hêtres, érables, pommiers, bouleaux … L'habitat: pour vivre, des maisons basses à mi-chemin entre le baraquement de chantier et le rustique faussement chic, pompeusement baptisés 'cottages'; pour apprendre, un imposant cube gris et blanc divisé en ruches à porte hermétiquement closes dont seuls les éducateurs-geôliers et les trop gentils organisateurs ont les clés; pour entreprendre quelque démarche, un bâtiment administratif où règnent les cadres du programme, villa en brique rouge dont les larges baies et surtout les portes ouvertes des bureaux disent assez le pouvoir symbolique. (64)

Charles suggests that the combined natural and built environment shapes specific tasks of acculturation. Foucault called such reform "social orthopedics," borrowing from the French medical doctor Nicolas Andry, whose engraving of a crooked tree tied with a rope to a wooden pole serves as a frontispiece to "Supplice," the first section of *Surveiller et punir*.[20] In the drawing, the crooked sapling – which became an emblem for orthopedic surgeons around the world – stands as a metaphor for a malformation in need of correction. Similarly, the pastoral setting of Greer is set up to give order to minors: faux rustic workshop-cottages;

19 José-Maria Berzosa, dir, *Un homme dans la tourmente*. From the investigation of Jean-Claude Charles. Antenne 2, 1982. Ina.fr. Web. Accessed 12 September 2017.

20 Nicolas Andry, *L'Orthopédie, ou l'art de prévenir et de corriger dans les enfans les difformités du corps* (Brussels: Chez George Fricx, Imprimeur de sa Majesté, 1743).

classrooms like beehives; and imposing administrative villas – all are invested with the symbolic power of reformation. Deprived of contact with extended family, forced to adjust to a strict schedule and to learn a new language, the children struggle, Charles observes, with the "violence douce de l'institution" (*De si jolies petites plages*, 77). In *Un homme dans la tourmente*, the camera frames a line of adolescents, standing in a snow-covered field and then zooms in to a series of close-ups, along with their names: Eddy, Mireille, Alex, and Claude. Some are smiling, while others look defiantly into the camera. Alternating between the Director of the school and the teenagers, Berzosa and Charles document a testimonial archive of contrasting voices.

If the education at Greer was developed to prepare the children for insertion into U.S. society, the same cannot be said for other sites, where few adults were permitted to leave. Krome, Guantanamo, and Fort Allen, in Puerto Rico, do not operate on the model of acculturation. When Charles gains access to these sites, he no longer appeals to Foucault. Let me suggest two additional analytical frames that can help situate Charles's critique in the broader context of Caribbean and Haitian studies, respectively. Beginning in the 1970s, the Jamaican writer and philosopher Sylvia Wynter theorized the legacy of the "plantation archipelago," or a matrix of violence whose logic endures in future geographies of black experience in the Americas. Aaron Kamugisha and Katherine McKittrick have renewed attention to Wynter's long-running critical project on conceptions of the human in New World coloniality.[21] Kamugisha underscores Wynter's "anticipation of what would two decades later become known as the 'prison industrial complex'" ("The Black Experience of New World Coloniality," 135), while McKittrick builds on Wynter to propose the idea of "plantation futures," or "a conceptualization of time-space that tracks the plantation toward the prison and the impoverished and destroyed city sectors and, consequently, brings into sharp focus the ways the plantation is an ongoing locus of antiblack violence and death … " ("Plantation Futures," 2–3). McKittrick's insistence on the ways that this plantation logic, consciously and unconsciously, has tracked across time and space (through neoliberal models of agriculture, trade, tourism, real estate, economic development, and incarceration) might be extended in relation

21 See, in particular, the special edition on Wynter guest edited by Aaron Kamugisha: "Sylvia Wynter's 'Black Metamorphosis,' a discussion." *Small Axe* 49 (March 2016): 38–46. I return to Wynter in more depth in Chapter Five.

to the interdiction and detention of refugees. The management of detention centers, the public and private use of the bodies of refugees, and the generation of capital from public funds to private contractors could all be studied as part of the larger development of the prison industrial complex. Moreover, as Charles points out, these models of incarceration are projected, nationally and internationally, as sites of security and order. Furthermore, Wynter's profound engagement with Foucault calls into question the inherent limitations of the cultural continuity upon which his study of the epistemology of national power depends. As such, she compels a rethinking of Foucault by way of a transatlantic history of regimes of marginalization and imprisonment. In his persistent, historically informed interrogation of the system of prisons, camps, and detention sites, including the repurposing of military installations around the United States, Charles's critique resonates with Wynter's project. Just as the ideology of the plantation endures and adapts, so do different modes of survival, including, as McKittrick and many others have pointed out, the blues. As a way to cope with the systematic oppression of refugees, Charles listens to Charles Mingus. Indeed, it is Mingus, perhaps more so than Foucault, who guides him through geographies of incarceration.

In *Diasporic Citizenship*, Michel Laguerre offers another way to complicate Foucault's theory of disciplined bodies. With the latter in mind, Laguerre first argues that multiple stages of control (embarkation, border, maritime, internal, and carceral) serve as implements of surveillance that are "regimented in such a way as to produce *flexible bodies*, ready to be disciplined for incorporation once they are admitted to the country" (76, emphasis in original). The use of "flexible," or that which can be made pliant, instead of "docile," easily taught, implies a return to more physical forms of punishment. Laguerre claims that the liminality of the transnational body challenges Foucault's theory of the unique power of the nation-state to exert its disciplinary measures.[22] Belonging to at least two states, the diasporic citizen is subject to the policies of both, Laguerre contends, and this body moves between different temporal and spatial orders. Although Laguerre is more interested in exploring the multiple forms of diasporic citizenship, his analysis of refugees and immigrants answers a couple of basic questions raised by Charles: why

22 On the Haitian "transnational body" see Nina Glick-Schiller and Georges Fouron, "Everywhere we go, We are in Danger: Ti Manno and the emergence of a Haitian transnational identity." *American Ethnologist* 17.2 (May 1990): 329–347.

does the United States insist on classifying the vast majority of Haitians as economic migrants instead of political refugees? Furthermore, if few Haitians are "disciplined" for incorporation into the body politic of the United States, what is the ultimate purpose of their incarceration? The different political treatment of Cuban refugees, from the 1950s to the 1980s, is also instructive. In the context of the Cold War, Cuban asylum seekers were granted refugee status because they were fleeing a communist regime, while Haitians were regularly deported back to Duvalier's dictatorship. With the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, however, as Laguerre points out, "fleeing a Communist country was no longer the central feature of the definition [of "refugee"], and therefore there was no legal ground to separate the Cubans from the Haitians" (81). Anticipating a groundbreaking ruling by Judge James L. King, who found that U.S. policy toward Haitians was unconstitutional, President Carter set up the "Cuban-Haitian entrant" status on June 20, 1980. Laguerre shows that, despite this change, Haitians continued to be subjected to a double standard, a bleak political reality that deteriorated under President Reagan.

Charles reported on refugees right around the same time that President Reagan issued an executive order on the Coast Guard patrol of refugee boats.[23] As Laguerre observes, "this interdiction program, carried out on the high seas, precluded applicants from any access to legal advice" (*Diasporic Citizenship*, 82). It also helped to circumvent the Refugee Act of the previous year. According to A. Naomi Paik, "Interdiction violates the international juridical principle of freedom in international waters and the principle of nonreturn or *non-refoulement*, a cornerstone of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1980 Refugee Act" ("Carceral Quarantine at Guantánamo," 149). Charles is not surprised by continued executive and legislative machinations that effectively legitimized institutional racism. His persistent inquiries into opaque systems of internment suggest that he is still guided by Foucault's carceral archipelago, which Foucault defined as "un filet carcéral subtil, dégradé, avec des institutions compactes mais aussi des procédés parcellaires et diffus" (304). At the same time, Charles finds that Krome and Fort Allen, which operated mainly as holding centers for eventual deportation, do not fit this model. In this

23 President Ronald W. Reagan, "High Seas Interdiction of Illegal Aliens." Executive Order No. 12324, 29 September 1981, *Federal Register*, vol. 46, 1981, 48109. Cited in Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship*, 93.

respect, he anticipates the theoretical claims of Giorgio Agamben in the idea of "states of exception."[24]

Before going to Greer, Charles visits the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He drops in on the Flushing Avenue site, a nondescript building of brick and glass, during an unseasonably warm winter. The "nature" of this enclosure draws his attention. Greeted by the warden, Charles discovers separate quarters for men and women without windows onto the paradise outside. Curiously, as part of its repurposing, the erstwhile naval prison has been redecorated:

> Murs verts. Vert partout. C'est la prison verte. Pas un coin de ciel, on a remplacé la nature par son simulacre. Encore un peu, ils auraient peint un soleil d'été au plafond, et des cocotiers, des flamboyants, des scènes de la vie rurale antillaise, des cactus, et pourquoi pas quelques portraits de tontons-macoutes pour ne pas perdre de vue la différence. (38–39)

In his interview with the warden, Charles wonders aloud if the greening of this "Service Processing Center" does not betray a concern for the homesickness of the inmates. If so, he suggests that the painting is unfinished. How about a few more trees native to the Caribbean, and why not add some of Duvalier's henchmen to make it feel even more realistic? The irony here is twofold: the bureaucratic desire to transform a gloomy, claustrophobic space into a more natural setting, followed by Charles's withering deconstruction of this *trompe l'œil*. Staying with Foucault, he decries an invention of incarceration that appears to naturalize and thus legitimate the power to punish. "Il parvient à rendre naturel et légitime le pouvoir de punir," Foucault writes, "à abaisser le seuil de tolérance à la pénalité" (*Surveiller et punir*, 308). Earlier in the text, Charles had foreshadowed this contrarian approach to the plight of refugees. "À histoire tragique, écriture ironique," he writes (27). The conditions at the Brooklyn Navy Yard are as naturally threatening, Charles argues, as the everyday presence of *macoutes* in the homeland from which Haitians fled in the first place. Charles leaves Brooklyn without word of the fate of those being processed. Instead, the text shifts to describe the transfer of 120 Haitians from one high security

24 Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). See also Valerie Kaussen, "States of Exception: Haiti's IDP Camps." *Monthly Review* (February 2011): 37–42. Kaussen writes of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps: "what all these spaces share is the suspension of national, territorial law and its replacement by police power" (37).

prison (Krome) to another (Otisville, in upstate New York), in late summer 1981, following an apparent riot, after Haitians had protested the overcrowded conditions. As Charles reports, the governor of Florida, Bob Graham, called for new measures. One such solution was to isolate the alleged ringleaders of resistance and to redistribute hundreds of others to penitentiary networks all over the U.S. Yet, by dispersing Haitians, the U.S. government failed to resolve the question of their right to escape persecution and to seek asylum. In fact, the deferral of responsibility for the protection and adjudication of refugees instantiates the concept of the paradoxical "*faux mouvement*" that Charles identifies at the outset. It is a continuous displacement without arrival.

Miami is the hub of this intransitive migration. If the city stands as a glowing beacon of the northern Caribbean, its shorelines are closely guarded, and Krome operates as a fulcrum of dispersion to northern and southern sites of internment. As Charles observes, the beaches of Florida create but the illusion of hospitality. Charles reports on the tragedy of October 1981 at Hillsboro Beach, near Fort Lauderdale, where thirty-three people drowned after being trapped beneath the hull of a small sailboat that had capsized in the rough sea.[25] In his account, a police sergeant is courageous but late; a resident of a coastal villa has remorse after the fact. The contrast between luxury and poverty brings Charles to reflect on the global problem of capitalism and the waste it produces and discards. The odyssey of many boat-people leads to confinement on the eastern edge of the Everglades. There, Krome stands as a symbol of sovereign power:

> Le règne de l'enfermement: béton, grilles et barbelés, ballets d'uniformes. Le mirador de cette ancienne base de stockage de missiles Nike reconvertie en structure d'accueil pour les boat-people d'Haïti n'a pas bougé. Au loin un grouillement humain. Ils sont debout, couchés sur le sol, marchant, tournant en rond, dans ce qui donnent l'impression d'être une immense cage entourée à distance par les marécages. (96–97)

Unlike Greer and the Brooklyn Navy Yard, no effort is made to attenuate sovereign power. The watchtower still stands, only now it "welcomes" refugees in a huge cage, surrounded by swamps.[26] Officials

25 According to Max Dominique, this event was likely the source of Ollivier's *Passages*.

26 The photographer Gary Monroe documented the inmates' lives at Krome from 1980 to 1998. See Special Collections of Duke University Library, https://repository.duke.edu/dc/garymonroe (accessed September 5, 2017). See also Edwidge

at Krome show no tolerance for protest, going so far as to use tear gas on demonstrators from the outside of the camp and a faction of the detainees within. In his interview, Charles asks the Director if she would agree with many Haitians that Krome is a kind of concentration camp.[27] An unsettling question, but what else does one call this place, Charles wants to ask the Director, "cette protectrice-des-animaux-par-les-gaz" (104). "L'épithète de 'lacrymogène,'" he continues, "a l'avantage du vérisme mais l'inconvénient d'effacer à bon compte le fantasme réel qui habite Krome … " (104).

Following the refugees from Krome to Puerto Rico, Charles discovers Fort Allen. He begins by transcribing the seemingly neutral arithmetic language of bureaucracy: "'Fort Allen Processing Center', grilles et barbelés sur environ 1 kilomètre, camp délimité en 8 enclaves, à raison de 6 tentes par enclaves, 410 gardes au total, chaque détenu devant porter de façon visible son matricule" (175). Winding his way through the corridors, Charles is a witness to the misery of the refugees. "Sous les tentes," he observes, "règne l'ennui. Et la chaleur, le jour. Et le froid, la nuit. À ciel ouvert, c'est le Sahara par endroits bétonné: sans un arbre, mais aussi sans une chaise où s'asseoir, une table où poser ses dominos" (177). Harold Lidin, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, corroborates Charles's account. He writes, "Fort Allen is located on an isolated, scorchingly hot plain near Puerto Rico's south coast, about 70 miles from the capital city of San Juan. There are permanent quarters at Fort Allen, air-conditioned and currently unused, but the government built a 10-acre tent city to house the refugees." In addition to physical hardship, Haitians suffered the traumatic memory of a name simultaneously with the erasure of their

Danticat's moving description of her uncle's death in Krome in *Brother, I'm Dying* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

27 Charles was not the only journalist who compared the detention centers at Krome and Fort Allen to concentration camps. See Harold Lidin, "Future Brightens for Haiti Refugees as Sympathy Grows in Puerto Rico." *The Washington Post*, August 21, 1981. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/08/20/future-brightens-for-haiti-refugees-as-sympathy-grows-in-puerto-rico/89913e9e-e5ef-4aad-9f9b-ae29d92443ab/?utm_term=.c5d03624cd69 (accessed May 15, 2017). Lidin writes, "Photos of the tent city, the long strands of barbed wire that surround it, the squads of armed guards patrolling the compound, conjured up visions of concentration camps – distressing visions to many Puerto Ricans." Laguerre refers to *Newsweek*'s cover story of February 1, 1982, "The Haitians: Refugees or Prisoners," which described "jail-like conditions" and "concentration camps" (cited in *American Odyssey*, 11).

own names. One fort (Allen) recalls another (Dimanche, the infamous prison in Port-au-Prince). Upon arrival, Sodom Oralis – a name, Charles reminds his readers, that signals its rhetorical resistance to the colonial history of naming slaves – is reduced to the ID number A 26 007 837 (181). A few pages earlier, Charles had jotted down, "le poids des mots" (178). Words have weight, even when they are absent. They also lack complete meaning, as Charles struggles to put into words what he sees, first at Krome, then at Fort Allen. The incarcerated in Puerto Rico resist through song: "Nou ganyin yon késion pou nou pozé / Késion sa-a sé Reagan nous vlé pozé-l / … Si ou té ouè mizè-nou nan Fòtalin' / Li tap gin tan lagé tout Ayisyin" (184). As Sony Douyon sings, Charles can only transcribe this voice of the blues – "le son long plaintif, le chant de la perte" (186).

Testimony recorded, statistical evidence compiled, and spaces observed and passed through all overwhelm Charles. In the end, the experience leads him to conclude that "Fort Allen participe d'une *trame concentrationnaire* pour laquelle les mots manquent" (192, emphasis in original). Mindful of the historical meaning of "concentration camp," yet also refusing to remain "imprisoned" by it (191), Charles argues that this web constitutes a new form that traps all possible alternatives to describe the internment of Haitians in the late twentieth century (*exode*, *boat-people*, *immigré*, *immigrant*, *réfugié politique*). A few years later, Nina Glick-Schiller and Georges Fouron arrive at the same conclusion: "Haitians, however, were rounded up and placed in federal 'detention centers' that were in fact concentration camps" ("Everywhere we go," 337).[28] Isolated in miserable cells, deprived of

28 Glick-Schiller and Fouron elaborate in a note:

> These detainees were denied any semblance of 'due process.' For example, the forms used by the INS to question the detainees as to whether or not they had grounds to request political refugee status had no place for the examiner to grant such status. Moreover, examiners did not speak Haitian Creole, lawyers who volunteered to defend the detainees were denied access to their clients … The detainees were also subjected to daily abuse, degradation, and intimidation on the part of the camps' guards … . (343)

Paik discusses the wave of refugees that followed the overthrow of Aristide by a military coup in late 1991. In her analysis of the infamous quarantine of Haitians who tested positive for HIV at Camp Bulkeley, part of the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo, Paik cites another reference to concentration camps. See Richard Cole, "'HIV Concentration Camp' Remains Despite Complaints by Feds, Military." *Associated Press*, December 12, 1992. See Paik, "Carceral Quarantine at Guantánamo," 167.

basic rights, surveilled by armed guards, refugees at Krome and Fort Allen had nowhere to go.

At the beginning of this chapter, I cite Charles's definition of this blockage: "une migration quasiment intransitive, d'un mouvement de départ dans le déchirement et d'arrivée toujours différée" (192). Thus, "trame concentrationnaire," not in the historical sense of a final solution, but rather an archipelago of enclosure without refuge. Instead of arriving at a destination prescribed by an ideology of peripheral islands and metropolitan centers – in Laguerre's sociological study, New York – refugees find themselves caught in a loop of a carceral system that keeps them dispersed and isolated, either in an artificial environment that estranges children from kinship and culture, or in stifling enclaves that dehumanize detainees.

A "trame" is also a collection of narrative threads drawn together for a plot. Like Yves Allégret's 1949 film *Une si jolie petite plage*, which surely inspired its title, Charles's text operates in the mode of irony. In the film, a man named Pierre returns to a beachfront hotel where he worked as a boy. Having come back to the scene of his miserable past as an abused ward of the state, Pierre attempts to help another orphan avoid a similar fate. In the final moments, with the police on his tail, Pierre walks alone on the beach, heading toward a small shack he had built himself years before. Rather than flee the provincial seaside town, it appears he has chosen to commit suicide. In a final tracking shot, the camera withdraws rapidly, like a tide rushing out, revealing an endless beach from which Pierre could not escape. Saturated in melancholy and despair, Allégret's film is a somber depiction of a bourgeois society and the vulnerable people who suffer its hypocrisy. Charles is clearly drawn to its critique of the degradation of beauty and youth, and to its long shots of a shoreline that captures the absolute desolation of its protagonist. Just as there is no way out for Pierre, there is no way in for Jean-Baptiste, Eddy-la-Fuite, and Mireille-la-Fugue, three of the young refugees that Charles had met at Greer-Woodycrest.

De si jolies petites plages exposes what might be called an "anti-Relation," or the ecological drive that Glissant defined as the quest for territorial supremacy. Charles assails the manipulation of shorelines in the intertwined ideologies of hospitality and tourism, neoliberal economic development, and national security. Networks of incarceration make possible and legitimate, or naturalize, the inequalities of human shores. In three different sections, Charles places in epigraph passages from the Berlitz Guide on the Florida coast; reveries of the Bahamas

pressed on t-shirts, and descriptions of postcards from Puerto Rico. As he reminds readers, the route from Haiti to the U.S. takes refugees along a string of islands in a zone of high pressure. Each cliché, each picturesque view promotes a fantastic idea of the Caribbean that conceals a nightmarish journey for migrants. The essay closes with the "lumière crue" (192) of the final journey of a young man who ended up in Fort Allen. His name was *Prophète*, and the only way out, Charles reports, was to hang himself: "il a abordé les plages de ce pays où n'existe aucun contrôle d'identité, ce que les Haïtiens ont coutûme d'appeler le 'Pays sans chapeau', devant lequel traditionnellement il convient de se découvrir, et de crier" (244–245).

Haiti in *Manhattan Blues* and *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris*

> Je devrais lui raconter l'odyssée des boat-people à travers les Caraïbes.
>
> Jean-Claude Charles, *Manhattan Blues*, 167

In his review of *De si jolies petites plages*, Leslie Péan writes, "Le livre a la facture d'une symphonie. Avec ouverture et finale. Une musique de quatre saisons" ("Journal de voyage de Jean-Claude Charles," 21). And yet, like the fiction that follows, it is also crafted in the rhythms of blues and jazz. Charles opens and closes with a nod to Charles Mingus.[29] "La contrebasse de Charlie m'a lâché en pleine nuit," he writes, "avec ces idées qu'on dit noires … " (*De si jolies petites plages*, 11). In "Haitian Fight Song," recorded in 1957, Mingus opens with a bass solo, and the other members of his Jazz Workshop soon join him. Barely a minute into the piece, just as the group has found a rhythm, Mingus lets out a high-pitched wail. For Scott Saul, "Mingus starts screaming for freedom" (*Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, 1).[30] Saul then asks, "What sort of music puts tension, anger, and ecstasy at the heart of its aesthetic, and understands freedom as the sound of struggle?" (2). Something of the "hard bop" jazz that, as Saul points out, thrived during the civil

29 Charles's identification with Mingus ran deep. In the final pages of *Le corps noir* he writes that, listening to Mingus, he could imagine the experience of growing up in Watts, Los Angeles, as Mingus did.

30 Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

rights movement in the U.S. finds its way into Charles's writing. It allows him to scream in anger and sadness after reading the news about Prophète. It is a cry of mourning and protest all at once.

How does the experience of writing about the incarceration of Haitians seep into his fiction? How do the music and voices of blues and jazz inflect the novelistic representations of his *enracinerrance* between New York and Paris? And what about the place of Vodou – its spirits, chants, and drumbeats – in this dialogue? There are some references to Vodou in relation to the beliefs and rituals of Haitian refugees, but Charles does not go beneath the surface of this dimension of their stories. These are all big questions, to be sure, and because I have elected to focus on *De si jolies petites plages* they cannot be fully addressed here. To bring this chapter to a close, I would like to sketch out a couple of lines of inquiry relating to the ways these novels dwell on (and in) passages between geography and history by grappling with different experiences of Haitian migrants, refugees, and exiles.

Manhattan Blues and its sequel *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris* offer a way to reread *De si jolies petites plages* from the perspective of Charles's alter ego, Ferdinand.[31] Perhaps named after another jazz legend, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton, Ferdinand, like Charles, is a novelist who left his native Haiti at a young age. He is also a journalist, who has taken up the cause of Haitian boat-people. There are parallels here with Ollivier's portrayal of Normand, in *Passages*, as a journalist also committed to the plight of refugees. In her study of Charles's texts, Lucienne Nicolas argues that, above all, the narrator seeks to "se situer par rapport au monde" (*Espaces urbains*, 119, 129). In drawing this conclusion, Nicolas focuses on *Manhattan Blues* and *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris*. She cites a key line near the end of the latter: "Je n'appartiens à personne d'autre que moi-même," Ferdinand declares, "Je n'appartiens à d'autre lieu qu'au monde" (*FP*, 228–229). Nicolas reads this affirmation as evidence of Charles's aesthetic commitment to *enracinerrance*. For Nicolas, what this final novel shows, and what *Manhattan Blues* registers on a lower frequency, is that Ferdinand has always carried "la terre de l'enfance … par la mémoire et l'imaginaire" (102). This is a convincing argument, and Nicolas's attention to the urban spaces of New York and Paris in

31 One could also include *Bamboola bamboche*, the novel that Charles published two years after *De si jolies petites plages*. I have elected to focus on *Manhattan Blues* and *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris* because they evoke the plight of refugees in a more direct and sustained manner than *Bamboola bamboche*.

terms of a practiced *errance*, steeped in the writer's memories of Haiti, provides an ecocritical analysis that complements this chapter's study of *De si jolies petites plages*. What is more, *Espaces urbains* examines the musicality of Charles's writing, and especially the melancholy of *Manhattan Blues*, whose syntactical structures, narrative techniques, moods, and varying intonations echo the minor chords and rhythms of the blues and the drumbeats of jazz.

In both novels, Ferdinand situates himself in the world by evoking the mournfulness of this music, its songs of loss, intense love, and inevitable rupture. The world of Ferdinand, like that of Charles himself, is the triangle of Europe and the Americas, across the Atlantic and around the Caribbean. Across both novels, the narrator speaks from the vantage point of all three locations. From Haiti, however, Ferdinand relates only a passing view from the window seat of an airplane. The rest of the account from Haiti comes either after the fact or from a historical perspective. In *Manhattan Blues*, Ferdinand flies from Paris to New York to work and to see his on-again, off-again love, Jenny. It is a terrible flight, not only because of the bad food and cheap wine, but also because he has nowhere to put his long legs.[32] The wanderer needs room to stretch his legs, and this is precisely what Ferdinand will do over the course of three days in New York. At the moment, Jenny is in love with someone else, and, after a brief meeting with her to retrieve the keys to her apartment, Ferdinand soon meets another woman, Fran, in a café. For the rest of the novel, Ferdinand and Fran walk and ride all over the city; it is a complicated love story because, during this fleeting yet intense affair, Ferdinand cannot stop thinking about his love for Jenny.

Charles wrote *Manhattan Blues* at the height of the Reagan era. The novel depicts the metropolis of global capitalism and those who inhabit the fringes of a consumer-based society. But he had also just published *De si jolies petites plages*, and the vivid memories of that journey accompany him on his transatlantic crossing. As soon as he disembarks, he gets into a cab with a Haitian driver, who talks about boat-people in internment camps. He remarks to Ferdinand, "Ils n'ont rien choisi à part se barrer d'un pays dont ils n'avaient plus rien à foutre" (*MB*, 13). Ferdinand listens but says to himself, "je connais la chanson,

32 In *Les années 80 dans ma vieille Ford* (Montreal: Mémoire d'Encrier, 2005), Dany Laferrière makes a playful connection between Charles's long legs and his need to be on the move: "Charles ne sait pas où mettre ses jambes. Il est un peu nerveux, vif, rapide. On dirait un homme toujours de passage" (169).

autant que lui, sinon plus" (13). In some sense, his time with Fran and their meandering around New York represent the struggle to resume daily rituals and to reflect on his perpetual migration in relation to the odysseys of the boat-people. While Fran's sense of history is personal (about her family and her relationship with Bill, her abusive on-again, off-again lover), Ferdinand contemplates a deeper history. During a walk with Fran, Ferdinand ponders this difference:

> Comme si elle tenait à nommer chaque chose. Comme d'annoncer que l'histoire commence, alors qu'on sait parfaitement qu'elle ne commence pas, qu'elle a commencé ailleurs, en un autre temps, en un autre lieu, ou qu'elle n'a jamais commencé, qu'elle ne fait que poursuivre, qu'elle s'arrêtera ou ne s'arrêtera pas, que de toute façon nous ne serons plus là, mais ça rassure d'arrêter un point quelque part et d'annoncer que l'histoire commence. (173)

In this passage rich with a Benjaminian understanding of history, Charles rejects the idea of new beginnings implicit in a notion of history as progress. The impossible choice of boat-people must be seen in a longer view of history between Haiti and the U.S. This is one reason why Ferdinand cannot let go of Jenny. Through her Polish grandmother she incarnates a subversive history from below, when Polish soldiers defected from Bonaparte's army to fight with the ex-slaves of Saint-Domingue.

Manhattan Blues is about a writer with a deep awareness of history and a consciousness of struggle. *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris* picks up with the hero, though still in love with Jenny, back in his apartment in the 10th arrondissement of Paris. Just waking up, Ferdinand muses that their lives will be spent between New York and Paris, but they will never live together: "Nous vieillirons entre deux villes," he thinks, "avec entre nous ce pays naguère interdit, désormais permis, en tout cas ma mémoire" (*FP*, 16). As in the previous novel, Haiti enters the novelist's field of vision. This time, however, it is not in relation to the exiled writer or to incarcerated refugees, but rather to events in the country itself. As Nicolas contends, *Ferdinand, Je suis à Paris* is about the possible return to the native land. Once a dormant memory, Haiti re-emerges after thirty years of dictatorship. And yet, from the start, the novel thwarts any sense of hope. Although his editor contacts him to get ready for a trip to Port-au-Prince to report on the aftermath of the ouster of Jean-Claude Duvalier, Ferdinand is seemingly more concerned with Jenny. As the title indicates, Jenny announces her arrival in Paris; in fact, she has left him a message that she has already arrived. For much of the novel, Haiti

remains in the background, while Ferdinand first has trouble finding Jenny, then struggles to connect with her on an emotional level.

Ferdinand's wandering around Paris becomes more isolating as the likelihood grows of returning to Haiti. Jenny remains a fragile but necessary source of protection against the history of the country of his youth. Like Brigitte, the refugee of *Passages*, Ferdinand meditates on five centuries of "images du désastre" (66). In this respect, he is another kind of *galérien moderne*; however, unlike Brigitte, he will not be repatriated. The possibility of a reformed Haiti and the inability to find common ground with Jenny bring Ferdinand to re-examine his life in Paris. As he reviews a manuscript in progress, he thinks about his "tourments":

> Je voulais écrire comment je porte sur les lieux, les choses et les gens de ce pays où je vis, dont j'ai acquis la citoyenneté, un regard à la fois complice et radicalement étranger, comment mes souvenirs sont appelés par un motif, une image, une idée, une parole prononcée, une musique entendue, quelque chose de passé plaçant alors l'histoire immédiate dans *une lumière crue, irréfutable* … . (138, emphasis added)

To the reader of *De si jolies petites plages*, the language jumps off the page. If part of the project of that essay was ethical and political – to shed this raw light on the biographies of boat-people – then the role of the immigrant writer is to show how his past challenges the norms of the republic that has granted him a place and where he has obtained citizenship. Danticat's reflections on the "immigrant artist at work" owe much to Charles, and specifically the dual complexity of this perspective, at once inside (*complice*) and outside (*radicalement étranger*). The above passage is striking for the way it reveals Charles's aesthetic ambition, which might also be understood as a kind of scriptural "voye pwen." "Throwing a point" is an aspect of Haitian music and popular culture that, like a repartee, criticizes by way of indirect language. In this light, Ferdinand's position in Paris, in both his personal relationships and in his writing, is a dialogue between belonging and foreignness.

The role of the writer is sketched out by Ferdinand on a good day, what he calls a "journée lisse" (137). There are rough waters ahead, however, as he is tasked to travel to Haiti. "Tout chavire" (150), Ferdinand says as he puts down the phone. The news staggers him, and everything starts to move around him, "comme un soudain tremblement de terre" (151). To describe the sensation of sudden destabilization, Charles mixes metaphors: "chavirer" refers to a boat that capsizes, but it can also denote the more general idea of being knocked over, as when the ground

moves during an earthquake. Ferdinand resolves to make the journey, yet the only real-time narration of Haiti comes from the plane, as he flies above a familiar countryside. Along with green hillsides and truck routes, he also recalls images of drought, erosion, and cyclones. "Qu'on m'explique pourquoi … les fléaux de toutes sortes préfèrent les pays du Sud," he remarks, "Pourquoi je me déplace avec cette lourdeur de qui porterait plusieurs millénaires d'injustice dans ses os" (157). Even before he lands, the view of this landscape brings forth memories of injustice, political and natural, that shed a light "trop vive, trop crue" (157). With the harsh light turned on him, the time spent on the ground in Haiti is elided, as if Ferdinand is unable to narrate this part of the story.

After a short break, the novel resumes with Ferdinand back in Paris, but in a hotel room instead of his apartment. In the space of this "lieu de passage" he is able to write the article on the end of the dictatorship. Charles includes snippets of the text, framed in the chapter "Un si long exil." For the Haitian people, Ferdinand writes in a fever, the liberation promised an end to the "*horreur absolue de cette dictature*" (171, emphasis in original); for journalists, he adds, "c'étaient les conditions de travail les plus passionnantes qui puissent se présenter, la fin de trente années d'agonie" (172). As he nears the end of the article, Ferdinand know his brief stay in the hotel is coming to an end. He has serious doubts about the future: "maintenant il va falloir s'atteler à cette reconstruction, en aurons-nous les ressources mentales?" (177). This passage moves seamlessly from a reflection on post-Duvalier Haiti to Jenny and life between Paris and New York. The "non-place" of the hotel – he could be in Paris, New York, or Port-au-Prince – allows multiple spaces and times to converge, such that a historical disaster is also a private one. In writing Ferdinand's itinerary, from New York to Paris, Paris to Port-au-Prince and back, Charles creates a troubled mood of uneven rhythms. A quiet rage is building on a chord of despair, and the reader senses that his protagonist needs a way out.

Back home, Ferdinand prepares a bath, only to fall asleep and accidentally flood the apartment. Beyond the physical damage, the inundation also does harm to his relationships and his mental well-being. The fear of drowning, like a refugee in a maritime disaster, had begun to pull him under before going to Haiti and has only intensified upon his return. Writing the article, Ferdinand initially experienced a rush of liberation. But confronting post-Duvalier violence leads to withdrawal. "Je savais que les images d'Haïti allaient continuer à me submerger," he confesses (*FP*, 218). To stay afloat, he lets out a cry of rage, directed

at Jenny. The migrant writer is drowning in a history that he feels all around him, but that is also far away. As he explains, "Je marche dans Paris sans voir Paris. Je revois des scènes vécues en Haïti. Avons-nous troqué la mort contre la mort? … Je marche dans un lointain pays dévasté" (224). The fury unleashed at his love is a violent utterance that brings to the surface a complex range of emotions. Charles depicts a protagonist who shouts and curses, but does not reveal the content of this frustration and anger. Trapped in a series of impasses, from the intransitive migration of boat-people and the continued violence of post-Duvalier Haiti to the blocked intimacy with Jenny, Ferdinand lets out a Mingus-like scream for freedom.

Conclusion

The writings of Charles, Ollivier, and Philoctète are a product of the last decade of the Duvalier era and its aftermath. In this critical moment of Haitian history, when hope for a democratic future leads to despair in the face of continued violence, their texts interrogate multiple sites and histories of migration, refuge, and incarceration. Philoctète turned to the past, while Ollivier and Charles stayed with the events unfolding around them. *Le peuple des terres mêlées* evokes the 1937 massacre, when migrants at the borderland of Haiti and the Dominican Republic were targeted by triumphant, racist myths of national pride. In *Passages* refugees capsize off the coast of Florida, and *De si jolies passages* reports on their internment in camps dispersed in the Caribbean and throughout the United States. These texts mediate the diverse environments through which their subjects move in search of refuge. Philoctète offers a poetics of hopeful restoration of a border that was a silent witness to genocidal violence, while Ollivier deplores the dispossession of a coastal environment and Charles reveals the inhuman spaces of carceral control. All three writers inscribe in these texts an ecological politics that takes up the cause of refugees by taking apart the grand narrative of Western modernity as a vision of forward-looking progress and a place of welcoming shores and by shedding light on the shadows of globalization and the exceptional violence of sovereign powers. For Ollivier and Charles, the fate of these modern *galériens*, whether as fictional characters or detained interlocutors, weighed on theoretical and personal narratives of "migrant writing" and "enracinerrance" with vexing, circular histories of precarity and degradation.

Part Two

Literary Witnesses

CHAPTER THREE

The Banality of Disaster

> An archive may be largely about 'the past' but it is always 're-read' in the light of the present and the future.
>
> Stuart Hall, "Constituting An Archive," 92

As an archive in the dual sense articulated above – a collection of documents and a creative process that makes sense of the present by revisiting the past – the texts examined in Part One understand history as an invisible border of fluid temporalities and ever-changing environments. Published during the transition from the late stages of the Duvalier era to the Aristide years, they attest to environmental and ecological dimensions of historical migrations of Haitians. The principle of the archival function continues to inform the historical frame of this second section. In the transition from Part One, the eco-archive lives on, reread and updated, in the works of succeeding generations. To borrow from Stuart Hall, it is a "'living archive,' whose construction must be seen as an on-going, never-completed project" ("Constituting An Archive," 89). Hall is influenced by Foucault's understanding of the discursive boundaries of the heterogeneous materials of the archive, which, as I reviewed above, are marked by the play between rupture and continuity. Hall adds a diasporic perspective, focusing in part on the question of origins and locations, to underscore the inherent incompleteness of archives. He writes:

> It is impossible to describe an archive in its totality. The very idea of a 'living archive' contradicts this fantasy of completeness. As work is produced, one is, as it were, contributing to and extending the limits of that to which one is contributing. It cannot be complete because our present practice immediately adds to it, and our new interpretations inflect it differently. An archive may largely be about 'the past' but it is

always 're-read' in the light of the present and the future … ("Constituting An Archive," 91–92)

Much like Jean-Claude Charles, whose protagonist in *Manhattan Blues* proclaimed that history always begins somewhere else, Hall draws on Walter Benjamin's concept of *jetztzeit*, or the constellation of past and present of the "now-being."[1] The danger, as Benjamin forewarned and as Hall recalls here, is to imprison the past in a single idea in the name of forward progress. As Hall conceives it, archiving is to contribute to a collection within a given cultural authority but also to contest it with a view to the future. In this sense, it is "*an interruption* in a settled field" (92, emphasis in original).

Rachel Douglas also writes against the inertia of what Hall describes as the "museum of dead works" ("Constituting An Archive," 89). Working in the field of Haitian literary studies, Douglas appeals to Hall to argue for the reconstructive force of the living archive in the wake of the destruction of several archival structures in the earthquake.[2] She points out that the ruins of institutions and monuments, along with the deaths of scores of the population, including artists and writers, also meant the loss of material archives. It is also true that the migration of earlier generations of Haitians, not to mention the dispersal of documents related to the colonial, revolutionary, and post-Independence periods to public and private sites of multiple nations, had already weakened archival foundations.[3] Yet it is undeniable that the earthquake wrought

1 See Thesis XIV of "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (*Illuminations*, 261). I return to Benjamin in Chapter Five.

2 Douglas has written elsewhere of the formal process of rewriting in the Spiralist literature of Frankétienne, Philoctète, and Jean-Claude Fignolé. See Rachel Douglas, *Frankétienne and Rewriting: A Work in Progress* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

3 In their fascinating work on ties between King Henry Christophe's court (1811–1820) and several European governments (notably England and Germany), Tabitha McIntosh and Grégory Pierrot discuss a range of artwork, official papers, and other memorabilia that have long been scattered on both sides of the Atlantic after Christophe's demise. As they put it, there is a veritable "black market for black history." See Tabitha McIntosh and Grégory Pierrot, "In the Court of the Mohrenkönig: Germans in Henry's Kingdom of Haiti." Unpublished paper, Annual Conference of the Haitian Studies Association, November 3, 2017 (New Orleans: Xavier University). See also Tabitha McIntosh and Grégory Pierrot, "Capturing the Likeness of Henry I of Haiti (1805–1822)." *Atlantic Studies* 14.2 (2017): 127–151.

extensive damage to national archives and libraries. Douglas's insight is that books published in the aftermath function as archives themselves. "If we can shift from seeing archives only as inert historical collections," she proposes, "stable repositories of material, depositories of documents … then archival work can also be seen as a *process*, with Haitian writers as integral parts of this archive storytelling" ("Writing the Haitian Earthquake," 391; emphasis in original). To develop this claim, Douglas adapts genetic criticism to a materialist practice of postcolonial studies to examine various editions of texts, especially Lahens's *Failles* and Frankétienne's play, *Melovivi* (*Le piège* in French). She finds that such rewriting and reassembling are evidence of a desire to rebuild Haiti. Douglas echoes Laura Loth, who writes, "Rebuilding Haiti entails a similar model as the project of rereading and rewriting that has been taken up by Yanick Lahens in her post-earthquake narratives" ("(Re)Reading the Ruins: Yanick Lahens's Post-Earthquake Narrative Revisions," 138). Furthermore, when viewed through the dual history of the difficulty of publishing in the country and, until recently, a lack of support from French presses for the publication of Haitian literature, these post-earthquake texts perform like archives, Douglas continues, in their "continuous production" ("Writing the Haitian Earthquake," 402), picking up fragments and adding new material to existing narratives. The intertextual memorialization of natural spaces of the eco-archive finds a partner in Douglas's argument for the "emergence of a new postcolonial archival-type writing" (389). She concludes that this textual archiving is tantamount to a "creative reconstruction" of Haiti (402). Paraphrasing Hall, Douglas contends that these texts are fundamentally concerned with "rereading the past in light of the present and future" (402).

The chapter opens with an attempt to define the idea of the "literary witness" that emerges in *Failles* by considering intertwined questions of form and ethics. It addresses Lahens's reflection on the space between witnessing and bearing witness, or between experience and text, as well as the ethical relationship between self and other, individual and collective. *Failles* is part testimony, part chronicle, and these modes overlap as the writer grapples with the effects of the earthquake on the daily activity of writing and, more broadly, on the role of the arts and literature in making sense of the historical repercussions of the event. This question is a source of personal and collective angst for both Lahens and Danticat as their texts move from individual to collective concerns, and even to global issues. For Lahens, the earthquake reinforced clichéd understandings of Haiti as the site of catastrophe. As a writer, Lahens

must confront the vexing problem of Haitian exceptionalism and its dual poles of attraction. Namely, Haiti is invoked negatively as the poorest country in the hemisphere, while, in an ostensibly more positive light, Haitians are extolled for their resilience.[4] The second part of the chapter examines the textual negotiation with disaster that Lahens undertakes in *Failles*. It shows how she unsettles received ideas on disaster, first by deconstructing their supposed natural, or normal, appearance in Haiti, and second by contextualizing them in a longer history. Lahens's recognition of the collision of human and planetary time in the earthquake develops into a critique of longstanding social and political differences in Haiti and, by extension, in the wider spaces in which Haitians have migrated and sought refuge.

Failles addresses a range of topics that, Lahens insists, are critical to a more comprehensive understanding of the historical dimensions of the earthquake and their implications for the present and future of Haiti. These include brief reflections on the Haitian revolution, on U.S. occupations, and on the related problems of humanitarian intervention and international aid. Published a mere six months after the earthquake, *Failles* is a relatively thin text that feels fragmented and open-ended. The final part of the chapter argues that the concern for the ongoing vulnerability of the Haitian people in what Lahens calls "the banality of disaster" is a central theme of the fiction writing that precedes and follows *Failles*. As a literary witness writing under the limitations of different forms and with the varying expectations and knowledge of her reading public, Lahens takes on the durable perception of disaster as ordinary.

Between Chronicle and Testimony: Questions of Time and Ethics

Failles is a firsthand account of the days and weeks following the earthquake, during which Lahens takes in the landscape of devastation and takes note of the living and the dead. This definition is consistent with her explanation of the kind of text that was taking shape in a letter to the jury of the PACA literary prize, for which she was a finalist. Serving as a proxy, her editor, Sabine Wespieser, read the following:

4 On the two poles of idealization and degradation in representations of Haiti, see Nadège Clitandre, "Haitian Exceptionalism in the Caribbean and the Project of Rebuilding Haiti." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 17.2 (2011): 146–153.

"Dès le mercredi 13 janvier 2010, j'ai commencé par tenir une chronique avec une simple comptabilité des faits et une description que je voulais la plus précise qui soit des dommages. Et bien sûr de la détresse" (*Failles*, 91). If these descriptions are fraught with a whirl of emotions – horror, grief, sadness, and anger, but also relief, pride, and even moments of happiness – at the scenes she witnesses, they are also burdened with questions about the possibility of writing. Throughout, Lahens asks a stream of questions about what to write and about the capacity of literature to be up to the measure of tragedy.

Lahens explains that *Failles* began as a chronicle. The etymology of this generic term points to a linear account of events that imposes a descriptive narration that enables Lahens to begin to put words on the page. However, as the break in the above passage implies, such accounting only gets so far, as it becomes an impossible, morbid task in the face of devastation. How does one tally suffering? This question exceeds the limited boundaries that Lahens initially sets on the form of the chronicle. An accomplished essay writer, she knows full well that the chronicle has long been a hybrid genre, capable of taking on many forms – historiographic, journalistic, anthropological, and literary – depending on the personal, cultural, and social contexts in which the author writes. Therefore, it makes sense that Lahens would start with the chronicle and then ask what other forms of writing are demanded by the earthquake.

Much critical work has been done on the chronicle and various genres related to it.[5] Likewise, studies of testimonial, autobiographical, and essayistic writing abound in Haitian, Caribbean, and Latin American studies.[6] My aim is to build on some key findings to frame close readings below. I have begun to demonstrate that *Failles* holds true to some of the

5 See Ignacio Corona and Beth E. Jörgensen, eds, *The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle: Theoretical Perspectives on the Liminal Genre* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); see also Anderson, *Disaster Writing*.

6 See John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Georg M. Gugelberger, ed., *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); A. James Arnold, ed., with Julio Rodriguez-Luis and J. Michael Dash, *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, Volume 1: Hispanic and Francophone Regions* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994); Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography*; Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy*; Raphael Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); and Shemak, *Asylum Speakers*.

conventions of the chronicle, and it can also be read within the porous boundaries of testimonial literature. *Create Dangerously* fits within the requirements of each genre, if in different ways. However, I am more interested in the connections between these texts and the fictional writing that overlaps with and succeeds them, and especially in the ways that fragments of non-fiction are revised and rewritten into creative literature.

Whether in Latin American, Caribbean, or European traditions, it is generally understood that the chronicle developed into a hybrid genre. The chronicler makes a record of events by keeping track in linear fashion but also adds personal observation or analysis. In their study, Corona and Jörgensen acknowledge the colonial history of Spanish American chronicles of European conquest as an important, if far removed, background to practices and theories of Mexican chronicles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Corona and Jörgensen demonstrate, scholars had relegated the chronicle, and non-fiction writing more broadly, to the margins of literary studies. By adopting a cultural studies approach, Corona and Jörgensen examine the social practices of chroniclers and the evolving social and political functions of a genre that crosses many discursive boundaries. Working within the practice of journalism, they find an array of documentary and testimonial modes, as well as more artistically oriented prose influenced by the French tradition of the *chronique* in the early to mid-twentieth century.[7] Ultimately, they make the case for a "flexible, fleeting, and yet always contemporaneous genre" (*The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle*, 13).

The articles and chronicles edited by Corona and Jörgensen inform Anderson's study of the mediating role of *crónicas* in the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City. Anderson opens with a succinct description of the hybridity of the genre: that is, how the journalist weaves individual experience into larger social causes. At first glance, he is arguably less interested in questions of literariness than in the strategic symbiosis between the massive output of these texts and popular organizations that sought to enact political reforms. As he asserts in a more robust definition: "The *crónica*'s use of documentary and testimonial modes of discourse is highly effective in legitimizing political ideology with the objectivity of shared experience, while the inclusion of subjective observation and commentary provides a space for theorizing local political phenomena" (*Disaster Writing*, 164). Anderson

7 See Albert Camus's journalistic articles collected in *Actuelles III: Chroniques algériennes 1939–1958* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958).

makes a convincing case for the political role of cultural production. In the attempt to organize such a large corpus, he also highlights the literary dimensions of its content. He teases out four "thematic phases" (165), going from personal experience to collective trauma, and from the documentation of dire material circumstances of the people and simultaneous outrage at the inadequate response of the government to historical and theoretical reflections on disaster. As one would expect, Anderson contends that, with some overlap, these phases developed more or less chronologically. For Corona and Jörgensen, such a straightforward analysis is likely the result of a literary study that makes assumptions about the organic causal structure of themes and tropes. Anderson is alert to this critique, as he identifies a transition from the bundle of *crónicas* published in newspapers in the year and a half after the earthquake to the appearance of "more formal literary representations" closer to the 1988 presidential elections (172). In the closing stages of the chapter, Anderson performs a more sustained literary analysis of the tropes, language, vocabulary, and "collage-like structures" (178) of these later texts, which include various forms of testimonials and essays. Moving beyond the temporal limits of the *crónica*, they situated the earthquake in a deeper historical context and sought to create a "new grammar of Mexican nationalism and citizenship ... " (179).

Anderson's analysis of the public role of the Mexican *crónica* offers many insights for the study of writers elsewhere in the Caribbean who published opinion pieces in news outlets in the Americas and Europe during key historical moments prior to and after the Haitian earthquake of 2010. The movement between personal and documentary modes recalls Ollivier's and Charles's reporting on the fate of boat-people, and, indeed, one might arguably locate Charles's *De si jolies petites plages* in a similar shift as that from journalistic to literary text that Anderson observes following the Mexican earthquake.[8] Moreover, in addition to Lahens, Kettly Mars and Junot Diaz, to name but two writers, published editorials in the wake of the earthquake.[9]

8 One could also include Gary Victor's *Collier de débris* (Montreal: Mémoire d'Encrier, 2013), a fictional chronicle of a woman who loses her husband and son in the earthquake but rebuilds her life as she works with a crew to remove debris from various neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince.

9 Kettly Mars, "Haiti without Walls." *New York Times*, January 1, 2011; Junot Diaz, "Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal." *Boston Review*, May/June 2011. See Walsh, "Reading (in the) Ruins."

Munro frames the essays of several Haitian writers, including Lahens and Danticat, under the heading of "going public" in a way that gestures to the ethics of writing about the earthquake (*Writing on the Fault Line*, 22). He begins by underscoring the tradition of essay writing in the history of Haitian letters. Like Douglas and Popkin, he also acknowledges the different types of testimony that emerged between oral histories such as the Haiti Memory Project and the texts of established authors. Munro situates these essays between the tradition of the *crónica* examined by Anderson and testimony, especially the Latin American form of the *testimonio* that John Beverley defined in his seminal essay "The Margin at the Center." Beverley defines it as an umbrella term for an array of non-fictional texts "told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or significant life experience" (*Testimonio*, 31). Like the *crónica*, it is a "protean and demotic form," Beverley continues, "not yet subject to legislation by a normative literary establishment … " (*Testimonio*, 31). Unlike the *crónica*, whose marginalization in literary studies owed more to its connection to journalism, the *testimonio* existed on the periphery of literary genres precisely because, Beverley contends, it "appears where the adequacy of existing literary forms and styles – even of the dominant language itself – for the representation of the subaltern has entered into crisis" (49). By the time Munro is writing, a quarter of a century later, the genre of *testimonio* remains fluid, yet its links to the question of subaltern agency, as well as the representation of the subaltern, have settled into multiple academic disciplines. However, the use of the term by Munro and April Shemak in the context of Haitian studies attests to the continued power of its political charge.

In Beverley's analysis of *testimonio*, the intentionality of the narrator is tied to an urgent collective concern. In this sense, the narrator's voice is more personal than that of the chronicler but has in common the representation of a community's problems. As with the *crónica*, the literariness of the testimonial has also become a key aspect of its generic hybridity, often stirring heated debate about authenticity. For example, Shemak cites the differing views of Beverley and Alberto Moreiras, and especially the latter's criticism of the "fetishizing" of testimonio (*Asylum Speakers*, 27).[10] Munro is drawn to the question of temporality contained within

10 Shemak cites Alberto Moreiras, "The Aura of Testimonio," in Gugelberger, *The Real Thing*, 198.

the *crónica* and to the testimonial's capacity to represent witnessing as it moves from the individual to the collective. Furthermore, the political role of both forms helps in an understanding of the essays of Lahens, Danticat, and Laferrière in relation to their fictional endeavors. Munro's overarching claim is twofold: first, both the form and the ideas developed in these essays "have a provisional quality" (70); second, in contrast to the context of the Mexico City earthquake, the weak structures of the Haitian state mitigated any real impact that these essays might have had in terms of a connection with popular political mobilization. This last point is indisputable, and it also raises the question of the intended readership of these texts. However, the argument concerning the transitory nature of these texts, the idea that they "record a specific period of time" (*Writing on the Fault Line*, 70), requires a closer look.

The essays of Lahens, Danticat, and Laferrière are provisional, Munro asserts, because they were updated and reprinted. This argument supports Douglas's analysis of the materiality of these texts. Yet, in this line of reasoning, the ideas conveyed are also impermanent, such that the earthquake would have created the conditions for temporary thought. These essays, Munro elaborates, "are a means of being able to write in the temporal and creative breach that the earthquake imposed on these writers, who in most cases hesitated before returning to writing fiction" (22). The writer grapples with the extraordinary dual power of the earthquake, which ruptures a sequential order of life *and* brings old questions to the surface. All the above writers contemplate this duality, yet the continuity of the latter calls into question Munro's assertion. In fact, in the context of the *crónica*, Anderson anticipates the argument that they are "grounded in the immediacy of the present" (169) and goes on to point out that their "thematic narratives … become useful in *long-term* political debates and projects" (169, emphasis added). Many of the problems unearthed by the earthquake, such as the precarity of living conditions for much of the population and the international infringement of Haitian sovereignty, are historical. In this sense, they had been archived but now demanded renewed attention. Lahens and Danticat may hesitate to return to fiction but not to writing and, in fact, the ideas that drive *Failles* and *Create Dangerously* are intertwined with fictional texts that precede and come after them. As Lahens writes regarding the intended short-term nature of tent camps, "D'ailleurs, dans cette île, tout provisoire est appelé à être permanent" (*Failles*, 83).

The earthquake opened a space in which time appears to stop, and the writer steps in to make sense of this rupture and to resume some

sort of routine. In this way, Lahens and Danticat must contend with the limits of the chronicle and testimony, but they do so because the subjects about which and for whom they write require the lived experience of the witness as well as the imagination of the storyteller. As Munro argues, the symbiosis of non-fiction and fiction is revealing of the political role of the artist and intellectual in the desire to call attention to the collective suffering of Haitians. To carry out this task, these texts reconnect to enduring questions and knowledge that the earthquake could not destroy.

***

> J'écris pour tenter de savoir / Juste un peu plus.
>
> Yanick Lahens, *Failles*, 17

This tentative declaration of intent – "I write to attempt to know. Just a little more" – underscores the ethical problems at stake for Lahens. How can she write about the earthquake, and to what ethical questions might she attest? Even though Lahens was present – she was a witness in the most basic sense of feeling and seeing it, of living through it – she admits to not yet having knowledge of it on some deeper level. In the immediacy of the event, she is not yet a reliable witness. In a way, she is unable to give evidence of it. Lahens makes a crucial distinction between witnessing and knowing: what does it mean to write, she asks, beyond the reporting of sensorial experience?

Lahens suggests a limitation to knowledge obtained through vision that recalls Emmanuel Levinas's skepticism regarding the face-to-face encounter between self and Other.[11] In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas argues that the self does not inherently possess a moral character. It comes to responsibility through the "face of the Other" (50–51). "The way in which the other presents himself," Levinas explains, "exceeding the idea of the other in me, we name here face" (50). The face-to-face encounter brings about only the "avidity of the gaze" (50). Vision alone cannot suffice as an ethical way of understanding because it is but the "neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an

11 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'Extériorité* (La Haye: Nijhoff, 1961); *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

object – appearing, that is, taking its place in the light – is precisely his reduction to the same" (43). The gaze is "transformed into generosity [*se muant en générosité*]" only through language, through the social capacity of discourse. The edifice upon which Levinas builds his definition of ethics disregards the idea of spontaneity: "We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics" (*Totality and Infinity*, 43).[12] As Jill Robbins observes, "The (ethical) encounter with the other interrupts the self's habitual economy and its tendency to conceive of the world as a space of possibilities and power [*pouvoir*]. It interrupts the play of the Same" ("Reading Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*," 137).[13] Levinas conceives of ethics in relation to language, an interpellation by an absolute alterity that is "welcomed [as] an interlocutor" (*Totality and Infinity*, 69).

Mindful of the abstractions of Levinas's thought, I have taken this short detour through the philosopher's ideas on otherness and responsibility because they help frame a central question of the ethics of Lahens's testimony. That is, if knowledge of the earthquake falls outside of the experience of what the "I" sees, then what is to be learned through what and to whom the "I" writes? Just prior to the disclaimer of a lack of knowledge that would emanate from the "j'écris," Lahens writes, "*Failles* fut le premier titre qui s'imposa à moi. Impossible d'entendre ce mot sans ressentir la point acérée d'un objet, là, dans la poitrine, à l'endroit du cœur" (*Failles*, 16). Because the earthquake "imposed itself," the text is a response or, in a Levinassian sense, a responsibility that passes from the outside to the self in a way that is sharply felt but not yet understood. In other words, the task that Lahens assigns to herself through writing is a constant search for knowledge that can only be found through engagement with others.

12 Levinas is in dialogue with Paul Ricœur. In *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), Ricœur makes an ethical claim that hypothesizes the spontaneous benevolence [*sollicitude*] of the self in relation to the other. He states, "Appelons 'visée éthique,' la visée de la 'bonne vie' avec et pour autrui dans des institutions justes" (202). Ricoeur's central objection is that Levinas turns the self into a passive subject in the face of otherness. For Levinas, however, Ricœur's model of ethics is a form of moral optimism.

13 As Robbins explains, Levinas also calls these kinds of self-serving interests, "economy of the Same," or that "fails to do justice to the other" (137).

In fact, the first line of *Failles* opens not with the singular "I" but with the collective "nous," not in the linear mode of the chronicle but in the mythic time of the fairy tale. From the beginning, Lahens positions the self in relation to community, near and far. The attempt to know is predicated on the connection between what she and her neighbors have seen and felt, and the conviction that this experience can be conveyed to her readers – indeed, that it will mean something to this disparate group of others. Throughout, the text alternates between the individual "j'écris" and the broader "nous." If writing as a search for this combined knowledge is an extended metaphor in *Failles*, it is because the direct approach to witnessing Haitian history has largely failed to change the narrative of exceptionalism. Perhaps, then, where the chronicle is unable to persuade readers, the rhetorical power of a testimony conceived as a shared voice can reach them in other ways. Following the tentative affirmation cited above, she continues, "Mais je ne guérirai pas / Je ne veux pas guérir. Je n'écris pas pour guérir. J'écris pour tout miser à chaque page et conjurer la menace du silence ligne après ligne. En attendant de recommencer" (17). At best, Lahens suggests, writing is a gamble. She employs the active, transitive sense of the verb "to heal" to convey that she does not claim to help others or to propose definitive solutions. She will not return Haiti to health. At the same time, she is compelled to write about "la santé du malheur," or the health of misfortune, as evidenced in the editorial she published in the French daily *Libération* a week after the earthquake, and reinserted into *Failles*. This is not only a central theme of the editorial but also of her fiction writing. Here, she develops it as part of the task of testimony, which is to transcribe what she witnesses. Writing is a defense against silence, a means to fill the void and thus to give form to what she sees, hears, and smells. The attempt to put everything on the page is a powerful wager because of the risks taken to open her testimony to the representation of others, in the sense of both depicting silenced voices and speaking for them. Lahens's framing of a testimonial "I" comes closer to Beverley's understanding of the *testimonio* as a form of solidarity. She does not write from a preconceived position of authority, and her presence as a witness does not guarantee truth. In effect, Lahens challenges the idea that testimony is a direct transmission of knowledge.

Deconstructing Disaster

> The task now is precisely to recognize how the *sekous*, the quake in the Haitian world, has rearranged not only heaven and earth but Haiti and its geopolitical neighbors in shattered slabs of international relations, how it has repositioned the faithful, *Vodouisant* and/or Christian, with regard to "god who is *there*," how to claw the future out from the debris, all without wrongly and prejudicially consigning Haiti, its state and its history, to disaster.
>
> Deborah Jenson,
> "The Writing of Disaster in Haiti," 111

The review of textual forms and their ethical implications reveals what is at stake for the writer as a witness to the earthquake. As Munro points out, several Haitian writers who continued to "go public" did so by "not writing disaster" (*Writing on the Fault Line*, 18). However, the decision not to write about the earthquake could still be interpreted as an ethical or political stance against the lasting clichés of "disaster" and "catastrophe" of multiple discourses that have long circumscribed Haiti, as Deborah Jenson recalls. Lahens addresses this history directly, and so one could then ask what a "creative reconstruction" of Haiti might entail as an ethico-literary process. What does it mean for the writer to "rebuild"? How does Lahens engage the diachronic, political history of disaster and catastrophe that Jenson describes? What vision for the future illuminates her texts?

While Jenson is wary about the continued use of "disaster" in relation to Haiti – in fact, she implores readers to know that "Haiti is *not*, in itself, disaster ... " (111, emphasis in original) – Anderson and Munro delve into the growing multidisciplinary fields of "Disaster studies" to argue for its usefulness in rethinking neocolonial narratives that persist in some disciplinary schools of thought. In the fields of political science and international relations, for instance, the concept of the "failed state" still has critical purchase, as Munro notes.[14] For these critics, literary texts and other artistic forms are indispensable sources for examining the ways that a given culture makes sense of "disaster." Munro writes, "In Haiti, literature in particular has often been a prime

14 See Martin Munro, "Disaster Studies and Cultures of Disaster in Haiti." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 69.4 (October 2015): 509–518.

site in registering and memorializing natural and other disasters" ("Disaster Studies and Cultures of Disaster in Haiti," 512). This view of literature resonates with Marie-Hélène Huet's reading, cited above, of the ways that cultures "think *through* disaster." *Failles* is a fragmented attempt to historicize disaster and related ideas of Haiti in the modes of apocalypse and tragedy and to seek a way out of the impasse that blocks new narratives.

Lahens frames the shifting modes of testimony and chronicle with a collective invocation of mourning. The text begins by memorializing Port-au-Prince in the imperfect temporality and nostalgic language of the fairy tale. In the timelessness of this mode – "il était une fois une ville" (*Failles*, 11) – Lahens depicts scenes of ordinary life, moments of happiness despite the evident misery. "Nous l'aimions à cause de son énergie qui déborde," she continues, "de sa force qui pouvait nous manger, nous avaler" (11). The earthquake interrupts this reverie, and the text shifts to the perfect tense. At the precise time of 4:53 p.m., a monstrous god straddled a passive Port-au-Prince: "chevauchée sauvagement avant de s'écrouler cheveux hirsutes, yeux révulsés, jambes disloquées, sexe béant, exhibant ses entrailles de ferraille et de poussière, ses viscères et son sang" (12–13). The fairy tale is disrupted by this brutal violence, as the humanity of the city is torn apart, turned inside out, its symbolic female body is violated by a bloodthirsty god that pulverizes it to a hybridized being, animal and mineral (*cheveux hirsutes*, *sexe béant*, *entrailles de ferraille*). The fairy tale continues, but its understanding of time has been forever fractured. The fault line has gobbled up part of the soul of Port-au-Prince.

From the start, *Failles* conceives of the active power of disaster as otherworldly. It belongs to a space and time outside the familiar, human landscape of the city. As Loth points out, the monstrosity of the earthquake reappears in *Guillaume et Nathalie*, the novel published three years later, and is set in contrast to the international media's portrayal of crowds in protest of the rising cost of food as a hungry monster. As Loth argues, the equation of disaster with monstrosity comes from an external point of view. In effect, Lahens renders disaster as unfamiliar. In this way, Loth writes, "Her emphasis on the monstrous represents all of the suffering and pain that has resulted in the destruction as aberrant, as *out of the normal order*" ("(Re)Reading the Ruins," 135; emphasis in original). From *Failles* to *Guillaume et Nathalie*, disaster is depicted as supernatural and political, while Port-au-Prince is represented as a raped female and as a body constructed of iron and cement on a dusty earth.

Therefore, by imagining a place where disaster is far from ordinary, Lahens reveals the political manipulation of a supposed natural order. However, the longevity of the narrative of the natural disaster is evidence of its universal acceptance. To counter this mindset, Lahens must leave the mythic time of the fairy tale and shift to testimony and, later, journalism.

The tentative first step of each of these modes is to survey the surroundings. Lahens takes the reader on walks around the neighborhood and on drives through various quarters of the city. Her field of vision focuses with difficulty on scenes of suffering and on landscapes of devastation, all the while aftershocks continue to displace her center of gravity. In this immediate stage of witnessing, Lahens comes to terms with the imposition of the experience of the fault line. "*Failles*, un mot comme jamais entendu avant le 12 janvier 2010," she writes (*Failles*, 16). Just to hear it causes her to stumble and almost "défaillir" (16). It is "un mot trou noir. Un mot sang. Un mot mort" (16). The feeling, she describes, is to "me retrouver au-dessus d'un grand trou béant" (16), the gaping hole that, in the fairy tale, had been ripped open by a sadistic god. Recasting the metaphor of the animated, hybrid city, Lahens wonders, "quels mots font le poids quand les entrailles d'une ville sont retournées, offertes aux mouches qui dansent dans la pestilence?" (17). Seeking to go beyond the visceral limitations of individual experience, she proceeds with a series of searing ethical questions.

> Mais comment écrire ce malheur sans qu'à l'issue de la confrontation il n'en sorte doublement victorieux et la littérature méconnaissable? Comment écrire pour que le malheur ne menace pas l'existence même des mots? … Comment écrire en évitant d'exotiser le malheur, sans en faire une occasion de racolage, un fonds de commerce, un article d'exhibition de foire? Comment être à la hauteur de ce malheur? (*Failles*, 18)

Lahens is at pains to avoid rendering the kind of cliché that would continue to degrade Haiti and the act of writing, reduced to a literature of circumstance or even to an ideological textual commodity. Above all, this great *malheur* must not be seen simply as a Haitian disaster. "Écrire pour rapatrier ce malheur à sa vraie place," she asserts, "Au centre. Parce que ce qui nous a frappés le 12 janvier n'est point un malheur de périphérie, un malheur de 'quart-monde.' C'est le malheur du premier monde comme de tous les autres" (18). In the call to do away with the neocolonial division of the globe, Lahens seeks a reckoning with the disaster that "repatriates" it not to one country but to a place of collective responsibility.

Haiti's Global Fault Lines

Readers familiar with Lahens' texts will not be surprised by the effort to historicize the earthquake. Some concerns of *Failles* had been taken up in *L'Exil: entre l'ancrage et la fuite, l'écrivain haïtien*, an earlier essay on exilic conditions known to the Haitian writer. As she takes in the scope of the devastation, Lahens finds her footing in the desire to recall Haiti's central role in narratives of revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century. As Jenson points out, by overthrowing the colonial master and then the French imperial army, the ex-slaves and their allies achieved a political feat that was compared to a geological event, like the earth-shattering force that struck Port-au-Prince in the late eighteenth century. A second quake left Cap-Haïtien in ruins some seventy years later, not long after the north and south had been reunited under President Boyer. Lahens realizes that many Haitians had been in denial of looming geological disruption, despite being forewarned only a year prior. "Le déni est tellement plus commode," she admits (*Failles*, 32). The remembrance of historical fault lines now burdens the present with the consequences of such neglect.

The establishment of universal freedom in Haiti shocked the political foundations of the Americas and Europe. Despite Michel-Rolph Trouillot's signature revision of the silencing of this history and a subsequent wave of like-minded scholarship, Haiti remains isolated in a "modernity disavowed," or Sibylle Fischer's thesis of a Eurocentric history of the West that denies its roots in an Age of Slavery at the same time that it creates stories and myths that reproduce similar racial, social, and economic inequalities.[15] Like her peers, Lahens sheds light on the role of Western democracies in the effacement of this revolutionary narrative, an injustice that is exacerbated by the gradual naturalization of poverty and disaster as Haitian problems. A major historical figure guiding Lahens is Camus, who reported in the underground paper *Combat*. A week after the earthquake, Lahens published "Haïti ou la santé du malheur" in *Libération*, an editorial reprinted in *Failles*. The title refers to a poem by the poet (and close friend of Camus) René Char. Writing during the Occupation of France, Char insisted on the need to work [*œuvrer*] for beauty in the midst of combat: "il est temps de nous composer une santé du

15 See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995); and Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*.

malheur."[16] Resurrecting this idea, Lahens cites another phrase that Camus penned during the war: "Nous avons maintenant la familiarité du pire. Cela nous aide à lutter encore" (*Failles*, 69). Born just before the Great War, witnesses to the concentration camp and the atomic bomb, Camus's generation had lived through several disasters. As Camus observed in his Nobel Speech in Stockholm in 1957, "ils ont dû se forger un art de vivre par temps de catastrophe."[17] This eloquent passage encapsulates the literary ethics that united Camus and Char and that Lahens redeploys in present-day Haiti: the relentless search for justice despite the familiarity of the "age of catastrophe."

The references to Camus and Char compose a paratextual frame that takes *Failles* back to the Second World War. In epigraph, Lahens quotes a line from *Combat* on December 26, 1944: "Notre monde n'a pas besoin d'âmes tièdes. Il a besoin de cœurs brûlants qui sachent faire à la modération sa juste place" (*Essais*, 284).[18] Camus celebrated the Christmas vow of Pope Pius XII, who had just disavowed the Spanish dictator, Franco, yet he decried the appeal to moderation, which, he argued, had allowed for continued injustice, most devastatingly during the Holocaust. In *Combat* Camus wrote about deeper problems that called into question the prevailing spirit of liberation. It is possible that the turn to Camus betrays Lahens's desire to connect with the progressive French-speaking readers of *Libération*. And yet, it is worth pointing out that the French left had long ago abandoned Camus owing to his stance during the Algerian war for independence. Camus remains a controversial figure today, yet many of the questions that he and his peers faced resonate deeply with Lahens and Danticat.[19] The editorials

16 René Char, *Recherche de la base et du sommet. Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1983), 748.

17 Albert Camus, "Discours du 10 décembre 1957," in *Oeuvres complètes* IV (1957–1959), ed. Raymond Gay-Crosier (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2008), 241. Hereafter cited in text as *OC* IV. Laferrière borrowed the phrase for the title of his Henry Kreisel lecture. See Dany Laferrière, *Un art de vivre par temps de catastrophe* (Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2010).

18 The updated *OC* II elides this editorial. It can be found in *Essais*, the 1965 Pléiade edition of Roger Quilliot.

19 Camus's deep attachment to colonial French Algeria arguably gets a pass in *Failles*. For the postcolonial critiques of Camus, see Edward W. Said, "Camus and the French Imperial Experience," in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Albert Camus: Of Europe and Africa* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970); and Emily Apter, "Out of Character: Camus's French

in *Combat* addressed the purge [*épuration*], the trials of Vichy collaborators, a time when France was in the process of reconstruction. How to rebuild after disaster? Do violence and division give way to justice, or do they exact a heavy toll? When justice concedes to violence, what are the consequences for the reformed nation?

In drawing inspiration from Camus, Lahens elides the transformation that he underwent during the *épuration*. In the immediate aftermath of the war Camus was on the side of retributive justice: "Nous ne sommes pas des hommes de haine," he wrote on August 22, 1944, "Mais il faut bien que nous soyons des hommes de justice" (*OC* II, 519). This idea of justice is about restoring the grandeur of the nation, and it becomes clear in a series of editorials that justice begins with the public removal of the Vichy traitors from the French body politic: "La France porte en elle, comme un corps étranger, une minorité d'hommes qui ont fait hier son malheur et qui continueront de le faire. Ce sont les hommes de trahison et de l'injustice" (*OC* II, 558). In a crescendo of editorials from late summer throughout the fall and winter of 1944, Camus engaged in a public debate with François Mauriac, fellow writer and columnist at *Le Figaro*, who argued that the execution of collaborators would be a stain upon the future of France. Camus's denunciation of papal moderation must be understood, then, within the context of the fiery time when he still held firm to his belief in the necessity of the death penalty. And yet, he would soon change course during the infamous case of Robert Brasillach, another well-known writer, editor of the right-wing journal *Je suis partout*, and collaborator with the Germans. Scarcely two weeks after preaching against moderation, Camus signed a petition for clemency for Brasillach that Mauriac had circulated. De Gaulle rejected the petition and Brasillach was executed by firing squad. Camus defers a volte-face, yet by the following summer, eight months after the editorial cited by Lahens, he writes, "Le mot d'épuration était déjà assez pénible en lui-même. La chose est devenue odieuse" (*Combat*, August 30, 1945, in *OC* II, 1316).[20] For Camus, the nation whose idea

Algerian Subjects." *Modern Language Notes* 112.4 (1997): 499–516. However, in *Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), David Carroll attempts to rehabilitate Camus's legacy. For a recent take on this ongoing debate, see Jason Herbeck, "Le Lâche des *Carnets* d'Albert Camus." *Présence d'Albert Camus: Société des Études Camusiennes* 8 (2016): 81–99.

20 On Camus's transformation, see Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility:*

of revolutionary justice proceeds by way of the death penalty is on the road to future destruction.

For Lahens, the connection Camus and Char make between resistance and reconstruction empowered them not to give in to a fatalistic view of humankind. Some sixty-five years later, their writings help her to mediate the debris of the present by reflecting on the revolutionary idea of Haiti. She writes:

> Notre révolution est venue indiquer aux deux autres qui l'avaient précédée, l'américaine et la française, leurs contradictions et leurs limites, qui sont celles de cette modernité dont elles ont dessiné les contours, la difficulté à humaniser le Noir et à faire de leurs terres des territoires à part entière. (*Failles*, 70)

The principled justice of Haiti was to abolish the institution of slavery. From the start, however, the nascent republic suffered through political strife and continued violence. "Nous n'avons su user de la constance et de la mesure," Lahens continues in a collective voice, " … qui aurait dû mettre les hommes et les femmes de cette terre à l'abri de conditions infra-humaines de la vie" (70–71). She goes on to argue that, instead of building a citizenry, Haitians have used a celebrated past as an alibi for the present. Thinking with Césaire, who staged the fatal flaw of national excess in the *La tragédie du roi Christophe*, Lahens observes, "Parce que la démesure a ses limites, la glorification stérile du passé comme refuge, aussi" (71).

Lahens also turns a critical eye on the contemporary problem of humanitarian intervention and its implications for the long-term health of Haitian sovereignty. Non-governmental organizations have done much to help, Lahens acknowledges, but they operate without sufficient regulation and raise the cost of living in Port-au-Prince. Most alarming, however, is the fact that nearly all aid monies flow through these organizations before reaching the people they are ostensibly intended to help. Lahens scrutinizes the structural inequalities upon which international aid depends and that keeps Haiti, she writes, like a patient in intensive care. As she imagines it, aid is an illness that infects the sick and the caregiver alike, both of whom succumb to the same "morbidity" (*Failles*, 102). In his documentary film *Assistance mortelle*, Raoul Peck goes one

Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 107–112; see also Robert Zaretsky, *Albert Camus, Elements of a Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

step further by arguing that the policies and programs of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) were also catastrophic.[21] In a series of interviews, some aid workers associated with the IHRC come to the shameful realization that they are part of a system that does more harm than good.[22] The film's damning conclusion is delivered by Peck in voiceover: "The dictatorship of aid is violent, arbitrary, blind, full of itself; a paternalistic monster that sweeps away anything in its path. It pretends to resolve problems that it tries its hardest to keep alive." Like Lahens, Peck witnesses a monster not of Haitian origins.

The question of aid is at the core of Lahens's rethinking of disaster. She argues that many aid groups, secular and religious, do not take the time to learn the "syntaxe and lexique" (*Failles*, 105) of the Haitian people. In lieu of attempting to make sense of cultural and socio-economic relationships in refugee camps, external organizations perceive disorder, Lahens writes. In the absence of deeper knowledge, the idea of resilience takes hold. Lahens has grown tired of this cliché and the aura of the exotic that clings to it: "La résilience est devenue le terme commode, hâtif, souvent teinté d'exotisme, pour en parler, presque comme d'une essence. Le racisme n'est pas loin non plus" (105). Praising the hardiness of the people does little to help them integrate into a larger national project from which they have long been excluded. Their familiar *malheur* is to be exploited by a class of elites – *homo politicus* and *homo economicus haïtiens*, the terms of classical economic and political liberalism that Lahens adapts here – whose pursuit of money and power is a contemporary form of colonial plundering. Lahens argues,

> Parce que l'*homo economicus*, cette autre face de Janus, est loin d'être en reste. Ayant, tout comme *homo politicus*, intégré le dicton de la terre qui glisse, il perpétue dans son mode d'être dans ce pays la tradition de la flibuste et de la rapine du temps de la colonie, qui consiste à faire de l'argent vite et très vite. (121–122)

The theoretical origins of *homo economicus* as a rational being who acts in self-interest mutated in the colonial Caribbean, Lahens suggests, to

21 See Raoul Peck, *Assistance mortelle*, narr. Raoul Peck and Céline Sallette (Arte France/Velvet Films, 2013). See John Patrick Walsh, "Haiti mon amour," in *Raoul Peck: Power, Politics, and the Cinematic Imagination*, ed. Toni Pressley-Sanon and Sophie Saint-Just (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 195–216.

22 This basic thesis informs research carried out in the anthropological wing of Disaster Studies. See Mark Schuller, *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

become the rapacious alter ego to the more ideological *homo politicus*. In *Failles*, these figures become less abstract as Lahens traces their itineraries (from province to Port-au-Prince, from Haiti to Miami) and shows how their wealth and power accumulate in a symbiotic dependency.

Failles is ultimately a reflection on the vulnerability of the Haitian people. The only way to a viable and just reconstruction, Lahens contends, is through "le long travail de réparation du tissu social en lambeaux" (106–107). Walking through the tent camps gives her little hope for a large-scale social project, yet it does motivate her to reclaim fundamental questions from the archive and recast them in the present. "Comment vivre à hauteur d'homme donc?" (79), she asks. This question is straight out of Camus's *L'homme révolté*, which Lahens continues to cite: "L'homme n'est pas seulement esclave contre maître, mais aussi homme contre le monde du maître et de l'esclave" (*Failles*, 79).[23] The overpopulated camps and hastily constructed provisional living quarters are a visible reminder of injustice. The revolt of the slave, Camus asserted, was about the freedom to break the "la muette hostilité qui sépare l'oppresseur de l'opprimé" (*OC* III, 304). From Camus to Lahens, to be "up to the measure of man" is to have a dialogue about liberty and justice that breaks this silence.

The turn to critical journalism means that *Failles* will not lead to the "crisis of witnessing" that Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub famously proposed in the context of the Holocaust.[24] This critical model would appear to be useful, but only if one were to pursue a psychoanalytical reading in order to work through the silence of earthquake victims. Lahens is not a traumatized witness in the sense that she is unable to give testimony in the face of unspeakable horror. On the contrary, she raises her voice to confront historical clichés that reverberated in multiple media outlets in the aftermath of the earthquake. The violated body of Port-au-Prince was not in itself obscene, Lahens asserts, it was its "mise à nu forcée" (13), offered to the world in immediate broadcasts that did little to contextualize the images that the media trafficked. What was and remains obscene, she continues, "c'est le scandale de sa pauvreté" (13). Later, she adds a crucial point: "Une pauvreté qui a ses

23 Camus writes, "Il [le révolté] n'est pas seulement esclave contre maître, mais aussi homme contre le monde du maître et de l'esclave" (*OC* III, 305).

24 See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992).

causes et une histoire dans le monde tel qu'il va" (62). In this blistering critique, Lahens makes the case for the continued inability, or just plain refusal, of "Western" governments to speak of this past. Ironically, it is the former colonial and imperial powers that are beset with a "crisis of witnessing."

In *Testimony* Felman argues that the unspeakable finds expression in "cryptic forms of modern narrative and modern art" (201). In an earlier essay on Camus's *La chute*, Felman had argued that, where the traumatized witness is unable to respond to the Holocaust, the writer can transform this silence into a legible figure. She concludes, "Camus succeeds in giving to the very silence of a generation, and to the very voicelessness of history – the power of a *call*: the possibility, the chance, of our *response-ability*."[25] Felman's interpretation of the narrative and rhetorical power of literature to give voice to history can be redirected to the numerous passages in *Failles* when testimonial and journalistic modes shift to the witnessing of history through literature.

The Literary Witness

> Il y a des désastres tranquilles.
>
> Jean-Claude Charles, *De si jolies petites plages*, 23

Sitting in her living room, among the books that the earthquake has toppled to the floor, Lahens pauses over titles and leafs through historical expressions of solidarity and revolt, from Camus and Marguerite Duras to Aimé Césaire and Ahmadou Kourouma. These writers represent a legacy of varied geopolitical backgrounds and literary histories, and are all key figures of the imperial twentieth century. They symbolize the four corners of the old French Empire (North Africa, Indochina, the Antilles, and West Africa). Lahens invokes their texts not so much to seek to align herself with the political debates that roiled a previous generation, nor does she delve into the historical circumstances under which any of these

25 Felman's analysis of readers "called" to *La chute* resonates with Levinas and the responsibility to the Other. See Shoshana Felman, "Crisis of Witnessing: Albert Camus' Postwar Writings." *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 3.2 (Autumn 1991): 239; emphasis in original. Felman cites Maurice Blanchot's famous sentence, "At whatever date it might have been written, each narrative henceforth will be from Auschwitz." See *Après-Coup* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983), 96.

writers lived and wrote. But, in alluding to the complicated imperial histories, she brings together a group who arguably wrote against the grain, and whose texts have endured generational readings.

The archival function of *Failles* can be seen in the material phrases and ideas it collects from these writers and others, who enable Lahens to read history into the earthquake. In this short text, she enriches the process of archiving by also drawing from her fictional stores. She has acknowledged that *Failles* sits unexpectedly between two novels, *La couleur de l'aube*, published in 2008, and *Guillaume et Nathalie*, which appeared in 2013.[26] *Bain de lune*, published in 2014, traces the historical conflict between an extended family of peasants and the line of the Tertulien, *homo economicus*, in a story of epic proportions. By extending the reflections of *Failles* and an earlier short story, this most recent novel continues the archival work of contextualizing social fault lines laid bare by the earthquake in stories of disasters past.[27] Thus, like Danticat, Lahens often crafts her novels from short stories, weaving bits and pieces, drawing out characters, and reflecting on the passage of time. In an interview in *Boutures* with Rodney Saint-Éloi, she remarks broadly on the history of these genres in relation to poetry and theater; on their modernity compared with the lyric orality of these older forms; and on differences between the short story and the novel in terms of their aesthetic relation to space and time.[28] In this manner, Lahens adds layers to a central theme of her writing: namely, how disaster is embedded as ordinary in Haiti.

In the opening chapter of *De si jolies petites plages*, Jean-Claude Charles wonders how to call attention to the exodus of Haitians. In contrast to the onslaught of reporters and fundraising telethons in the aftermath of the earthquake, the boat-people of previous generations received scant attention in the press. Their journeys were "quiet disasters," Charles lamented, "un dispositif d'oppression à bas bruit, ça ne s'entend pas" (22). Charles's struggle to shed light on this "réel haïtien"

26 During a panel at the 2013 annual conference of the Haitian Studies Association, in Port-au-Prince, Lahens spoke of the unexpected place of *Failles* in her body of work.

27 In her essay on *La Couleur de l'aube*, Marie-Agnès Sourieau points out that Haitian literature has long evoked the "déchirures du tissu social, culturel, et intellectuel Haïtiens … " ("*La Couleur de l'aube* de Yanick Lahens: Cette horrible béance obscure." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 18.2 [2012]: 51).

28 Yanick Lahens, "Où va la nouvelle?" *Boutures* 1.1 (July 1999): 4–7. http://ile-en-ile.org/lahens-ou-va-la-nouvelle/ (accessed July 18, 2017).

(22) can also be read in Lahens's various depictions of what she calls the "banality of disaster." At first glance, one reads an allusion to Hannah Arendt's (in)famous judgment on the "banality of evil" embodied by Adolf Eichmann, the high-ranking Nazi official.[29] Arendt argued that the evil of Eichmann derived from his role as a functionary – he was nothing more than an unthinking bureaucrat. In Lahens's use, banality refers to political oppression that is systematic and therefore routine. During both the Duvalier and post-Duvalier eras, scores of people were either sacrificed or were willing to sacrifice themselves as a means of escape. A recurring phrase in Lahens's fiction, it captures the sense of a cyclical history, one that appears to go nowhere, like the intransitive migrations that Charles tracked in his reporting. It first appears as the title of the short story "Le désastre banal" in the collection *La petite corruption*. Set in 1986, the story portrays Mirna, a young Haitian woman who seeks a way out of poverty. Resigned to the presence of U.S. soldiers, she has an affair with a serviceman:

> Mirna se demandait ce que pouvait désormais un peuple dont les chefs avaient été à ce point humiliés si ce n'est que d'entrer lui aussi dans la banalité du désastre. Mirna changea de position, glissa jusqu'à s'asseoir sur le bord du lit, les pieds posés à plat sur le sol et se mit du vernis sur les ongles des mains. (17)

For Mirna, and by extension a generation of young people, to enter into banality is to give oneself over to those with power, in her case Officer William Butler. Rather than resist the occupying force, Mirna enlists her body to the "puissance étrange et ambiguë du vainqueur" (20). Barely out of adolescence, she wants to leave the pettiness of life in Haiti, even if it means replacing one form of suffering with another. As Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo argues, "Lahens exposes women's strategies of survival. She shows how young women from impoverished areas are fighting by all means necessary to escape squalid conditions" ("The Haitian Short Story," 47). At the end of the story, in a seaside hotel with William, Mirna is less a fighter than a victim. Even when she would rather "se

29 Drawing on ancient Greek thought, Arendt's chief criticism of "the rubbish of educated philistinism" (*Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* [New York: Viking Press, 1961], 204) is the inability to think. In a different context, this became the controversial argument on the "banality of evil" in her reports on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1963 before being published as the book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

noyer," she puts on a good face, "ce masque qui devait remplacer son visage le reste de sa vie" (20).

Mirna's surrender is made as part of a desperate quest for an elsewhere. In the very language used (*se noyer*) to describe Mirna's state of mind, the narrator allows the reader to imagine another young girl, embarking on a small boat, like the one crafted by Ollivier's villagers, willing to risk death in the hopes of a better life. Nine years after *La petite corruption*, Lahens publishes *La couleur de l'aube*, a novel set during the violent throes of the Aristide presidency. In the story of the Meracin family, Lahens depicts the tragic consequences of being trapped in the "banalité quotidienne du désastre" (81–82). The novel's second line – "Comment ne pas prier Dieu dans cette île où le diable a la part belle et doit se frotter les mains" (11) – suggests a helplessness in the face of what Camus called the "familiarité du pire." However, the struggle to survive continues. Staying with the predicament of women, Lahens reimagines the plight of Mirna in the tale of two sisters, Angélique and Joyeuse. As their names suggest, the former keeps a religious distance from the "joies terrestres" in which the latter delights, with "une foi inébranlable dans son rouge à lèvres, ses seins et ses fesses" (*La couleur de l'aube*, 20, 27). Both, however, are unable to find a way out of the surrounding misery and violence that take the life of their brother, Fignolé.

Like Mirna, Joyeuse attaches herself to a *blanc*, John, a journalist from the United States who, Angélique informs the reader, arrived ten years earlier with the contingent of occupying soldiers. The daily banality lived by Joyeuse has something in common with the experience of Mirna. In fact, Lahens rewrites the same phrase, cited above, from "Le désastre banal." The key distinction in the novel lies in the way that Lahens shifts the perspective on the ordinary disaster from the Meracin family to the American journalist. John reimagines the narrative of their struggle for his readers back home. In language that predicts the international media coverage of the earthquake, Angélique observes:

> Nos vies se résumaient à des lettres griffonnées à la hâte qui feraient la une très loin pour des gens gavés de mots et d'images … John nous imagina plus pauvres que nous l'étions et moi encore plus dévouée que je ne l'étais en réalité. C'était cela le beau film que John et beaucoup de ceux qui lui ressemblent, nés sous des cieux cléments, et dans des beaux quartiers, se jouent dans leur tête. (84–85)

Throughout, the sisters' narratives are filled with the kind of self-reflection and familial and social commentary that can be read in the above

passage. In this sense, the text is not unlike the blend of testimony and chronicle of *Failles*. Moving between the two modes, the novel offers two competing narratives on poverty: the personal experience of Angélique and the sensational "film" produced in John's reporting. Lahens demonstrates that both narratives dramatize disaster according to the normative expectations (cultural, religious) of a given society.

Failles experiments with different narrative ways of having knowledge of the earthquake and with deconstructing ideological notions of disaster that frame it. In fact, because the earthquake interrupted the project of *Guillaume et Nathalie*, Lahens disperses notes on the novel in the text of *Failles*. One month later, she returns to a passage drafted earlier. "Cette nuit-là," she notes, "j'ai sorti Nathalie and Guillaume, cet homme et cette femme dans les hauteurs de Pacot, cet homme et cette femme aux ombres à peine esquissées sur des feuilles jaunes, de mes décombres intérieurs, presque comme des êtres de chair" (*Failles*, 20). The fictional meeting between the two characters was supposed to take place in an apartment building on a hilltop in Pacot. In the days that followed, Lahens discovers that the building slid down the ravine. Initially, she imagines that Nathalie and Guillaume are buried with the rest of the real inhabitants, all of whom perished, she is told by passersby. In this scene, testimony threatens to put an end to fiction. She hesitates: "Et puis, silence. / Plus rien … / Vraiment plus rien? / Je ne peux pas m'y résoudre et je ne sens pas non plus la force d'aller plus loin" (*Failles*, 54–55). As the specter of death fills her field of vision, Lahens needs time before her characters can take shape.

While Nathalie and Guillaume wait, Lahens turns to other, equally intimate spaces of conversation with family and friends. She draws strength from a close-knit circle of artists, activists, and academics – as she calls them, "les amis du samedi matin / du dimanche matin soir" – who participate in a kind of weekly salon (*Failles*, 80, 130). In Haiti, Lahens explains, "nous maintenons une tradition de la parole, la *lodyans*, qui remonte à longtemps et qui se pratique encore dans quelques villes de province et sur des galeries à Port-au-Prince" (81). According to Georges Anglade, a specialist on the genre who died in the earthquake, "tirer des *lodyans* c'est raconter des histoires lorsqu'une assistance s'y prête et qu'un conteur se lance … mais c'est surtout le soir que des voix tout en inflexions animent des galeries faiblement éclairées … " (*Les blancs de mémoire*, 7). In *Failles*, *lodyans* is the vocal counterpart to the quieter practice of reading. If the conversation amongst friends serves as a *mise en éclairage* of political and social

fault lines, the sketches of Nathalie and Guillaume fulfill another source of ethical dialogue.

The brief passages of the novel that appear in the text are essential to the idea of the literary witness as archivist. They become part of the novel, *Guillaume et Nathalie*, a love story between a sociologist, Guillaume Jean-François, and an architect, Nathalie Dubois. To understand how the story develops in the novel, the reader would do well to reread the notes and characters sketched in *Failles*. The earthquake did not kill the project for the new novel, but it left Lahens unsure about the fate of its protagonists. Set in December 2009, *Guillaume et Nathalie* begins with the two lovers entering the apartment building in Pacot, before returning to the scene of their first encounter, at a meeting in an international agency that had funded the construction of a community center in Léogâne, a project for which the agency hired Nathalie, as well as Guillaume, who works for an NGO. Because it is set before the earthquake, the novel makes for a disorienting read. At the end of *Failles*, Lahens admits she does not know what will happen to her protagonists; by the last page of the novel, neither does the reader. As Munro and Douglas underscore, the reverse chronology of the two texts is evidence of sustained reflection on the recurrence of the past.

A chilling moment occurs as Guillaume returns to his apartment one evening in Delmas. After the narrator has recalled the historical rise of the black middle class in the neighborhood, Guillaume turns on the radio to listen to the news. On this day, it so happens, a geologist issues a warning about an imminent earthquake. Guillaume finds the scientific explanation plausible, yet even so, "une terreur sourde le traversa en un éclair. Si fort que Guillaume en fut secoué" (*Guillaume et Nathalie*, 44). He had, of course, lived through hurricanes and floods, but an earthquake, "c'est quand même autre chose … Absolument autre chose … " (45). Such presentiment calls for a rereading of *Failles*, in which, the reader recalls, Lahens had written "*failles*, un mot comme jamais entendu avant le 12 janvier 2010" (*Failles*, 16). In the novel, however, Guillaume listens to the reporting of shifting tectonic plates, yet is still unable to imagine them. What is the reader to make of this narrative memory and of the novel's *mise-en-scène* of the construction of a community center in Léogâne, near the epicenter of the earthquake? What is more, the pairing of an architect and a sociologist, two individuals with troubled pasts who are also called upon to fulfill social roles, allows Lahens to reimagine the critique of humanitarian discourse in *Failles*. Nathalie's boss, Pierre Marvois, embodies the French experts who "s'abattent sur l'île depuis

quelques années pour raconter des contes de fees. Pour faire avaler des potions magiques" (*Guillaume et Nathalie*, 25).

The process of rewriting allows Lahens to think about the evolution of the ordinary. After the sacrifice of vulnerable women at the end of the Duvalier regime, the novel portrays the political opportunism of Eddy, an old friend of Guillaume, who has recently been promoted to director of public service with the return of Aristide. A vocal dissident under Jean-Claude Duvalier, Eddy was once a firebrand, someone who would change the system. Yet shifting political winds would bring him to "cogn[er] fort aux portes du royaume" (*Guillaume et Nathalie*, 109). Having breached the "apartheid tranquille" of Pétionville, Eddy sacrifices the conviction of youth for wealth and power. This transformation is made possible by the neoliberal restructuring of Haiti's economy as mandated by the international powers that brought Aristide back. As Guillaume explains, "le retour du prophète-président, la queue basse sous le bruit des bottes onusiennes, et l'enrichissement du Parti des démunis achevèrent d'affadir le rêve et firent tout basculer dans la banalité du désastre" (113–114). In this context, the corruption that smothers the promise of the political youth is a disaster, as is Guillaume's resignation to such a state of affairs. Unlike Mirna, who understood the affair with William would mean a loss of self, in the case of Eddy, "masque et visage s'étaient complètement confondus" (110).

As with Mirna and the Meracin sisters, Guillaume discovers that there is no place to seek refuge when poverty and death become ordinary. In these texts, Lahens studies the ways that power and hypocrisy have infiltrated multiple layers of Haitian society from the beginnings of the Duvalier era up to the earthquake. The short story offers a glimpse of Mirna's predicament and leaves the reader in suspense. The fleeting temporality of this aesthetic form means that the reader must imagine her future. The novel allows for the time to listen to Angélique and Joyeuse from dusk to dawn and thus to come to terms with Fignolé's death from their differing perspectives. Likewise, *Guillaume et Nathalie* takes the reader through digressions of time and space in backstories that give depth to its protagonists, as individuals and as a couple, in Haiti and the international community. Lahens recasts the central questions and themes that animate the above texts and that she bears witness to in *Failles* in the epic drama of *Bain de lune*. Among the many questions brought to the surface by the earthquake, the historical fault line between landowners and peasants becomes the foundation of this

cross-generational saga. If there is an origin to the banality of disaster, Lahens suggests, it lies in this longstanding conflict.

In *Failles*, Lahens contemplates the fate of the historical poor, urban and rural, ignored by Haitian governments since the beginning of the republic:

> Cela fait deux siècles qu'ils ont pris le pli d'avancer seuls dans l'histoire … . Cela fait deux siècles qu'ils esquivent tous les gouvernements … . Aujourd'hui, plus aucun gouvernement, plus aucune instance internationale, plus aucune ONG ne peut les rattraper. Ils sont réfractaires à toute prise. Ce flair est bien plus qu'une posture, mieux qu'une stratégie, c'est un savoir. (43)

Bain de lune is an attempt to give voice to this knowledge. The novel weaves a story of two ways of living on the land and with the sea. On one side are the Lafleur, who trace their lineage back to Dieunor, an ancestor born in Africa. The knowledge of this extended family spreads out in the communal *lakou*, in the coastal village of Anse Bleue, and draws strength from the invisible yet ever-present pantheon of vodou spirits. Lahens imbues the novel with the syncretic belief system of the peasants, who inhabit a world in between the human and the divine, "livré à nous-mêmes, des hommes et des femmes qui en savent assez sur l'humaine condition pour parler seuls aux Esprits, aux Mystères et aux Invisibles" (60). On the other side of the mountains are the Mésidor, the landowners who have exploited the Lafleur since the time of the first U.S. invasion, when Anastase Mésidor managed to buy land from Bonal Lafleur in a disastrous bargain for the latter and his family. The Americans had recently opened up Haitian lands to foreign ownership, and Anastase was eager to turn a profit off these creole gardens. Lahens depicts a dialectic of possession and dispossession, as the rapacious greed of *homo economicus* leads to the loss of ancestral *doko*, or places of refuge going all the way back to the maroons of colonial Saint-Domingue. Forty years after his father stripped the Lafleur of their land, Tertulien covets Olmène, the granddaughter of Bonal. At the dawn of the Duvalier era, their union produces a new lineage that brings the families together at the same time as it creates rifts in the greater social fabric of Anse Bleue. Tertulien must adapt to the reach of Duvalier into the countryside, reinventing his role among new hierarchies of power. In the ensuing violence, Olmène flees to the Dominican Republic, leaving her newborn, Dieudonné, in the care of her parents, Orvil and Ermancia. Her brother Fénélon takes some control by becoming a *macoute*, while

another, Léosthène, departs, first for the "grande bouche dévoreuse de Port-au-Prince" (115), followed by a harrowing clandestine journey in the hold of a cargo ship to Miami.

The arc of the novel spans roughly eighty years, from the first occupation to the second, during the turmoil of the Aristide years. By tracing the intersections of political and economic migrations within Haiti and around the greater Caribbean in the context of external and internal pressures, the novel is an homage to canonical texts of literary ancestors. Moreover, like Roumain, Alexis, and Chauvet, Lahens interrogates the material impact of larger economic and political forces on rural and coastal ecologies, and especially the deterioration of natural resources on which communities such as Anse Bleue depend. In fact, reading *Bain de lune* in an intertextual dialogue with Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* makes for a compelling comparison not only of the political climates depicted in both texts but also of the different representations of the inexorable transformation of their *entours*. Both writers pay close attention to the botanical and mineral composition of Haitian lands, yet their characterizations of this natural world diverge in significant ways. In particular, their textual landscapes represent two strikingly different imaginaries with respect to gendered and political views of the land. Roumain's narration is saturated with a masculine point of view that renders hills like breasts and the hands of male laborers rough like bark. Consider, for example, one of the most iconic scenes in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, when Manuel, still the *étranger*, steps off the truck that has led him back to Fonds-Rouge. The narrator describes the homecoming in the following terms:

> Si l'on est d'un pays, si l'on y est né, comme qui dirait: natif-natal, eh bien, on l'a dans les yeux, la peau, les mains, avec la chevelure de ses arbres, la chair de sa terre, les os de des pierres, le sang de ses rivières, son ciel, sa saveur, ses hommes et ses femmes: c'est une présence, dans le cœur, ineffaçable, comme une fille qu'on aime: on connaît la source de son regard, le fruit de sa bouche, les collines de ses seins, ses mains qui se défendent et se rendent, ses genoux sans mystères, sa force et sa faiblesse, sa voix et son silence. (30)

This well-known passage of a "paysage retrouvé" (29) conflates natural spaces with human features and circumscribes characters in gendered hierarchies. By contrast, Lahens's land- and seascapes do not traffic in such tropes, as the reader discovers in another, less dramatic scene of a homecoming in *Bain de lune*:

> Elles reprirent la route. A chaque montée succédait une descente qui ne conduisait pas à une plaine mais juste à une bande de terre qui préparait une nouvelle montée vers un étroit sentier bordant un dangereux abîme … . Olmène et Ermancia aperçurent enfin Anse Bleue. Derrière elles, les perroquets venus des montagnes lointaines criaillaient, annonçant l'imminence de pluies. A l'horizon, le globe rouge du soleil déclinait dans les piaillements d'oiseaux aquatiques. Le vent brisait la crête des vagues en giclées d'écume qui venaient mourir sur le sable. Anse Bleue somnolait déjà. (59–60)

A picture of a daily journey blends into a long, undulating strip of land that leads to a destination. The two women become part of the background, as the use of onomatopeia animates the scene with squawking birds around the red globe of the sun. In this Haitian pastoral, Lahens presents a coastal region in decline, populated by tired peasants who are simply relieved to return to family after a hard day's work and a long walk home.

Another key difference between the two novels is evident in the political implications of their representations of land and sea. In *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, Manuel's return holds much promise for the future of his native land, even if it means his ultimate sacrifice. In *Bain de lune*, Léosthène, like Manuel, returns after fifteen years to witness the degradation of a skeletal land: "Il n'en croyait pas ses yeux: toute la campagne semblait avoir souffert d'une longue maladie dévastatrice" (173). Yet where Manuel was determined to find the source of water with which to irrigate the parched lands of Fonds-Rouge, Léosthène is resolute in his desire to end "sa lutte contre la terre, les eaux et le soleil" (114). Aside from renewing contact with his family, Léosthène finds no reason to attempt to nurture the land back to health, and so his stay is temporary. Unlike Roumain, Lahens looks back on a period of despair, when the organization of the disenfranchised into a political party of consequence is still in the future. At the time that Roumain wrote, faith in Marxism was strong in the Caribbean. Inspired by the ideology of collective labor that would achieve reconciliation between rival communities and revive the land, Manuel is portrayed as a savior. Even in death, he remains a spiritual guide.

If Lahens has faith in the world inhabited by her characters, it is because their human condition is inseparable from lands and seas that are imbued with the *Mystères* and *Invisibles*. When the natural world is personified in the novel, it is not with a view to human mastery over the environment or to some essence of human nature, but rather as part

of the worldview of vodou and the connections between all life and the spiritual realm. The description of the sea by Cétoute, granddaughter of Olmène and daughter of Dieudonné, is exemplary:

> J'aime la mer, son mystère. A tant examiner la mer, j'ai toujours cru que je finirais un jour par faire surgir au-dessus de l'écume toute la cohorte de ceux et celles qui dorment au creux de son ventre sur des lits d'algues et de coraux. Ceux et celles dans les chemins d'eau, leur route océane vers la lointaine Guinée avec Agwé, Simbi et Lasirenn qui les escortent. (226)

Cétoute speaks of ancestors lost in the Middle Passage who "sleep in the deep belly of the sea." They are granted peace in the afterlife by the *lwa anba dlo*, beneath the water, who bring them back to Africa. The mystery of the sea is that it transforms a space of brutal history into one of divine protection. It is a space where the gods remain in proximity. Indeed, even when Léosthène leaves Haiti in the hold of a boat bound for Florida, the gods do not abandon him. "Et puis tu as peur de mourir dans ce linceul quand le vent fait se cabrer et plonger le bateau … " he tells his audience, " … Alors tu appelles Agwé, Damballa, Ogou. Tu les appelles tous" (180). Léosthène is one of the lucky few, to be sure, but in narrating his experience as a boat person, "dans les ténèbres profondes" (179), he gives voice to an instance of a Haitian crossing that ends not in the ordinary disaster but with a real sense of empowerment. He closes the story on a positive note: "Une fois cette épreuve traversée, tu ressens une forme de pouvoir. À cause de cette connaissance des choses que d'autres n'ont pas et n'auront jamais. Oui, c'est bien cela, du pouvoir" (180). Ironically, however, for the villagers, Léosthène's triumph owes to the fact that he returns to Anse Bleue by plane. In the end, for all the power Léosthène feels from having survived the passage from below, he finds only temporary refuge in Haiti. Sensing the contempt in the air from his brother, Fénelon, and his fellow militiamen, Léosthène realizes that it is time to leave. Yet, before setting off again, he honors the Lafleur ancestors with a ceremony. He calls upon the spirits to protect his family and the tired land on which they remain.

Although the novel renders the land and sea in a state of perpetual decline, it also treats them with some reverence as spaces of refuge. In fact, the title, *Bain de lune*, is meant to evoke the sense of freedom that the first-person narrator enjoys while going for a swim, away from the endless work around the house and in the fields. These "moonbaths" allow the narrator to "gouter la sauvage beauté, le violent mystère de la nuit" (209). For much of the novel, the identity and fate of this narrator

is the other great mystery. The book opens with a narrator in the first person, and the reader knows little save that it is a woman who has just died, washed up on the shore after three days in the sea. We learn only near the end that it is Cétoute, who slowly pieces together memories that unravel the secret of her drowning. An omniscient narrator in the third person, a Lafleur, alternates with Cétoute's voice to weave together the epic story of the entanglement of the Lafleur and Mésidor families. Cétoute's life spans the final years of Jean-Claude Duvalier to approximately the end of the Aristide government, and her downfall can be understood in the context of this turbulent political environment. Jimmy Mésidor, the youngest grandson of Tertulien, returns to Haiti from the United States with a vision to take back family property lost during the Duvalier era. On a summit overlooking Anse Bleue, Jimmy sees nothing but disorder: "[C]'était son élément, sa respiration, son eau et son ciel. Il se frotta les mains, un large sourire sur les lèvres" (244). After consulting with Tertulien, this *homo economicus*, at home among the villagers, is prepared to impose order: "il lui fallait faire vite, très vite" (245). Jimmy is irresistible to Cétoute, and she becomes involved with him despite her mother's warning. If her mother senses imminent danger, it is because of her intimate knowledge of the dangerous relationship between the two families. For the Lafleur, the return of political power under the U.S. occupation meant the end of a false sense of peace. "Nous n'avions plus de *dokos* où se réfugier," the narrator continues, "Même les *dokos* dans nos têtes avaient reculé. Nous étions plus nus que notre ancêtre Bonal. Gran Bwa Îlé semblait impuissant à guider nos pas. *Le désastre devint banal*" (231, emphasis added). The death of a young woman is all too familiar. From the moment of Cétoute's first death, which opens the novel, she is a refugee, carried back to Anse Bleue for the ceremony that will give her the refuge of her second and true death. Her body washed and mourned by her family, Cétoute finds safe passage with the ancestors, and the story can end on the note of this quiet disaster.

Conclusion

The language in *Bain de lune* jumps off the page for readers of *Failles*. The novel collects the fragments of the chronicle and develops them in its historical sweep, so that the reader grasps the complexity of the disasters that it depicts, from the dispossession of land and forced labor that occurred during the U.S. occupation all the way to the

continued impoverishment of villagers under the neoliberal management of the Haitian economy by the international stakeholders that facilitated Aristide's return. While her characters seek refuge, so does Lahens, as she struggles with the historical and theoretical blockage that keeps Haiti in a sick bed, to return to a key metaphor in *Failles*. In this text and in her fiction, Lahens attempts to find a way out of this impasse. She writes to rebuild the house for Haitians real and fictive. For, if the reader is permitted a bit of optimism, perhaps Nathalie and Guillaume also survived. Lahens transforms a variety of Haitian settings within the pages of her accounts and stories. Her vantage points are as real as they are imagined, and they lead to a reconstruction of the past with compelling implications for critical and creative ways of understanding the present and of looking forward to an alternate future. The role of the literary witness is to bring the reader to refuse the banality of disaster by thinking deeply about Haiti in the history and future of the Caribbean and Atlantic world.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Distant Literary Witness and the Ghosts of History in the "Other America"

> And during this final conversation, I am even more certain that to create dangerously is also to create fearlessly, boldly embracing the public and private terrors that would silence us, then bravely moving forward even when it feels as though we are chasing or being chased by ghosts.
>
> Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously*, 148

This chapter examines the literary witnessing of Edwidge Danticat and Dany Laferrière. Consistent with the preceding chapter, it pairs testimonial texts and fiction (Danticat's *Create Dangerously* and *Claire of the Sea Light*, along with Laferrière's *Tout bouge autour de moi* and *L'Énigme du retour*) to consider the creative reconstruction of Haiti through its "living archive." The critical literature on these two authors is voluminous.[1] As such, after a brief comparison, the bulk of the chapter is devoted to Danticat. This decision is both practical and strategic. Camus plays a leading role in Danticat's *Create Dangerously*, and therefore I continue to analyze Haitian rereadings of the French-Algerian.[2] In

1 For a history of criticism on Danticat see Martin Munro, ed., *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010). For an excellent collection of essays on Laferrière, see Carrol F. Coates, ed., "Dany Laferrière. Fiction Writer: A Special Section." *Callaloo* 22.4 (1999): 902–949. See also Rachel Douglas, "Rewriting America/Dany Laferrière's Rewriting." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 15.1 (January 2011): 67–78.

2 Danticat has often spoken of Camus's influence on her writing. See Maxine

pursuing this lead, I am in good company. J. Michael Dash writes eloquently of Danticat being inspired by Camus's varied depictions of the solitary artist in pursuit of unbounded solidarity.[3] More recently, Christian Flaugh underscores Danticat's admiration for friends of her parents in their secretive staging of Camus's play, *Caligula*, in Duvalier's Haiti. "This particular popular theatre," Flaugh contends, "revealed a transcultural performance practice by way of a twentieth-century French-Haitian *traversée*" ("Engaging Reality and Popular Performance," 48). Flaugh's characterization of this intertextuality as a kind of crossing is richly suggestive of the historical and cross-cultural depths of the literary archives treated in this book.

This chapter focuses on a different Camus than the more uplifting figure resurrected by Lahens. Although both writers reflect on the ethics of the writer in times of crisis, Danticat evokes the Camus whose literature was celebrated by the Nobel Committee at the same time that his peers rebuked his political stance on the war in Algeria. Camus was beholden to the myth of the Mediterranean as a space of timeless humanism and hospitality. Yet the colonial setting would also induce a sense of alienation, a feeling of distance and estrangement that Camus famously explored in *L'Étranger* and the short stories of *L'Exil et le royaume*. It was Camus's self-imposed exile from politics without, however, the renunciation of France's claim to Algeria that Albert Memmi had in mind when he conceived of the portrait of the "colonisateur de bonne volonté."[4] Part of my aim here is to consider the colonial diaspora that Danticat conjures in *Create Dangerously* and its implications for her witnessing of Haitian history.

The essays of *Create Dangerously* are grounded in multiple histories, from postwar France to Haiti under Duvalier and Aristide, from New York during 9/11 to New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and finally to the earthquake of 2010. There are many "ghosts" to reckon with, as Danticat writes above, while still others serve as creation myths of her writing. While Lahens expresses doubts about her role as a writer,

Lavon Montgomery, ed., *Conversations with Edwidge Danticat* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017).

3 See J. Michael Dash, "The Pregnant Widow: Negating Frontiers in Danticat's *Create Dangerously*." *SX Salon* 4 (April 2011). http://smallaxe.net/wordpress3/discussions/2011/04/30/the-pregnant-widow/ (accessed November 23, 2018).

4 Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957). See Chapter Two, "Le Colonisateur qui se refuse," 47–69.

Danticat is less reserved in her desire to confront the disasters that give shape and movement to a historical *traversée* that has dispersed scores of refugees.[5] War, dictatorship, terrorism, hurricanes, and earthquakes, these are the major events addressed in *Create Dangerously*. Danticat seeks to understand how they expose those marginalized and made vulnerable by their power. Moreover, she is also consumed with the question of temporality, and specifically how events in the present bring forth different, generational memories of the past. In turn, these events of the past linger in the present. *Create Dangerously* works through the past in a way that betrays what Danticat calls a Haitian obsession with memory (*Create Dangerously*, 63). In these essays, Danticat moves through the abovementioned events, yet she struggles, it seems, to move forward in time. David Scott's reflections on the temporal and spatial dynamics of aftermaths are instructive here. As I observed in the introduction, reading *Create Dangerously*, one gets the sense of what Scott calls the "stalled present," or the feeling that the "present seems stricken with immobility and pain and ruin" (*Omens of Adversity*, 6). As many have observed, Scott's long-running inquiry into the failure of postcolonial political movements proposes a rather bleak view of the present and future.[6] To be sure, Danticat's essays and stories are filled with tragic figures that appear, as Scott writes, leaning on Frank Kermode, "stranded in the middle" (*Omens of Adversity*, 67), or caught in a kind of narrative loop of socio-economic precarity and social and environmental injustice.[7] For Scott, if the postcolonial present feels abandoned it is because this time is marked by the ending of the anticolonial struggle for a socialist revolution. And while postcolonial narratives are not "apocalyptic," he continues, they are "nevertheless dramatic and … seemingly *terminal* – that is, the end of the great modernist narratives of revolutionary overcoming" (71, emphasis in original). In a sense, it is possible to read Normand's death, in Ollivier's *Passages*, as a fictional rendering of a postcolonial tragedy. A major issue

5 Munro writes, "Lahens fluctuates between a sense of hope and a feeling of doubt tinged with anxiety. She is far from convinced that her own art, anyone's art, can offer any kind of salvation" (*Writing on the Fault Line* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015], 62).

6 See Gary Wilder, "Review Essay: *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*, by David Scott." *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 20.1 (2015): 189–200.

7 Scott cites Frank Kermode's celebrated work, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

for this chapter, then, is how Danticat's essays and fiction interrogate the time of "pain and ruin."

If the idea of the stalled present has taken hold in Haiti, it is because, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot famously put it, "it represents the longest neocolonial experiment in the history of the West" ("The Odd and the Ordinary," 7). *Create Dangerously* examines the history of Haiti's isolation and extends its critique outward. After watching televised reports of Hurricane Katrina, Danticat writes of the surprised reaction of many in the U.S., suddenly faced with scenes of "a country within a country, that other America, which America's immigrants may know much more intimately than many Americans do, the America that is always on the brink of humanitarian and ecological disaster" (*Create Dangerously*, 113).[8] Danticat witnesses the "other America," where political, economic, and environmental damage have taken a toll in the shadows. By "other America," Danticat refers not just to marginal spaces within the United States. In making this argument, I propose that her view of the hemisphere calls to mind – and, indeed, would appear to contrast with – the creative, relational space conceived by Glissant as "l'autre Amérique" (*Le discours antillais*, 17). In both the *Discours* and *Poétique de la relation*, Glissant envisions the Caribbean as a space of interconnected islands. As he wrote in a famous passage:

> La mer des Antilles n'est pas le lac des États-Unis. C'est l'estuaire des Amériques. Dans un tel contexte, l'insularité prend un autre sens. On prononce ordinairement l'insularité comme un mode de l'isolement, comme un névrose d'espace. Dans la Caraïbe pourtant, chaque île est une ouverture. (*Le discours antillais*, 427)

Glissant's poetic reflection on islands goes back to his earliest writings. In *Soleil de la conscience*, for instance, he evokes the positive synthesis born of the "bouillon de cultures" (15); Paris, too, is an island, in that it "capte de partout et diffracte aussitôt" (68). This hopeful poetic vision will later illuminate an ecological politics that renounces territorial claims in order to cultivate instead relationships among local and regional entities. In many ways, Danticat is an heir to Glissant's hemispheric thought, and she, too, compels her readers to see a larger idea of "America." Yet, as we saw in her preface to the English

8 On Glissant's conception of "l'autre Amérique," see J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

translation of Philoctète's *Le peuple des terres mêlées*, her viewpoint is focused, in part, on the ways that neoliberal development and trade continue to exploit the disenfranchised, at the same time that climate change erases the distinction between "First" and "Third" World. Political and economic powers collude to create the appearance of separate spheres, but natural forces regularly expose this illusion. Still thinking about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, she continues, "No, it is not Haiti or Mozambique or Bangladesh, but it might as well be" (*Create Dangerously*, 113). If Danticat suggests that it is possible to replace New Orleans with Port-au-Prince, it is not to point out the well-known historical and cultural ties between the two Creole cities but rather to argue that humanitarian disasters are always (already) ecological, and that all of America must grasp that catastrophe cannot be contained within political boundaries.

Shedding light on this "other America" and those who seek refuge from within brings Danticat to define her mission as a writer. How does Danticat's position in the United States inform her commitment as a literary witness? How does she contextualize the earthquake in relation to historical events, and, more broadly, how has history intervened to entangle the creative and essayistic modes of her writing? In the attempt to answer these questions, this chapter makes the central claim that, between *Create Dangerously* and *Claire of the Sea Light*, the "ghost" is a key figure of spatial and temporal transition through which Danticat interrogates the place of Haiti in its hemispheric setting. Referring to spectral presences, haunting and menacing figures, as well as illusions, "ghost" is an apt metaphor for Haiti as *tè glise* in that it allows Danticat to connect past and present, and diaspora and homeland. The first part of the chapter takes up the first-person subject positions of the narratives of Danticat and Laferrière. Rather than dwell on the question of exile, which, as Nadève Ménard has argued, has become something of a tired trope in analyses of Haitian literature, I focus on the ethical implications of the capacity to bear witness from a transnational position.[9] In particular, the immigrant artist peers into the shadows with the knowledge and skill to portray lives at the crossroads. Like Jean-Claude Charles, Danticat suggests another way to see America, yet she avoids the bitter irony that characterizes *De si jolies petites plages*. Both Danticat and Laferrière turn to the novel

9 See Nadève Ménard, "The Myth of the Exiled Writer." *Transition* 111 (2013): 52–58. See also *Écrits d'Haïti*, 8.

as a means of reimagining the central themes of essays in the indirect language and rhetorical figures of fiction. Laferrière's *L'Énigme du retour* is critical to Danticat's understanding of her own return to Haiti after the earthquake. The second part of the chapter considers the extent to which the earthquake interrupted not only their writing but also their grasp of history. Treating the chapters of *Create Dangerously* as an archival-type work, in which Danticat collects reflections on, and conversations with, several (immigrant) artists, I contend that the historical process of such archiving is, to recall Hall once more, always incomplete. In this way, the earthquake causes her to rethink settled ideas about past events and the writers and artists that gave textual and visual form to them. As she moves through historical transitions, Danticat reminds readers that writing has always been a perilous vocation in Haiti.

Recovering oppressed history has long been a mainstay of Haitianist scholars and Haitian creative writers. As Flaugh suggests, the underground popular theater in the obscured light of the early years of François Duvalier was a vital means to speak truth to a political power that silenced dissident voices. For Danticat, this was just the sort of dangerous creation that Camus had in mind. The third section highlights the ghost of Camus in *Create Dangerously*. After recalling the historical circumstances of Camus's speech in Uppsala, it demonstrates that Danticat fails to acknowledge the defensive posture of this credo, when Camus was isolated from fellow writers and increasingly disconnected from the communities of *pieds noirs* from which he came. However, the intertextual link to postwar France and French Algeria is crucial to Danticat's conception of literature as an assemblage of texts, images, artistic voices, and the historical memories that inspire them.

Like Camus, who refracted fundamental philosophical and political questions through fiction, Danticat recasts the ethical stakes of the essays in forms of the imaginary. The fourth part of the chapter performs a brief genetic analysis of *Claire of the Sea Light* before carrying out a close reading that brings out three ghostly figures: the *revenan*, or the young girl, Claire, whose mother dies as she gives birth; the *chimè*, the gang members who inhabit Cité Pendue, the "midlevel slum" (63) adjacent to Ville Rose, a fictional seaside town; and ruins and monuments that keep the colonial past on the surface. The local transformation of these ghosts reveals Danticat's interest in stories within Haiti. *Claire of the Sea Light* weaves intricate relations of class, gender, sexuality, and environment. In overlapping narratives that alternate between past and present, a

changing coastal region comes into view. The conclusion of the chapter comes back to the idea of being stranded in the "other America" that Danticat had located in *Create Dangerously* to consider how it is rendered in the local voices and sea light of the fiction.

Diasporic Testimony

> If witness literature is to find its place, take on a task in relation to the enormity of what is happening in acts of destruction and their aftermath, it is in the tensions of sensibility, the intense awareness, the antennae of receptivity to the lives among which writers experience their own as a source of their art.
>
> Nadine Gordimer,
> "Literary Witness in a World of Terror," 67

To frame her analysis of the writings of Danticat and Laferrière, Bénédicte Boisseron draws on George Lamming's conception of belonging to the Caribbean as both "comfort" and "cultural obligation" (*Creole Renegades*, 97). She makes the following distinction:[10]

> Laferrière and Danticat are different types of Haitian immigrant writers, offering two perspectives on the cultural obligation of the diasporic subject: one [Laferrière] avoids addressing Haitian misery at all costs, and one makes Haitian misery her main concern. In both cases, the line between cultural obligation and opportunism gets dangerously thin for the immigrant writer at work. (97)

Putting aside the "pleasures of exile" that Lamming wrote about at length, Boisseron focuses on the burden of those on the "external frontier" of the Caribbean (97).[11] Yet Lamming's reflection on the "dilemma of the West Indian writer abroad" is arguably more nuanced (*The Pleasures of Exile*, 50). As he explained, "he hungers for nourishment from a soil which he (as an ordinary citizen) could not at present endure. The pleasure and paradox of my own exile is that I belong wherever I am" (50).

10 Boisseron refers to a lecture Lamming delivered in 1985. For the full speech, see Frank Birbalsingh (ed.), "George Lamming: Concepts of the Caribbean," in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1996), 1–14.

11 Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile*.

It is beyond the scope of this book to dig into Lamming's collection of essays, but one can at least appreciate the ambiguity of belonging contemplated in this celebrated passage. Keeping in mind the distinct experiences of Caribbean writers of different generations, it is possible, I think, to draw on Lamming's feelings about exile and belonging to read a similarly conflicted expression in Danticat's writings.

What does it mean to consider diasporic testimony as either a debt paid to the native land or a chance to profit from it? In both cases, one is left with an idea of diaspora still tethered to the (former) homeland. The chapter of *Creole Renegades* on Danticat, Laferrière, and Jamaica Kincaid runs somewhat against the grain of the book's overarching thesis, which is that second-generation writers have moved beyond older conceptions and forms of Caribbean identity to explore more personal understandings of home. Boisseron constructs a binary frame of textual analysis – either avoiding misery or obsessing over it – at the same time that she contends that readers have imposed on these texts limiting expectations that derive from the narrative of Haitian exceptionalism. Haitian writers "are faced with the difficult choice," Boisseron contends, "of either writing dangerously like a *journalis* or writing individually like a novelist" (104, emphasis in original). Both instances, she continues, expose the unseemly commercial reality of their writing. After detailing the material rewards of Danticat's career, Boisseron writes,

> To some degree, Danticat is indeed a 'parasite' in that she is a diasporic organism that lives off the history of the land to which she no longer belongs. The author seems to be sucking it all in for cultural survival. But for immigrant writers, cultural parasitism is not necessarily negative, unless, of course, there is not just human but also capital gain involved in writing about Haitian suffering. (92–93)

To be clear, this argument responds to a passage in *Create Dangerously* in which Danticat addresses the accusation of parasitic writing.[12] Boisseron moderates her criticism in the larger question of the

12 In the chapter "Walk Straight," Danticat reports a letter written to her concerning her first book, *Breath, Eyes, Memory.* A woman accused Danticat of being a liar. "You are a parasite and you exploit your culture for money and what passes for fame," she wrote. Danticat answers in *Create Dangerously*: "Anguished by my own sense of guilt, I often reply feebly that in writing what I do, I exploit no one more than myself. Besides, what is the alternative for me or anyone else who might not dare to offend? Self-censorship? Silence?" (33).

commodification and marketing of literature, yet she emphasizes the "dark side" of testimony (*Creole Renegades* 113), by which she means that Danticat earns a living from the "safe" space of diaspora.[13] The market conditions that regulate the production and circulation of literary texts no doubt require scrutiny on the part of scholars. Yet the ethics of literature does not have to be solely, or even primarily, about the financial capital that underwrites it.

Nadine Gordimer offers another way to think about the literary witness. She insists on the ethics of the writer as being up to the "enormity of the task." As Lahens put it, to be up to the measure of tragedy is to go beyond opportunistic reporting. By bringing out the "tensions of sensibility," Danticat strikes a tone that allows her to render lived experience as a poetic and affective bond with those she represents and those who read her texts. This critical perspective allows for a more optimistic take on the writer's relationship to the native land, both material and imagined. Furthermore, one might also read the careful treatment of history in the testimonial texts of Danticat and Laferrière as the kind of "intense awareness" that Gordimer underscores as an ethical pairing of the writer's self and the lives of others. To this end, Renée Larrier's reading of the advocacy at work in Caribbean literary history is insightful. Borrowing from the combat dance principles of "*danmyé*" – including "narration, initiation, challenge, confrontation, interaction, surprise, anticipation, improvisation, resistance, positionality, displacement, balance, and negotiation" (*Autofiction and Advocacy*, 6) – Larrier focuses on the dynamic "I" of autofiction, or a "first-person narrative that may or may not overlap with autobiography" (21). She calls attention to the ways that writers blend genres as they move between fact and fiction and between literature and history. She is particularly interested in testimonial literature, "in which women are positioned to see, hear, and report as voyeurs/observers, actors, oral historians, storytellers, or a combination of these" (*Autofiction*

13 Boisseron refers to a debate between Chris Bongie and Nick Nesbitt over Oprah Winfrey's early role in Danticat's marketability. It is important to consider Boisseron's analysis of Danticat in terms of the larger critique of the commodification, as well as the role of critics in bringing attention to authors and their works. See *Creole Renegades: Rhetoric of Betrayal and Guilt in the Caribbean Diaspora* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 93–94; see also Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 325–327.

and Advocacy, 25). One such "I" that Larrier examines is located in Danticat's historical novel *The Farming of Bones*. The trope of testimony is developed in the character of Amabelle Désir, who listens to and records the accounts of survivors of the 1937 "Parsley Massacre." "Through her [Amabelle]," Larrier argues, "Danticat makes a case for including in the process of history production the oral testimonies of those involved in the events, thereby giving voice to those who are typically excluded … " (118). Larrier reads an intimate connection between Danticat's experience of diaspora and the texts she writes. It is less a remittance, she would seem to argue, than a making sense of the various histories that have shaped Haitian lives across generational divides.

While Danticat evokes communal histories, Laferrière's testimonial voice is more self-centered. In *Tout bouge*, it is stressed as the *moi* around which "everything moves." As Munro remarks, "The image the title evokes is of the author standing at the center of a still shifting world, shaken and alone. One gets the sense that he wants to resist being redirected, thrown off the singular literary and intellectual path that he has carefully shaped for himself for over a quarter of a century" ("A New Pastoralism?" 20). This interpretation takes the measure of the outsized "I" but also minimizes it against a larger historical backdrop, one in which the earthquake looms large. Recalling Larrier, one might ask where does the "I" position itself in relation to such an apparently epochal event? How does it negotiate and improvise? How is it displaced? If Danticat's desire to "create dangerously" rests on a before-and-after interpretation of the earthquake, it appears more complicated for Laferrière. Munro points to a passage in *Tout bouge* where Laferrière rejects the idea of an "année zéro" proposed by a television commentator, arguing instead that earthquake could not erase the collective memory of Haitians, "malgré ces images insupportables qui me déchirent la rétine" (*Tout bouge*, 59). Yet, earlier on, Laferrière had observed that the habitual bustle of Port-au-Prince was brought to an abrupt halt by the earthquake at 16h53, or "le moment fatal qui a coupé le temps haïtien en deux" (17). No doubt aware of the apparent contradiction between these statements, Laferrière concludes that history is a continuum, such that, "on ne recommence rien" (59). However, it remains difficult to reconcile this assertion with one made a few sentences earlier, when he reminds the reader, "dans le cas d'Haïti, l'histoire débute par un prodigieux bond d'Afrique en Amérique" (59). This raises an important question: is the earthquake the most recent reminder of the Middle Passage, the

cataclysm at the origin of Haitian history? Reading *Tout bouge* alongside *L'Énigme du retour*, the novel published a year prior, a complex idea of return emerges between two ways of (re)thinking history, before and after the earthquake.

Laferrière also grapples with the precariousness of being. Scribbling in his black notebook, he attempts to understand the turbulence around him, to contain the disruption. “Tant que j'écris,” he observes in the epilogue to *Tout bouge*, “rien ne bouge” (134).[14] If Lahens feels hemmed in by post-earthquake realities, Laferrière trembles and has nightmares, as if imploring the ground beneath him to stop moving. This is not the first time he has linked his writing to the surrounding movement. In *L'Énigme du retour* he writes, “Mon carnet noir à portée de main où je continue à noter tout ce qui bouge autour de moi. Le moindre insecte que mon regard capte” (209). This passage is set in the long second part of the novel that takes place during his return to Haiti, after more than thirty years of being away, when Laferrière realizes he is an outsider in his native environs. The reader has the impression of scientist, notebook at the ready, eager to get as close as possible to learn something anew on long-lost terrain. In *Tout bouge*, however, he is less concerned with observing and recording the habits of the objects of his gaze than he is with more existential problems of life and death. In both instances, writing shapes a particular ethos, whether in the memory of a Haiti Laferrière once knew or in the aftermath of an earthquake.

The earthquake challenged the writer's vocation, raising doubts over the very possibility of literature, especially fiction. Like Larrier, Munro focuses on Haitian writers, yet he is less certain about the capacity of fiction to advocate for truth in the manner of testimony. He writes:

> Fidelity to the truth seemed to be a primary motivation for many authors. One was left to wonder, however, what the role of fiction might be in the post-earthquake period. Does the drive for truth and the need to bear witness necessarily exclude fiction and render it a sign of vanity, a luxury almost? (“A New Pastoralism?” 21)

One hears the ghost of Camus in this question. During the conference at the University of Uppsala, the very one that inspired Danticat's title *Create Dangerously*, Camus reflected on the “Artist and his Time” and

14 This is the second edition, published by Mémoire d'encrier, that updates the first, published in 2010, with an account of Laferrière's return to Haiti several weeks after the earthquake.

wondered if art had become a "luxe mensonger" (*OC* IV 249).[15] As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Camus's writings in the aftermath of the Second World War, and especially during the trials of the purge, are critical to Lahens's sense of what is at stake in the attempts to reconstruct Haiti after the earthquake. For her part, Danticat re-examines Camus's response to the stakes of artistic creation at the height of the French–Algerian war, when he was an artist under siege. Estranged from both France and Algeria, Camus returned to the "autofiction" of *Le premier homme*, the unfinished novel whose protagonist, Jacques Cormery, is based largely on the author's life story. David Carroll reads Camus's literary and political texts together to find the complicated expression of a man torn between cultures, one who refused to defend the right to Algerian independence but who also demanded justice for all.[16] In an important way, Carroll points to the ethics of fiction as it mediates the political implications of the essays. Could one therefore read Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light* as a fictional reprise of the stakes of *Create Dangerously*? Following Larrier, is it possible to read a kind of archival advocacy in such (inter)textual pairing, much in the same way that Lahens both interrogates recurring themes of her fiction in *Failles* and later reconsiders suggestions and questions raised in the chronicle in the expansive, imaginative setting of *Bain de lune*?

Danticat affirms just such an ethical relationship between Laferrière's *Tout bouge* and *L'Énigme du retour.* Walking around Port-au-Prince, she discovers that the novel has imparted a key lesson by evoking the idea of a lost Haiti. She writes, "The novel, it turns out, is a love poem, a love song to a Haiti that no longer exists, the Haiti of before the earthquake" (*Create Dangerously*, 161). Having just returned to her devastated neighborhood, Danticat finds that the 2009 text already "feels like a

15 Camus, *OC IV*, 249. The title of Camus' conference in Uppsala was "The Artist and his Time." In *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), a collection of Camus's essays that he translated, Justin O'Brien entitles it "Create Dangerously." On the risk of art becoming a luxury, Camus may have been influenced by Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*. See the introduction to Volume I.

16 Alison Rice also picks up on Carroll's argument, which fits seamlessly, she argues, with the aim of a global reinterpretation of fixed identity, be it "Frenchness" or "Algerianness." See Alison Rice, "All Over the Place: Global Women Writers and the Maghreb," in *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History*, ed. Christie McDonald and Susan Suleiman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 160–176.

historical novel" (162). "Then it hits me," she continues, "From now on, there will always be the Haiti of before the earthquake and the Haiti of after the earthquake" (162). This dramatic reading of the radical place of the earthquake in Haitian history holds meaning for Danticat's theory of the writer "at work." In her reading of Laferrière, she insists on a tight connection between bearing witness and storytelling. Just as the novelist is a kind of witness through the reminiscence of his adolescent years, he is also capable of delivering testimony in the mode of non-fiction. Laferrière carries out this task, Danticat argues, from outside Haiti. She defends his decision to leave shortly after the earthquake – "his role was to bear witness," she writes (161). In this manner, the writer serves as a vital bridge not only between past and present but also between mainland and diaspora. His status as an outsider shapes his ability to make sense of the various encounters that mark his return. Despite the fear of becoming a stranger, Laferrière demonstrates a commitment to asking unsettling questions and, in the process, attempts to know what "moves around him."

Having just arrived for *Étonnants voyageurs*, the literary festival that had been scheduled to take place in Port-au-Prince when the earthquake struck, Laferrière is exultant. "La littérature reprend ici sa place," he writes, celebrating what he sees as the return to prominence of literature in Haiti (*Tout bouge*, 9). In the opening paragraph of *Tout bouge*, Laferrière returns to a place where "la vie semble reprendre son cours après des décennies de turbulence" (9). "Cela [le festival] s'annonce excitant," he continues, "car, pour la première fois, la littérature semble supplanter le discours politique dans la faveur populaire" (9). Laferrière is downright nostalgic, recalling previous literary heydays announced by such French writers as Paul Morand, in the late 1920s, and André Malraux, who wrote in 1975 of "un peuple qui peint" (*Tout bouge*, 9). And yet, as he succumbs briefly to the exceptionalist rejoicing in Haitian arts – "on cherche encore la raison d'une pareille concentration d'artistes sur un espace aussi restreint" (9) – Laferrière does not mention the political atmosphere that stifled Haiti during each of these otherwise literary times. Instead, he describes the literary electricity that charges him upon his return to Haiti by grounding it in the historic essays of two French writers, without questioning the air of exoticism that lifts their own testimony.[17] Putting aside Laferrière's less critical attention to his

17 Not to mention Morand's antisemitism in the 1930s, which culminated in a prominent role in the Vichy government. See Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial*

fellow men of letters, it is the symbiosis between testimony and fiction that draws my attention. That is, the question of the role of fiction post-earthquake, and its relation to an idea of truth, is not sufficient without considering the non-fictional testimony that moves the writer to artistic creation or that brings him to call it into question. For, if Laferrière turns to poetics to unravel the mystery of his belated return in *L'Énigme du retour*, he also knows that, from one minute to the next, the ground can "onduler comme une feuille de papier que le vent emporte" (*Tout bouge*, 10).

Writing Interrupted

The genesis of *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* was sometime before March 2008, when Danticat gave the second annual Toni Morrison lecture at Princeton University's Center for African American studies.[18] Composed of twelve chapters, the collection of essays includes material new and old, going as far back as the afterword to the 1999 re-edition of her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.[19] Ranging from political and cultural history and criticism to literature, visual arts, and autobiography, the topics are expansive yet closely connected to each other. They fit together much like the stories that make up *Claire of the Sea Light*, whose chapters shift focus, moving through several points of view and character arcs, only to come back to its overarching themes. Silvia Martínez-Falquina refers to the text as a

> short story cycle – which, as opposed to either the novel or the short story, allows for its parts to be read independently, for each story stands on its own with some sense of closure, or sequentially, in such a way that meanings are added to the whole and the connection of the separate parts is emphasized. ("Postcolonial Trauma Theory in the Contact Zone," 846)

Martínez-Falquina understands the generic flexibility of the text as influenced by the movement of "closure and openness" that, she contends,

Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 107.

18 "Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work." Toni Morrison Lecture Series. Princeton University, March 25, 2008. Uploaded 15 March 2012. http://www.princeton.edu/africanamericanstudies/events/toni-morrison-lectures/2007–08/ (accessed June 15, 2015).

19 Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York: Random House, 1998).

is inherent to "the dyaspora condition in all its ambivalence" (846).[20] Such attention to the connections between aesthetic form, theoretical production, and cultural histories of Caribbean spaces informs my attempt to analyze *Create Dangerously* alongside *Claire of the Sea Light*. In addition to their structural similarities, the writing of each text was interrupted by the earthquake. "While I was 'at work' at 4:53 p.m., on January 12, 2010," she writes in the opening chapter, "the ground was shaking and killing more than two hundred thousand people in a 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti" (*Create Dangerously*, 18). The idea of "writing interrupted" refers to the ways that unexpected events interfere with and suspend textual representation. This lived experience also recalls individual and collective memories that then compel the writer to revise a work in progress. It also speaks to the differences between the genres of testimony and chronicle, in that personal reflection gives way to social commentary with a view to political and historical context. The testimonial features of *Create Dangerously* – and especially the three chapters that directly address the earthquake – are less a daily chronicle in the manner of *Failles* and *Tout bouge* than they are an effort to make connections to other historical moments.

In *Create Dangerously*, two pivotal dates help bring January 12, 2010 into focus. Together, they evoke the central themes of life and death to which the writer bears witness. The first is November 12, 1964, when a Duvalier firing squad publicly executed Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin, two political dissidents. The eponymous opening essay defines this moment as a "creation myth":[21]

20 In an earlier article, "Postcolonial Trauma Theory and the Short Story Cycle: Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*," Martínez-Falquina underscores a similar structure in *The Dew Breaker*. She examines both texts through an approach that aims to decolonize prevailing critical paradigms of trauma theory. Although she is more interested in these larger theoretical questions, her reading of Danticat finds a partner in Mary Gallagher's analysis of the connection between the hybrid form of *The Dew Breaker* and its treatment of themes of trauma and loss. See "Concealment, Displacement, & Disconnection," in Munro, *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide*, 147–160. Also cited in Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line*, 183–184.

21 In his novel *Le crayon du bon dieu n'a pas de gomme*, which I take up in Chapter Five, Louis-Philippe Dalembert depicts an execution scene from the point of view of a young boy who is in attendance with his classmates. In *Create Dangerously*, Danticat observes, "To the side is a balcony filled with school-children" (3).

> All artists, writers among them, have several stories – one might call them creation myths – that haunt and obsess them. This is one of mine. I don't even remember when I first heard about it. I feel as though I have always known it, having filled in the curiosity-driven details through photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, books, and films as I have gotten older … . Like most creation myths, this one too exists beyond the scope of my own life, yet it still feels present, even urgent. Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin were patriots who died so that other Haitians could live. They were also immigrants, like me. (5–7)

Before reflecting on the informal syllabus that nourished her upbringing, Danticat locates "all artists," in a sweeping gesture, in the dialectic between "haunt and obsess." This early passage in the book conjures the image of the writer at work and begins to call forth the "ghosts" that Danticat chases and is chased by, in public and private. The literary witness is both object (is haunted) and subject (obsesses over) of history in that the stories provided by these textual and visual materials bring her to write. Following Gordimer, the events of the surrounding world interact with the writer's "inwardness" and satisfy the desire to transform the past into a story that speaks to the urgency of the present. By collecting memories of the execution that live on in literature and film, and by updating them in the pages of *Create Dangerously*, Danticat revives "inner voices," as Gordimer put it, those that had been "submerged beneath public ideology, discourse and action" ("Literary Witness," 72). Yet even this personal dimension risks being distorted by the popular clamor for the writer's presence in public: "And even before the first aftershock," Danticat writes with some exasperation, "people were calling me asking, 'Edwidge, what are you going to do? When are you going back? Could you come on television or on the radio and tell us how you feel? Could you write us fifteen hundred words or less?'" (18–19).

The second date is April 3, 2000, the day that Danticat's friend and mentor, Jean Dominique, was assassinated. The founder of Radio Haïti Inter, Dominique was an outspoken critic of both Duvalier regimes. For Danticat, his death brings to the surface conflicted feelings about diaspora and belonging that consume the immigrant artist, as Lamming had written many years before, who crosses borders and languages, and is at home and in exile. Chapter Three, "I Am Not a Journalist," evolved out of an essay she had begun on the morning of Dominique's murder. She writes that the initial objective of the piece was to reflect on the "multilayered meaning of the Creole word *dyaspora*" (49). The

original plan was to celebrate the life story of Dominique, who had been in and out of exile for years. She wanted the essay to be a rewriting of an earlier speech in which she had expressed shame in belonging to a "parasitic *dyaspora*, a foreign being but still not a *blan* [foreigner]" (50–51). She finds solace in the words of Dominique: "The *Dyaspora* are people with their feet planted in both worlds ... you are not alone" (51). Now, however, history called for an elegy, and Danticat draws a connection between Dominique and Jacques Roumain. Rereading Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, she writes, "Délira's despair and Manuel's hope make for a delicate balance, of which I am reminded each time I return to Haiti: the exile's joy and the resident's anguish – it can also be the other way around, the resident's joy and the exile's anguish – clashing" (46). She calls out to Roumain to find an answer to one of the many difficult questions posed throughout, "who do we think we are?" Joy in writing, anguish in poverty and fear; yet also anguish in having to choose to leave Haiti, joy and pride of those who remained. Even though she appears comforted by the memory of Dominique's confident reassurance, Danticat wants to understand the "delicate balance" of her place in the *dyaspora*. The reader gets the feeling that she hesitates to accept fully Dominique's metaphor. Yet, as the memories of his life take on the aura of myth and as she draws lessons from additional readings of Haitian writers, Danticat ultimately arrives at a more positive definition of *dyaspora*, though one still tinged with ambivalence.

As the histories of November 12, 1964 and April 3, 2000 resurface after January 12, 2010, the overlaying of multiple times and places calls into question Danticat's insistence on the earthquake's rupture of historical time. The invocation of Camus could be read as evidence of continuity. The first part of the title borrows a phrase from Camus's last public lecture in Sweden. "Create dangerously" is an artistic credo that guides Danticat in the face of existential threats. The subtitle makes her project more precise yet also more precarious. It is not enough to make sense of the earthquake and its place among other historical events. As an "immigrant artist" Danticat must also negotiate the intermediary spaces from which she writes. Just as Camus moved between colonial Algeria and France, she, too, is outsider and insider, part of the Haitian diaspora yet still attached to her homeland, as Dominique reminded her.

In addition to questions of time and space, "writing interrupted" also speaks to the structural process of drafting, revising, publishing, and republishing the individual pieces that make up *Create Dangerously* and *Claire of the Sea Light*. Comparison of their production is revealing

because, even though the novel appeared three years after the essays, Danticat composed and published parts of both over roughly the same period of time, between 1999 and 2010.[22] This process, or how ideas and words on the page become a published text, is part of the commodification of literature. As I have endeavored to show, historical circumstances, too, can intervene, not only at the level of ideas but also in terms of the labor of writing. On one hand, in terms of the ongoing preparation and production of the texts, it does not seem inaccurate to argue that her writing, like that of several of her peers, was not fundamentally altered by the earthquake. On the other, I suggest that the interruption of the earthquake deepened the resolve to be mindful of the past. Douglas's argument concerning the blurred lines between "manuscript genetics [and] textual genesis" ("Writing the Haitian Earthquake," 388) goes a long way to grasp Danticat's conception of the "collaged manner" of her art: "to merge my own narratives with the oral and written narratives of others" (*Create Dangerously*, 62). The blend of creative and critical processes – how one interrupts or interferes with the other – that allows genres and modes to intermingle is arguably the defining characteristic of previous texts, including the memoir, *Brother I'm Dying*, the novels, *The Dew Breaker* and *The Farming of Bones*, and the collection of stories, *Krik? Krak!*, whose epilogue, "Women Like Us," includes a chilling reminder of risks taken by Haitian writers past: "Writers don't leave any mark in the world," she contends, "Not the world where we are from. In our world," she continues, "writers are tortured and killed if they are men. Called lying whores, then raped and killed, if they are women" (221). Larrier cites this passage as evidence of the dangerous advocacy performed by women writers. She also points out that another story in the collection, "Nineteen Thirty-Seven," "forecasts features that Danticat will revisit and develop in the *Farming of Bones*" (*Autofiction and Advocacy*, 115.) This literary advocacy is not to be understood in terms of a simple political *speaking for* but rather as the ethical work of the imagination that recalls and represents voices that history has silenced.

22 She published two chapters of *Claire of the Sea Light* in *The New Yorker*: "Reading Lessons" in the January 10, 2005 edition, and "Ghosts" in the November 24, 2008 edition. Additional parts were published in a variety of sources between 2005 and 2012, including a short story in *Haiti Noir*, an anthology that she edited. In *Create Dangerously*, an earlier version of "Our Guernica" ran as "A Little While" in *The New Yorker* (February 1, 2010), while other chapters were published between 1999 and 2010. See *Create Dangerously*, 175–176.

As Larrier and other critics have shown, the intertwining of testimony and creative literature goes back to some of Danticat's earliest texts. As evidenced in the somber final note of *Krik? Krak!*, the earthquake did not create anew the dangerous circumstances under which the writer works. Yet it did bring Danticat to re-examine her public role, especially given her physical absence. If sadness and fear registered in the immediate aftermath, a sense of powerlessness was not far behind. In a passage from which I draw the title of this chapter, she concedes: "When our worlds are literally crumbling, we tell ourselves how right they may have been, our elders, about our passive careers as distant witnesses" (19). On the surface, she succumbs to the *j'étais-là* phenomenon, just as fellow writer Marvin Victor lamented his own distance.[23] This inability to be present haunts Danticat and creates the desire to collapse the space of diaspora. On a deeper level, it brings her to question her self-esteem as a writer, suddenly deprived, it would appear, of the capacity to act. She goes on to explain:

> We think we are people who might have had a mother and father killed, either by a government or by nature, even before we were born. Some of us think we are accidents of literacy. / I do. / We think we are people who might not have been able to go to school at all, who might never have learned to read and write. We think we are the children of people who have lived in the shadows for too long. (19)

The essay that marks the cautious resumption of writing begins by looking back to the scenes of a coming to literacy. It is a rereading of the past that has new meaning in the present. And this revisited past life, too, had its own before-and-after moment. The opportunity to learn to read and write would eventually bring Danticat to leave Bel Air, where she spent the first twelve years of her life before immigrating to Brooklyn.

To get a sense of what it was like to live in Bel Air – a fictional rendering, of course – readers can turn to the meticulous narrator of "Ghosts," the short story first published in *The New Yorker* before undergoing substantial revision as the third story of *Claire of the*

23 Reflecting on his novel, *Corps mêlés*, during an interview with Arnaud Robert, Victor stated: "C'était pour moi une manière d'expier le sentiment de trahison qui me taraude depuis le séïsme. Je n'étais pas là. Je ne suis d'ailleurs jamais en Haïti quand quelque chose s'y passe." See "Corps mêlés, le premier roman de Marvin Victor, est devenu le 'grand roman du séïsme.'" Interview with Arnaud Robert. *Le Temps*, 19 March 2011, 2.

Sea Light.[24] In the latter, Bel Air becomes Cité Pendue, still a "mid-level slum" (63) inhabited by poor families and gang members, and relocated outside of Port-au-Prince. Yet where so much goes unsaid between the characters of the novel, all of whom seem to carry secrets that threaten to tear apart already precarious lives, in *Create Dangerously* Danticat operates under an imperative from Camus, for whom, she insists, writing was "a revolt against silence" (11). "Create dangerously, for people who read dangerously," she writes with a flourish (10). To understand the depths of essay, it is necessary to return to Camus.

From Camus to Danticat, French Algeria to Haiti

Create Dangerously is more than a homage to Camus. It could be argued that the French-Algerian writer is part of her creation myth, since Danticat makes a connection between the story of the execution of Numa and Drouin and Camus's literary presence in Haiti during the early years of François Duvalier's rule. She relates that her characterization of Numa and Drouin as "patriots who died so the rest of us could live" came from her father, as he lay dying in 2005. "My father was the one who … first told me about the banned books and plays," she writes. "Only when he mentioned togas and Caesars, and an author with a name that sounds like *camion*, did I manage to find my way, among other possible choices, to Camus's *Caligula*" (12). According to her father, a group of young people in Bel Air belonged to a book club called *Le Club de Bonne Humeur*. After the executions, they began to read *Caligula*, the famous play about the Roman emperor who has the power to choose life or death. "As my father used to tell it," Danticat continues, "these young people donned white sheets as togas and they tried to stage Camus's play – quietly, quietly – in many of their houses, where they whispered lines … " (8). These young Haitian actors found inspiration in Camus's staging of unchecked power. Danticat imagines this underground theater to be evidence of vitality in the face of death: "They needed art that could convince them that they would not die the same way Numa and Drouin did. They needed to be convinced that words could still be spoken, that stories could still be told and passed

24 Edwidge Danticat, "Ghosts." *The New Yorker*, November 24, 2008. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/11/24/ghosts-10 (accessed November 10, 2016).

on" (8). Ultimately, she finds that Camus became a part of the Haitian imaginary by giving hope to his courageous readers.

Camus is a literary and historical bridge between the execution of Numa and Drouin and the 2010 earthquake. The creation myth gives meaning to life and death across generations, as Danticat turns from stories of the two dissidents to the more personal loss of her father. The latter's demise becomes the catalyst for bringing together these separate eras and the violence that defines them. Both the Duvalier regime and the earthquake left the country in a spectacle of ruins, Danticat contends, and both magnified problems of time and space. Like Lahens, she writes about the precarity of life on the fault line. The public killing of Numa and Drouin was swift, yet it ushered in a political power that took its time to decimate the country. The turn to Camus is part of the attempt to comprehend systematic political violence. Like the actors of the *Club de bonne humeur*, Danticat re-enacts a historical tragedy for scenes witnessed in the present. And yet, by evoking Camus she also brings the reader to contemplate the violence of the French-Algerian War. Furthermore, since Camus had first written on the question of the artist well before 1957, Danticat also raises the specter of the dangerous times and places – the civil war in Spain and colonial Algeria of the late 1930s, and occupied France in the early 1940s – in which the younger Camus had contemplated his role in the midst of violence and poverty.

It is worth pausing once more to consider what it might mean to call forth Camus, who was honored by the Nobel committee "for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times."[25] Whereas I examined the implications of Lahens's rereading of Camus during the *épuration*, or the crisis of the French nation after Liberation, I now consider Danticat's re-appropriation of the idea of creating dangerously – an idea perhaps inspired by Camus's reading of Nietzsche, who appealed to those "seekers of knowledge" to "live dangerously" (*The Gay Science*, 283) – at a time when the writer is urged, perhaps against his will, into the public sphere.[26] If Camus was hailed by conservatives

25 "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1957." Nobelprize.org. Nobel Media AB 2014, December 10, 2016. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1957/ (accessed November 23, 2018).

26 Camus cites Nietzsche in conclusion of his speech of 14 December (*OC* IV, 265). See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1974), Book Four.

of his time for his unwillingness to endorse the Algerian fight for independence, and, consequently, excoriated by the anti-colonial left, how does Danticat read him? Why does she ignore his controversial political stance yet find his art so convincing for a Haitian audience, past and present?

One possible answer to these questions might point to affinities between Danticat and Camus as people who do not fit neatly within prescribed national identities. But the public role of the writer makes the problem more acute. Camus gave expression to this predicament in the famous ending of the short story "Jonas, ou l'artiste au travail" – which inspired the subtitle of Danticat's book – in which his lonely protagonist produced the ambivalent word-painting "solitaire ou solidaire" (*OC* IV, 83).[27] Over the years, scholars have interpreted the conclusion as the all too human condition of betweenness. Danticat attempts to resolve the dilemma – and, by extension, Camus's emblematic and highly criticized position – by suggesting that the artist makes a sacrifice in the present for the benefit of future readers. This connection between the writer who risks public scrutiny and her future readers gives meaning to Danticat's vision of dangerous creation. Her father's story about the Haitian actors of Camus's play leads to the recognition of the "unifying principle among all writers" (*Create Dangerously*, 10), which is the conviction that "someday, somewhere, someone may risk his or her life to read us" (10). Danticat does not so much ignore Camus's colonial problem as demonstrate how his writing resonated with a Haitian audience terrorized by Duvalier and continues to ring true to Haitian readers today.[28] In other words, the ethics of his literature resides in its global reach and in the condemnation of ideological violence. Camus's writing and speeches, overwhelmed by intractable political circumstances, were misunderstood by partisan readers of his own day. At the very least, such literary testimony required time and space that could not be found between France and Algeria. To understand the gap that allows

27 On *L'Exil et le royaume*, see Lawrence D. Kritzman, "Camus's Curious Humanism or the Intellectual in Exile." *Modern Language Notes* 112.4 (September 1997): 550–575.

28 For further evidence, one can turn to Gina Athena Ulysse's *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), whose introduction cites Camus in epigraph: "Certes, le goût de la vérité n'empêche pas la prise de parti [A taste for truth does not eliminate bias]" (*OC Essais*, 266). The phrase comes from the editorial "Le journalisme critique," in *Combat* (8 September 1944).

for Danticat and Lahens to read Camus differently than his French peers and, later, his postcolonial critics, it is necessary to take a closer look at the essay that informs Danticat's conception of the work of the writer.

Camus's belief in the writer's obligation to events that surround him was bound up with his experience as a *pied noir.* After having advocated for over a decade for the nonviolent union of French Algeria, Camus was pressed on all sides, friends and enemies alike, to move away from an untenable middle ground. However, he continued to urge for a peaceful solution that would keep metropole and colony together. The Nobel speech and the subsequent lecture at Uppsala can be read in terms of a public figure backed into a corner. "Les écrivains d'aujourd'hui … ," he began in Uppsala, "s'ils parlent, les voilà critiqués et attaqués. Si, devenus modestes, ils se taisent, on ne leur parlera plus que de leur silence, pour le leur reprocher bruyamment" (*OC* IV, 247). "Create Dangerously" starts with the realization that the writer can no longer take refuge because "qu'il le veuille ou non … tout artiste aujourd'hui est embarqué dans la galère de son temps" (*OC* IV, 247). The beginning of the speech, then, is less an active "revolt against silence," as Danticat would have it, than it is an almost involuntary expression of the situation in which Camus found himself. In fact, the day before this conference, during a gathering with students in Stockholm, Camus is reported to have broken his silence over the crisis in French Algeria after an Algerian student interrupted him. The student, also apparently a member of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), demanded to know why Camus "intervenait si volontiers en faveur des Européens de l'Est mais ne signait jamais de petition en faveur des Algériens."[29] Apparently unfazed, Camus is reported to have responded, "Je n'ai jamais parlé à un Arabe ou à l'un de vos militants comme vous venez de me parler publiquement … . Vous êtes pour la démocratie en Algérie, soyez donc démocrate tout de suite et laissez-moi parler … " (*OC* IV, 288). As he continued, Camus argued that his silence did not mean a lack of action, most probably referring to his attempts behind the scenes to intervene on behalf of

29 "Polémique de Stockholm: Albert Camus a exposé aux étudiants suédois son attitude devant le problème algérien." *Le Monde*, December 14, 1957. According to *Le Monde* journalist Dominique Birmann, "cette polémique pénible, à laquelle Camus, ne se départant pas un instant de sa mesure et de sa dignité, se refusa, scandalisa l'auditoire suédois" (*OC* IV 288). The subtitle of the article, "the Algerian problem," reveals just how far the French were in 1957 from realizing the depth of the crisis.

Algerian writers. But it was in his closing remarks when he delivered the famous rejoinder: "J'ai toujours condamné la terreur. Je dois condamner aussi un terrorisme qui s'exerce aveuglément, dans les rues d'Alger par exemple, et qui un jour peut frapper ma mère ou ma famille. Je crois à la justice, mais je défendrai ma mère avant la justice" (*OC* IV, 288–289). This momentary admission was startling, not least for the way in which it brought out into the open his belief in the colonial fusion of French Algeria. It was also an unexpected preview of the central argument of his lecture in Uppsala, which was that the artist could no longer be disengaged from the events of his era.

This was not the first time Camus had expounded on the artist and the idea of revolt in the face of injustice. Along with *L'homme révolté*, the long essay that Lahens reflects on in *Failles*, numerous other writings, including the wartime exchange *Lettres à un ami allemand* and the interviews collected in *Actuelles II* and *III*, all clear a path to the public engagement in Sweden.[30] Camus addressed the students in Uppsala with a sense of urgency, one that moved from the historical and theoretical concerns of these earlier writings to the problem of French colonialism:

> Créer aujourd'hui, c'est créer dangereusement. Toute publication est un acte et cet acte expose aux passions d'un siècle qui ne pardonne rien. La question n'est donc pas de savoir si cela est ou n'est pas dommageable à l'art. La question, pour tous ceux qui ne peuvent vivre sans l'art et ce qu'il signifie, est seulement de savoir comment, parmi les polices de tant d'idéologies (que d'églises, quelle solitude!), l'étrange liberté de la création reste possible. (*OC* IV, 248)

For Camus, the work of artistic creation is an "incessant témoignage" (*OC* IV, 263) of freedom against the tyranny of ideology. Yet this proclamation of responsibility nonetheless confounded many of his critics, given his stubborn belief in colonial myths that had long been deployed in many discursive forms, including literature (and especially the short stories of *L'Exil et le royaume*), to justify the continued French presence in Algeria. The extemporaneous response to the Algerian student was a far cry from the young journalist who, in the pages of *Alger républicain* in 1939, had decried the French treatment of the Kabyle population. Moreover, how could Camus condemn the recent Soviet violence in

30 See "L'Artiste et son temps," in "Création et Liberté," *Actuelles II* (*OC Essais*, 800–804); see also "Misère de la Kabylie," *Actuelles III: Chroniques algériennes* (*OC* IV, 307–336).

Hungary, many wondered, yet be unwilling to recognize any justification for the call for independence by the FLN? Ironically, in the aftermath of his appearances in Sweden, Camus would become more disengaged, retreating inside political and artistic silence until his death, a little more than two years later, in a car accident.

Camus's premature death meant that he would no longer be able to elaborate on his views on French Algeria. Arguably, even the unfinished *Le premier homme*, the fictional autobiography, did not risk a revision of the more questionable colonial abstractions of his earlier fiction, from *L'Étranger* and *La Peste* to *L'Exil et le royaume*. For many, the remarks in Sweden continue to tarnish his legacy. Therefore, it is somewhat remarkable that the relationship between Camus's political stance and his artistic beliefs is elided in Danticat's reappropriation. Clearly, she finds inspiration in the timeless questions to be found in his dramaturgy. In Camus, however, there is a tension between the ethical universal of art and the personal politics of the *pied noir.* Given the historical depth of her writing, one should like to know her perspective on the colonial theater of Camus's predicament, particularly how it might run counter to her critique of the long history of U.S. involvement in Haitian affairs. But here Danticat is strangely silent, and her lack of engagement is a missed opportunity for a potentially "dangerous" demystification of an icon.

Camus remains an essential interlocutor among the many that constitute the chain of intertextual and "intervisual" references in *Create Dangerously.* Through this network (among others, Laferrière, Roland Barthes, Pablo Picasso, Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison, Hector Hyppolite, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Michael Richards, and Daniel Morel), the essays theorize and put into practice an idea of literature as communicative. I have in mind here Celia Britton's analysis of Daniel Maximin's *Île et une nuit* (1995), a novel that depicts the night that Hurricane Hugo made landfall on Guadeloupe in 1989. Britton mobilizes Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of literature in *The Inoperative Community*, and particularly the "insistence on literature's lack of homogeneity, [and] on its interruption and spacing ... " (*The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction*, 129).[31] Reading Maximin, she goes on to argue, "The experience of reading his novels is therefore one of responding to a multiplicity of

31 Britton thinks through Nancy's *La communauté désœuvrée*, first published in 1983 (Paris: Christian Bourgeois), and translated as *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

different subjects of enunciation. Equally, intertextuality could be said to enhance the *suspension* of meaning that is essential to literature in its difference from myth" (129, emphasis in original). Britton contends that the many fragments of texts of other writers create a notion of literature as a "form of community-in-solitude": "'the being-with' that sustains [the protagonist] Marie-Gabriel through the hurricane is also a matter of being with books and music," she elaborates (*The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction*, 122). The idea of making sense of the event through the accompaniment of artists resonates deeply, I think, with Danticat's orchestration of works of art and film in *Create Dangerously*. Moreover, as Britton points out, this "intertextual dimension … involves the active participation of the reader" (125). Ultimately, leaning once more on Nancy, she argues, "Maximin's novel counters the conventional view of a bounded, self-contained work and promotes the endlessness of literature" (129).

Where Camus could be seen to occupy an isolated ground – an argument made with great care by James D. Le Sueur[32] – Danticat seeks the company of multiple stories, voices, and the events they narrate. In this transnational light, she digs up uncomfortable truths about Haiti's past and brings them to the center of a debate about Haiti's place in the Americas. In "Daughters of Memory," the fourth chapter of *Create Dangerously*, Danticat writes: "Grappling with memory is, I believe, one of many complicated Haitian obsessions. We have, it seems, a collective agreement to remember our triumphs and gloss over our failures" (63). In her discussion of the relationship between history and memory, Danticat avoids an academic debate in favor of a brief psychoanalytical treatment:

> In order to shield our shattered collective psyche from a long history of setbacks and disillusionment, our constant roller-coaster ride between saviors and dictators, homespun oppression and foreign tyranny, we cultivate communal and historical amnesia, continuously repeating cycles that we never see coming until we are reliving similar horrors. (64)

Selective amnesia is a side effect of historical failures that, in turn, induces periodic political anxiety. In the aftermath of the earthquake, efforts to move beyond disunion were overshadowed by the polarizing *revenants* of Jean-Claude Duvalier and Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who

32 Echoing Tony Judt, Le Sueur writes that Camus's "predictions about [the future violence of] Algeria came true" (*Uncivil War*, 127).

brought back with them conflicting memories of violence past that also further muddled the present political landscape. In *Assistance mortelle*, Peck captured this political unease when his camera zooms in on the handshake between Duvalier and then Haitian president, Michel Martelly, during a ceremony to mark the two-year commemoration of the earthquake. Like Peck, Danticat suggests that to pretend that these ghosts no longer exist is an illusion, a chimera that looms throughout the stories of *Claire of the Sea Light*.

Reckoning with Ghosts

Claire of the Sea Light opens with an early turning point in the lives of a seven-year-old girl, Claire Limyé Lanmé, and her father, a fisherman named Nozias.[33] Claire's mother has already died in childbirth. Burdened with personal tragedy, Nozias struggles to provide a good life for Claire as fishing becomes more and more difficult. The narrator recounts how overfishing has denied the sea of replenishment. Even then, "the seabed was disappearing, and the sea grass that used to nourish the fish was buried under silt and trash" (9). Climate change, economic deprivation, and pollution all combine to threaten the way of life of coastal communities. This is the inexorable reality that forces Nozias to ask Gaëlle, a fabric vendor – whose daughter, Rose, had died in a mototaxi accident – to adopt Claire. Gaëlle initially demurs and, on the day that she finally agrees to take her in, the girl runs away. Claire's disappearance, at the end of the first chapter, leads the third-person narrator on a quest, not only for Claire in the immediate future, but also back in time to link together the cast of characters by telling stories of lives intimately connected.

In each story, characters are surrounded by the past, in the form of memories and in material remnants that endure in the changing landscape. Of the latter, some, such as the Anthère Lighthouse, sit like forlorn monuments to an earlier time. Originally constructed

33 The novel begins and ends with chapters on the namesake of its title, Claire (of the Sea Light). As I note above, an earlier version of the first chapter ("Claire of the Sea Light") and last (*Claire de Lune*), appears in *Haiti Noir*. Beyond the change in the father's name – he is "Gaspard" in the short story – the conclusion of the "noir" version, with Claire's mysterious death on her mother's tombstone, differs dramatically from the ending of the novel.

as a beacon for fishermen, it was largely abandoned when "a fancy neighborhood … sprang up on the hill … the lights from the homes becoming beacons themselves" (149). Perhaps because her grandfather built the lighthouse, Gaëlle has fond memories of a childhood spent inside its gallery, overlooking the "land, the mountains, and the sea bathed in sun, mist, or fog, depending on the season" (150). With the passage of time its luster has faded, and its sole purpose is to help rescue the remaining fishermen. Other sites, such as the Abitasyon Pauline, a castle built originally for Napoleon Bonaparte's sister, are colonial vestiges. "It had been left unfinished in 1802," the narrator explains, "when Pauline Bonaparte's husband died from yellow fever and she sailed with his body back to France" (47).[34] The ruins of the old plantation symbolize the failure of Bonaparte's imperial plan to wrest control from Toussaint Louverture and re-establish order on Saint Domingue. Yet they are also a visible reminder of a colonial edifice that continues to haunt the land some 200 years later. Its fields have long been cultivated, as "tubers were planted where Pauline's drawing rooms and boudoir should have been. Cows and goats grazed around them" (47). And yet, driving through this place, as Gaëlle and her now deceased husband, Laurent, used to do, one becomes aware that the apparently natural wilderness cannot cover over the colonial past. Danticat depicts a Haitian pastoral in which an idealized attachment to place – represented in this story both by Gaëlle's nostalgic memories and by a colonial family romance – is always unsettled and displaced by the violence of history.[35]

How does one see Ville Rose, Danticat seems to ask, and how does one imagine the fullness of an individual life therein, when history has inflicted so much damage? Redirecting a line from *Create Dangerously*, how does one bear witness to this "country within a country"? The desire to tell stories that attest to the humanity of Cité Pendue, an

34 Pauline's husband was none other than General Charles Leclerc, dispatched by his brother-in-law in late 1801 to lead the expeditionary force that was to retake control of Saint Domingue from General Toussaint Louverture. Leclerc's soldiers managed to capture Toussaint and deport him to a prison in France. Leclerc implored Bonaparte for more men before he succumbed to yellow fever five months before Toussaint died in a cold cell in the Jura.

35 On the tension between place and displacement in representations of landscapes in the "New World," see Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

overpopulated neighborhood scarred by gang violence and the blight of poverty, is the central theme of "Ghosts," the third story. In an earlier version, published in *The New Yorker*, Pascal Dorien is a teenage boy whose parents own a small restaurant that has become a hangout for local gang members. In the novel, Pascal becomes Bernard, who, though a few years older, is still portrayed as more fortunate than those who joined the gangs. The latter, " … who were also called chimè, chimeras, or ghosts, and were, for the most part, former street children who couldn't remember ever having lived in a house, boys whose parents had been murdered or had fallen to some deadly disease, leaving them alone in the world" (*Claire of the Sea Light*, 65). The narrator's attention to class history is meant to give context to "gang" and "chimè." The reader is reminded that, earlier on, gangs were known as "popular organizations," but deteriorating political conditions under the Duvalier dictatorships saw the rise of "street children," who would eventually succumb themselves to the "poud blanc."[36] A newswriter at Radio Zòrèy, Bernard conceives of a show he would call "Chimè, or Ghosts." Yet, by being so earnest, Bernard proves to be naïve, as his idea is plagiarized by a colleague. Even before this intellectual theft, the narrator introduces doubt about the lack of critical depth of Bernard's documentary eye. For this reason, "Ghosts" – the story within the story – reads like a cautionary tale. It is ultimately less about the *chimè* than it is about the failed attempt to represent them. How does the reader grasp Bernard's desire to make public the desolation that surrounds him? This dilemma thinly disguises what J. Michael Dash underscores as the chief concern of *Create Dangerously*: " … Danticat seems to pick up on Ollivier's challenge and reflects on the dilemma of the Haitian writer in the wake of separate tragedies of the Duvalier dictatorship and the earthquake of 12 January 2010" ("The Pregnant Widow").[37] In the end, Bernard is murdered, shot like Laurent, and so falls prey to the very violence that he had wanted to write about.

Despite his misreading of social and political hierarchies, Bernard's attachment to Cité Pendue is complex. Equally importantly, he insisted on showing another story about those dehumanized as monstrous ghosts.

36 In the short story published in *The New Yorker*, the reference to the Duvalier is explicit, as the street children are described as having parents who were killed " … during the dictatorship, leaving them alone in a lawless and overpopulated city."

37 Dash refers to Ollivier's essay, "L'enracinement et le déplacement à l'épreuve de l'avenir," cited in Chapter Two.

This struggle to go beyond the self and to find meaning in a collective history is a hallmark of *Claire of the Sea Light*. For Martínez-Falquina, grief is a key motif across the stories that holds the tension between self and other, past and present. She writes, "The text is constructed as a string of stories of grief, most of which can be traced back to the inheritance and persistence of colonialism in Haiti" ("Postcolonial Trauma Theory in the Contact Zone," 845). This argument shores up the connection between literary form and the ideas to which it gives shape. The individual characters' experience of loss is intimate yet grounded in a greater history. In fact, this is a key lesson that Claire learns at school:

> One story that Madame Louise had read to the class when Claire was smaller said that people were afraid to go to Mòn Initil because that's where in the olden days the slaves who had escaped the old Abitasyon Pauline had gone to hide, and some of them had never made it out. The bones of our ancestors, Madame Louise had said in her croaky voice, still litter the grounds of Mòn Initil, and their ghosts still haunt its trees. (216)

This passage takes place in the concluding story, as Claire ascends *Mòn Initil*, or "useless mountain," and looks down on the beach below at the crowd of people mourning the death of another fisherman while they also look for her. As she gazes into an uncertain future, she recalls the teacher's story about escaped slaves who found refuge in the hills. In this pivotal moment, "she stood in the middle of the scorched field for a long time, imagining this life as a maroon" (235). Incarnating the maroons, Claire feels protected by these rebellious figures of history and myth. She then runs down the hill to the beach, even if she remains unsure where her future path will lead.

As her name suggests, Claire is an illuminating figure. Her ability to straddle the realms of life and death owes to the tragic circumstances of her birth: "To most people, Claire Limyè Lanmè was a revenant, a child who had entered the world just as her mother was leaving it. And if these types of children are not closely watched, they can easily follow their mothers into the other world" (16). Sure enough, just as Nozias loses sight of Claire in the first story, so, too does the narrator, who turns first to the story of Gaëlle and then to a series of other characters in Ville Rose, each one connected in some life-and-death way to the next. The death of Laurent leads to Bernard, who is falsely accused of assassinating Laurent, a patron of the station. Bernard's demise takes us to his secret lover, Max Ardin, Jr., whose father had sent him away to Miami the day before Bernard was killed. Upon his return to Ville Rose,

Maxime, Jr. becomes despondent after meeting the boy that he fathered after raping Flore, a former maid in his house. As he walks along the beach one evening, he witnesses the crowd of people looking for Claire. Hearing her name seems to lift his spirits: "The name was as buoyant as it sounded. It was the kind of name you said with love … . It was the kind of name that you could call out with hope. It was the kind of name that had the power to make the sun rise" (118–119). The repeated evocation lights the way to the end of Part One, yet the narrator has yet to find Claire.

Part Two resumes the search, initially through the story of Louise, Claire's teacher, who senses something special about the girl, perhaps even something otherworldly. The reader is then led back to Gaëlle, who tells Claire that it was not her fault that her mother died. "That revenan talk is superstition," she says, "Nobody *returns*. That is not real … . Too many people die here, and why do the rest of us get to live?" (162). Gaëlle's admonition would seem to cast doubt on the possibility of a brighter future for Claire. Yet she is trying to reassure Claire and, indeed, it seems likely that she speaks more of the death of her daughter. Her question reveals that the novel is just as much about the search for one fragile life as it is about the bigger picture of social precarity and ecological degradation in the region. Making this connection requires tying the stories together, I think, instead of isolating particular episodes of grieving. In this manner, one can read Claire's descent of *Mòn Initil*, in the final story, as the return of a young girl who is ready to reappear and to give life with Gaëlle a chance; perhaps even, at some point, to embody the history of revolt that hovers over the country, like an aura.

Just as Claire senses the many revenants around her and allows them to accompany her, Danticat, too, feels that she is "bravely moving forward" (*Create Dangerously*, 148). Unlike the short story in *Haiti Noir*, *Claire of the Sea Light* appears to close on an uplifting note, one that mirrors the growing conviction of the testimonial "I" of *Create Dangerously*. However, Claire's future as a *restavek*, or a child sent away to work as a domestic servant, is hardly cause for optimism. The fact that her voice is reported through the narrator makes it even harder to imagine an alternative future for Claire. But perhaps giving direct voice to this young girl is outside the bounds of testimony and fiction alike. Both reach, in different ways, for solidarity across cultures and classes. In its depiction of deep-rooted inequality and injustice, especially for its female characters, *Claire of the Sea Light* reveals a coastal region on the edge.

Conclusion

In *Create Dangerously*, Danticat argues that artists can no longer turn away from scenes of ghostly living. The final two essays of the collection address the vital role of art in bringing to light what is marginalized or lost to history and, in so doing, making an appeal to justice in the present and for the future. "Acheiropoietos" ponders the work of another artist and friend, Daniel Morel. A young boy who witnessed the execution of Numa and Drouin, Morel is the key figure of the conclusion of the creation myth of *Create Dangerously.* In Danticat's telling, Morel was able to pick up Drouin's eyeglasses, on which "he'd noticed tiny chunks of Drouin's brain" (137). Because another boy snatched them away, Morel was not able to put them on, Danticat imagines, "to see the world the way it might have been reflected in a dead man's eyes" (137). However, she anticipates what Morel could have seen, as she picks up this visual metaphor in an extended meditation on theories of the photographic image. Gleaning from Sontag, Danticat dwells on the dual power of the photograph, its ability to reveal just as much at it conceals. The photograph allows us to participate in a moment of time but it also keeps us at a distance. As a writer, Danticat revels in the imaginative, if elusive, possibilities contained in the captured image. Yet she also dwells on the uneven relation of power between those who take the image and those whose image is taken. But if it means being able to tell stories about Haiti that, she contends, people need to see to understand, then it is worth it. "It fights complete erasure," she states, "It forces others to remember that we were – are – here" (147). Citing Barthes, she finds that the photograph is evidence of an almost divine inspiration, something "not made by the hand of man, *acheiropoietos*" (148, emphasis in original). Danticat does not push too hard to make the case for the otherworldly aspect of "all impassioned creative endeavors" (148). Instead, she has faith, however fragile, in the power of art to inspire and to provoke. In fact, it is Morel who helps her understand her mission as a fearless, creative writer. He tells her that he became a photojournalist after being afraid at the execution of Numa and Drouin. The camera empowers him to confront this fear, he explains, because he protects others with the truth of what he witnesses.

In the closing essay, "Our Guernica," Danticat describes a painting on a white tent in Léogâne: "a beautiful chocolate angel with her face turned up toward an indigo sky as she floats over a pile of muddled corpses" (169). The comparison of the angel of Léogâne to Picasso's

"Guernica" confirms the belief that art is possible "amidst the Haitian ruins" (159). As arresting and unlikely as the image is, its existence on the tent does not complete the story. The lesson to be drawn is not simply about the possibility of art after unimaginable tragedy. The allusion to "Guernica" takes the reader beyond an axiomatic truth by at once collapsing and expanding the spatio-temporal boundaries of Haitian experience. Reading the artwork as a whole, the historically charged images ("chocolate angel, indigo sky, and pile of muddled corpses"), together with its place in a "makeshift refugee camp," is what draws Danticat's attention. And, recalling the impact of Laferrière's novel, the trope of reading brings about the recognition that "we artists too have changed" (162). The essay describes an emotional return to Haiti that is mediated by two readings of art. The first is the reinterpretation of Laferrière's *L'Énigme du retour*, and the second is the unexpected viewing of a canvas angel. And, it could be argued, these readings are themselves mediated by our reading of *Create Dangerously*. These readings teach Danticat about the role of the artist in Haitian culture, about the process of bereavement and about cross-cultural prejudice. They lead to a central argument of the essay, which is that to understand Haiti post-earthquake – "both inside and outside of Haiti" (162) – is not to fixate on the possibility of art but to read historically and, possibly, to take a closer look not only at scenes of ruins but also, self-reflexively, at the comfort of our ability to witness them from a distance.

In both of these essays, Danticat moves seamlessly from the beginnings of the Duvalier era to post-earthquake Haiti. As she contemplates time in the ruins and what the future might hold, she is drawn back, time and again, to the past. Discussing Morel's "pictures of death and destruction" (*Create Dangerously*, 150) in Port-au-Prince and visiting a cemetery with him lead Danticat back to the graffiti of Jean-Michel Basquiat in the New York of the 1980s and, farther still, to the execution of Numa and Drouin in 1964. In the next essay, Danticat is back in the present, in view of a canvas angel, flying over piles of bodies. Thinking once more with David Scott, the reader may be inclined to acknowledge that Danticat's generation is haunted by the past and unable to overcome it. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the angel of the tent camp turned to the future. At the same time, however, Danticat sheds light on Haiti and this "other America" as spaces that political and economic powers in the present have obscured and forgotten. Likewise, the fictional Ville Rose and Cité Pendue are less visible locales. Danticat's creative vision is at least a generation removed from the "other America" that Glissant witnessed

in *Le discours antillais* and that later inspired Dash's comparative study, also titled *The Other America*. Whereas Dash points to the array of Caribbean voices and forms of modernism that challenged European ideas of the colonial tropics with energy, creativity, and skepticism – the anticolonial fervor that, for Scott, is now lost – Danticat calls attention, in *Create Dangerously*, to artists and writers who cope with the intertwined legacies of the Duvalier dictatorships and neoliberal modernization schemes enforced by the United States and the international organizations in league with these policies, and the deprivation left in their wake. The essay, "Another Country," critiques a triumphant understanding of America that fails to acknowledge the separate spaces inhabited by the privileged and the vulnerable. "For the poor and outcast everywhere dwell within their own country," Danticat writes, " … that's why one can so easily become a refugee within one's own borders" (*Create Dangerously*, 111). In *Claire of the Sea Light*, Danticat imagines the struggle of a young girl, internally displaced and in search of refuge. Where her story ends, the reader will never know for sure.

PART THREE

The Anthropocene from Below

CHAPTER FIVE

Fictions of Migration and Refuge from the Anthropocene

> s'en aller en éternelle drive
> à trop sentir la terre
> se dérober sous ses pieds
> dériver encore et toujours
> en navette entre ici et là-bas
> pour éviter l'effondrement
>
> Louis-Philippe Dalembert,
> "l'étranger en marche sur la terre … "[1]

Yanick Lahens and Edwidge Danticat are literary witnesses to political and natural catastrophes and their unsettling effects on the experience of time and space. Part Two has drawn attention to the ways that each attests to overlapping temporalities of past, present, and future inherent to aftermaths. Their fictions shed light on communities that remain haunted by the shadows of political violence and that continue to struggle with deteriorating environments and economic deprivation. Lahens and Danticat write and rewrite stories of migration and refuge that are animated by an acute awareness of the dispossession of Haitian experience and a deep sense of environmental justice. Yet if their essays are bolstered by the desire to re-center the place of Haiti within the Americas and to critique reductive, politicized ideas of disaster, they also betray apprehension in the face of an obscured future.

Having considered the synergies of testimonial and creative writing, this final chapter returns to the imbrication of geological and human fault

1 An earlier version of the poem was published in *Transhumances* (Paris: Editions Riveneuves, 2010).

lines. In the introduction to this book, I suggested that questions raised in *Failles* offer a way to rethink the emergence of the Anthropocene and to check its increasing influence in academic and popular circles – indeed, one might say, its tendency to *colonize* these discursive spaces. Crucially, Lahens suggests that the well-being of humanity lies not simply in a future-oriented awareness of "our geological age," but rather in the recognition of the unfinished "Age of Revolution" and the failure of Western European modernity to "humanize the black Man." As opposed to the universal human of the Anthropocene, perceived to be outside the politics of difference, Lahens underscores the continuous history of subjugation and political and environmental injustice.

This chapter extends the opening analyses of *Failles* by arguing that the open-ended conclusions of Dalembert's *Ballade d'un amour inachevé*, Victor's *Maudite éducation* and *L'Escalier de mes désillusions*, and Pierre-Dahomey's *Rapatriés* go against the grain of two widespread narratives that shape the interpretation of disaster.[2] The first is the humanitarian storyline, which I briefly summarize below before turning to the second – the narrative of declension proper to most, if not all, theories of the Anthropocene.[3] The first section of the chapter draws out the central questions driving debates about the Anthropocene and considers key interventions of Caribbean thought. Close readings of Victor, Dalembert, and Pierre-Dahomey follow this theoretical prologue in considering how their fictions imagine the collision of geological and political time and space. The analytic focus on the historical and environmental subtexts of their stories has implications for what Bruno Latour calls "our common geostory," or the idea of the planet as a "full-fledged *actor*" ("Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 3;

2 Had I more time, I could also have included James Noël's first novel, *Belle merveille* (Paris: Zulma, 2017). The novel is a poetic reflection on the aftermath of the earthquake, the ubiquitous presence of humanitarian actors, and the role of Nepalese peacekeeping troops serving with the United Nations Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH) in the cholera outbreak that ravaged the country in fall 2010.

3 Narratives on techno-utopia represent a less prevalent strand of the Anthropocene, and are epitomized by Diane Ackerman's *The Human Age: The World Shaped By Us* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014). As Rob Nixon put it in his review, "Ackerman's Anthropocene, however, is decidedly sunny side up." See "Future Footprints." *The New York Times*, September 5, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/books/review/the-human-age-by-diane-ackerman.html (accessed September 18, 2016).

emphasis in original). "Storytelling is not just a property of human language," Latour continues, "but one of the many consequences of being thrown in a world that is, by itself, fully articulated and active" (13). Victor's protagonist initially surrenders to the earthquake but then manages to historicize its catastrophic power and conjure different temporalities of being between religion and politics. Victor's reflections on the deeper time of Vodou and the temporal ambiguity of the extended present are at odds with the irruption into history that Danticat and, to a lesser extent, Laferrière claim to witness in the earthquake. In this way, Victor's narratives slip through the temporal frame of predominant narratives of the Anthropocene, most of which, as Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz demonstrate, posit a new era of reflexivity that radically replaced a long period of non-reflexivity.[4]

Dalembert imagines conflicts of time and space in a story that follows a migrant from the Caribbean to Europe. As evidenced in the passage from "l'étranger en marche sur la terre ... ," the poem cited here in epigraph, Dalembert dwells on the politics of migration and ecological problems, including climate change, overpopulation, and the impermanence of fault lines. The final section of the chapter treats Pierre-Dahomey's portrait of Belliqueuse (Belli) Louissaint. *Rapatriés* recounts Belli's life, from a failed attempt to flee to the "belles plages de la Floride" (10), just after the ouster of Jean-Claude Duvalier, to her precarious existence in "Rapatriés," a camp on previously uninhabited land where boat-people were "repatriated," all the way to her death not long after the earthquake. Pierre-Dahomey creates a moving, if uneven, story that can be read as a fictional rendering of the intransitive migration and search for refuge that Charles reported on in *De si jolies petites plages*. The novel imagines the personal lives of refugees, whose trajectories approximate those documented in Charles's reporting. Pierre-Dahomey compels the reader to take hold not only of those on the periphery or altogether outside the privilege of citizenship in the nation-state, but also of immigration and refugee policies and practices that betray different realities of being human in the world today.

4 Bonneuil and Fressoz date the non-reflexive modernity from the eighteenth to the twentieth century and locate the moment of reflexivity in the late twentieth century. They also liken this shift to "an accent on a radical break [that] is a rhetorical feature of any prophetic discourse that seeks to win people to the idea of an advent" (*The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, trans. David Fernbach [London: Verso, 2016], 74).

The Anthropocene From Below

> The argument proposes that the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethno-class (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself / ourselves.
>
> Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 260

With few exceptions, media outlets, religious groups, and humanitarian organizations respond to natural disasters with uplifting, empathic narratives. They are exemplified by the refrain "We are all Haitian," which rang out after the earthquake. To a sympathetic ear, it might be heard as an expression of solidarity. Yet, as Didier Fassin wrote of the apparently generous pledges made to the Haitian government, "For a fleeting moment, we had the illusion that we shared a common human condition" (*Humanitarian Reason*, xi).[5] In this critical light, the sentiment of togetherness is belied by concrete divisions (geographical, geological, environmental, socio-economic) that reveal the abstraction of the "human condition." The elision of difference keeps out of view the scandal of poverty, as Lahens argues in *Failles*. In their various depictions of Haitian lives, Victor, Dalembert, and Pierre-Dahomey share the active pessimism of their compatriot. When faced with good will and material assistance, their characters are simultaneously confronted with the vulnerability of their humanitarian condition.

Chapter Three addresses the ways that Lahens challenges the particular altruism of what can be loosely called the humanitarian narrative, which remains tied to Western liberal and neoliberal notions of *homo politicus* and *homo economicus*.[6] Fassin's critique of the apparent ecumenism that undergirds much humanitarian thought contains an implicit recognition

5 Fassin continues: "We could forget that only 6% of Haitian asylum seekers are granted the status of refugee in France … or that thirty thousand Haitians were on the deportation lists of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency" (xi–xii).

6 Chapter Three also briefly describes Raoul Peck's deconstruction of international aid and humanitarian organizations in his documentary *Assistance mortelle*.

of many ways of being human and the unresolvable conflicts that arise. This tension is at the heart of the story of the Anthropocene. The prevailing (which is to say, scientific) narrative holds that humankind has become a collective force capable of impacting the functioning of the Earth system. Depending on the outcome of the Working Group on the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch is upon us. The dates may remain in dispute (1610, 1784, 1945, or 1964). However, because they are all in the past, we will have discovered that this "new" Age had been hiding in plain sight for some time.

The Anthropocene is the subject of a wide-ranging academic debate among scientists and humanists. It is no small irony that the two groups are rarely in dialogue with each other. In "Untranslating the Anthropocene," Phillip Usher argues that, despite a number of attempts to define the "Anthropocene," both the sciences and the humanities have not done enough to problematize the etymon, *anthropos*, upon which all definitions are premised. At the outset of the essay Usher contends "It is not enough – as countless books and articles do – to 'translate' it as 'man' or 'human'" ("Untranslating the Anthropocene," 57). In a similar gesture, Stacy Alaimo opens with two deceptively simple questions: "Who is the 'anthro' of the 'Anthropocene'? In its ostensible universality, does the prefix suggest a subject position that anyone could inhabit?" ("Your Shell on Acid," 89). Immediately, however, she states that " … some accounts of the Anthropocene reinstall rather familiar versions of man" (89). For their part, Bonneuil and Fressoz devote a chapter to the question "Who is the Anthropos?" (*The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 65). They point out that the "key [scientific] article on the Anthropocene and its history … counts no less than ninety-nine occurrences of the adjective 'human' or the noun 'humanity.' The Anthropocenologists' dominant narrative of the Anthropocene presents an abstract humanity uniformly involved – and, it implies, uniformly to blame" (66).[7] To be clear, Alaimo, Usher, and Bonneuil and Fressoz do not wish to do away with the term. In fact,

7 Bonneuil and Fressoz refer to Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill in "The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 369 (2011): 842–867. "Anthropocenologist" is the term used by Bonneuil and Fressoz to designate those who would subscribe to the idea of the Anthropocene without questioning the biases and political implications of scientific authorities. Usher writes of the "Anthropocenist" as the scientist who observes the observed, or the *Anthropos* ("Untranslating the Anthropocene." *Diacritics* 44.3 [2016]: 67).

the latter conclude emphatically, "The Anthropocene is here. It is our new condition" (*The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 289). As they see it, "thinking with the Anthropocene" (288) means accepting this condition without the illusion of a sudden awareness and re-engaging the powerful institutions and systems that led us into it. Alaimo and Usher have a less sanguine outlook. Usher makes a convincing case to "untranslate," by which he means to "defamiliarize the overly familiar Anthropocene by writing back into it some of its more distant histories … " (65). In other words, it is necessary to stay in contact with, and most certainly to read and listen to, the subjects in the archive. In the end, all four argue for rethinking received ideas on the future of the *anthropos* by way of a historical approach that calls for cross-disciplinary dialogue and goes beyond the limits of periodization.

To be sure, the Euro-American and predominately masculine bias of scientific narratives on the Anthropocene has not gone unchecked.[8] In addition to Usher's attention to the connections between contemporary scientific approaches to the *anthropos* and anthropometrical methods of the late nineteenth century, and the global view of Bonneuil and Fressoz, one could also point to the eco-Marxist notion of the "Capitalocene," a neologism coined by Jason W. Moore to interrogate the historical dependence of industrial capitalism on the transatlantic slave trade and slave labor.[9] Moore defines it as "the historical era shaped by relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital" (*Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 493). "The Anthropocene makes for an easy story," he argues, "because it does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic relations of power and production" (485). Other major lines of critique come from ecofeminist and posthumanist precursors who paved the way for the collection of essays in *Anthropocene Feminism*, as Alaimo points out in her contribution to this volume.[10]

8 See Kate Raworth, "Must the Anthropocene Be a Manthropocene?" *The Guardian*, October 20, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/20/anthropocene-working-group-science-gender-bias (accessed June 15, 2016).

9 See also Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2016); and Andreas Malm, "The Anthropocene Myth." *Jacobin Magazine*, March 30, 2015. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/anthropocene-capitalism-climate-change/ (accessed September 30, 2016).

10 See Richard Grusin, ed., *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Several contributors acknowledge the legacy of Donna

These critiques belong to growing networks and schools of thought that seek to temper the conviction of epochal theories based on assumptions of an undifferentiated humanity. Yet no matter how far-reaching their questions, no matter how forward-thinking they appear, they also feel belated. This is quite simply because the question of what constitutes the human is an old one. Caribbean, Haitian, and, more broadly, Postcolonial studies; Africana, Diaspora, and Critical Race studies; and Feminist and Queer studies have all taken up the question from their respective and intersecting quarters. Of course, it has been a central preoccupation of generations of creative writers, artists, and intellectuals "from below," several of who serve as touchstones for this study, including Césaire, Glissant, Brathwaite, Fanon, Wynter, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot. I want to come back briefly here to the latter two. In Chapter Two, I suggested that Wynter's conception of the plantation archipelago as a matrix of racial oppression and violence is a precursor to the systemic incarceration of Haitian refugees that Jean-Claude Charles documents in *De si jolies petites plages*. Her multi-pronged critique of the overrepresented and hegemonic conception of "Man" – the core argument is highlighted in epigraph to this section – predicts the central problem of the scientific narratives of the Anthropocene: namely, the unconscious cultural assumptions and political privileges upon which depend debates about the "human" impact on the Earth systems. Wynter's meticulous genealogies of Western "modes of being human" begin with the transformation of Christian theocentrism, first from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment ("Man1") and then from the late eighteenth century until the present ("Man2") ("Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 264). In this deeper history, the Anthropocene appears like a *déjà vu*. As Katherine McKittrick argues, "These figures, both Man1 and Man2, are also inflected by powerful knowledge systems and origin stories that explain who / what we are" (*On Being Human as Praxis*, 10). McKittrick synthesizes Wynter's many creative and analytical writings in the following context:

> Working alongside W.E.B. Dubois, C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Elsa Goveia, among others, Wynter dedicates her own past and still ongoing work to the furthering of the "gaze from below"

Haraway and her seminal essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto," first published in 1984. See Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–181.

> emancipatory legacy.[11] This legacy had been born out of the overall global range of anticolonial and antiapartheid struggles against the overtly imperial and colonial liberal monohumanist premises … Her overall project can be identified as that of a *counterhumanism*. (*On Being Human as Praxis*, 11; emphasis in original)

Wynter's overarching argument is built on these intertextual layers. While her "counterhumanism" is at odds with some environmental and posthumanist thought, as Alaimo points out,[12] it is animated by the generational and diasporic links of a "Caribbean critique," or those intellectuals who sought to undo the invention of the Western European idea of Man and his less than human others.[13]

In this eloquent reassessment of the postmodern critique of anthropology, Trouillot also took the long view of the colonization of the Americas.[14] He argued that "the European Renaissance shaped a global geography of imagination" – one that, he continued, "required a 'Savage slot,' a space for the inherently Other" (*Global Transformations*, 1). The projects of modernity that began in the encounter between New and Old Worlds were necessarily developed by a "geography of management," a network of institutions, corporations, procedures, and laws that sustained, both locally and globally, the beginnings of capitalism in the Atlantic world (*Global Transformations*, 2). The

11 Wynter is also in dialogue with a number of European thinkers, including, among others, Darwin, Heidegger, Bateson, Foucault, and Derrida.

12 Referring to "other models of environmental and feminist science studies and material feminisms … ," Alaimo pauses, in particular, over Wynter's "idiosyncratic definition of the 'biocentric' and her use of Darwin." Alaimo continues, "Wynter critiques the idea that humans are 'purely biological beings,' arguing instead that humans are hybrid creatures of both 'mythoi and bios' (34, 31). Critical posthumanist and animal studies scholars, including myself, would not agree with this human exceptionalist argument that denies nonhuman beings their own modes of culture" ("Your Shell On Acid," 116–117). Alaimo cites the interview with McKittrick, *On Being Human as Praxis*.

13 See Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

14 A number of articles on Trouillot appeared in the wake of his untimely death. See Yarimar Bonilla, "Ordinary Sovereignty." *Small Axe* 42 (November 2013): 151–165; Greg Beckett, "Thinking with Others: Savage Thoughts about Anthropology and the West." *Small Axe* 42 (November 2013): 166–181; Colin Dayan, "And then came culture." *Cultural Dynamics* 26.2 (2014): 137–148; and Harvey R. Neptune, "Savaging Civilization: Michel-Rolph Trouillot and the Anthropology of the West." *Cultural Dynamics* 26.2 (July 2014): 219–234.

essays collected in *Global Transformations* read like a documentary of the history of anthropology. Trouillot scans the past of the discipline, including its solidification from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, and its re-evaluation over the last quarter century. By tying various branches of anthropology to the power and rhetoric produced by the myth of the "Savage slot," Trouillot appeared to have little hope for the future. Yet, throughout these essays, it becomes clear that Trouillot aimed for a reform of anthropology, the discipline in which he was trained and which, he still believed, could claim the high road of moral optimism by calling attention to the "richness and variability of humankind" (*Global Transformations*, 139). In this regard, he praised the research of Richard Price and Jennie Smith as exemplary of work that "faces the Native" and "restor[es] the specificity of Otherness" (133).[15] By acknowledging the epistemological value of this voice, Trouillot contends, anthropologists take the necessary risks for a wider vision of humanity. In his conclusion, Trouillot called for a fundamental revision of the discipline premised on the "study of Man": "Anthropology also needs to clearly identify its inescapable interlocutors within the West itself … . [It] should abandon the fiction that it is not primarily a discourse to the West, for the West, and ultimately, about the West as a project" (136). Trouillot is here on common ground with Glissant, who famously noted that "L'Occident n'est pas à l'Ouest. Ce n'est pas un lieu, c'est un projet" (*Le Discours antillais*, 12). Similarly, Trouillot demystified the project of Western authority with a stirring appeal to renounce the myth of the Savage slot and to denounce the idea that economic production should be the "ultimate human value" (139). As Greg Beckett states, *Global Transformations* is "far more than a critique of anthropology. It contains a broader argument that has relevance well beyond the discipline itself" ("Thinking with Others," 167). "Anthropology in this sense," Beckett continues, "must be understood not as a method (fieldwork) or a genre of writing (ethnography) but as an ethical and political stance on the question of what it means to be human" (180).

In the archives of Caribbean and Haitian studies, Wynter and Trouillot are vital points of departure for a rethinking of the Anthropocene

15 See Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an African American People*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Jennie M. Smith, *When the Hands Are Many: Community Organization and Social Change in Rural Haiti* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

from below.[16] Given his founding role in Subaltern studies and his notable critique of European colonialism in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), another central figure would be Dipesh Chakrabarty. However, his intervention into the debate over the Anthropocene, beginning with the widely read essay published in *Critical Inquiry* in 2009, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," arguably amounts to a critical volte-face. For Chakrabarty, global warming ultimately reveals that humans are faced with "a question of a human collectivity, an us, pointing to a figure of the universal … that arises from a shared sense of catastrophe" (222). This is a problem of scale, he contends, that demands a reconceptualization of the understanding of the human as merely biological agent. On the question of scale, Latour would appear to concur. "People are not equipped with the mental and emotional repertoire," Latour writes, "to deal with such a vast scale of events … they have difficulty submitting to such a rapid acceleration for which, in addition, they are supposed to feel responsible … " ("Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 1). Taking a lesson from Michel Serres, but also wanting to go beyond the limited grasp of a contractual solution, Latour proposes a "geostory," or a way of altering the narrative perspective from "dreams of mastery" ("Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 5) to those that animate the agency of a world long understood to be material and inanimate.[17] And yet, while Latour remains focused on the ways that different humans conceive of their place in these geostories, Chakrabarty argues that, because humans have become a "force of nature in the geological sense" ("The Climate of History," 207), we must contend with our power as a species, something that, he continues, is beyond our capacity for self-understanding. In the end, Chakrabarty suggests that the consequences of climate change are so devastating as to command a

16 Another, more recent critical voice to mention here is Gina Athena Ulysse. In *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives*, Ulysse focuses on reductive representations of Haiti and Haitians across multiple discourses, academic and popular, from the persistent maligning of Vodou to violence against women, especially from lower classes and in rural areas. In conclusion, she reflects on the ongoing problem of misrepresentation in the aftermath of the earthquake: "Too many old patterns were being re-created. Indeed, who gets to represent whom remains one of the most enduring legacies of Haitian inequity and instability" (119–120).

17 As Haraway writes of Latour, "he passionately understands the need to change the story, to learn somehow to narrate – to think – outside the prick tale of Humans in History … " (*Experimental Futures*, 40).

new way of thinking humanity that rivals, if not completely overrides, the politics of social justice.[18]

In "Postcolonial Studies and Climate Change," Chakrabarty continues to reckon with the political implications of the earlier emphasis on the collective force of humans.[19] This subsequent essay is an effort to understand more fully the "planetary conjuncture" that he had previously located in "The Climate of History" (199). To lay the groundwork for the central proposition, he begins by providing an overview of three understandings of the human: the universal man, endowed with rights, born in the age of the Enlightenment; the decentered subject of various postmodernist/deconstructionist critiques; and, finally, the geological agent of the Anthropocene.[20] "The current conjuncture of globalization and global warming," he asserts, "leaves us with the challenge of having to think of human agency over multiple and incommensurable scales at once" (1). The confluence of these two transformative processes – when globalization meets a warming planet – produced one image of the human based on difference, as theorized broadly in postcolonial thought, and another based on the collectivity of species. The existence of the former is defined in terms of ontology, while the latter, Chakrabarty argues, is now a collective force that "has no ontological dimension" (13). The impossibility of reconciling these two ideas of the human means that they are "simply disjunctive" (2). Humans cannot

18 "The Climate of History" considers climate change. But what about earthquakes, events not of human origin but of shifting tectonic plates? This is a crucial question that Shatil Pravinchandra raises in a careful check to Chakrabarty. See Shital Pravinchandra, "One Species, Same Difference? Postcolonial Critique and the Concept of Life." *New Literary History* 47.1 (Winter 2016): 27–48.

19 Pravinchandra cites this second essay in a note but chooses not to examine it, because the "earlier article is where Chakrabarty engages extensively with the term 'species'" ("One Species, Same Difference?" 47).

20 These distinctions, which betray Marx's influence on both Chakrabarty and Wynter, correspond to what Chakrabarty had referred to as "History1" and "History2" in the second chapter, "Two Histories of Capital," of *Provincializing Europe*. He clarifies this in response to Ian Baucom:

> History1 and History2 of my earlier proposition in *Provincializing Europe* were about different ways of being, and in that sense about different ways of 'worlding' the Earth … . History1 and History2 are ontologically available to us, that is to say, they both are accessible to us directly through our shared (and evolved) human capacity to experience space and time. ("Baucom's Critique: A Brief Response," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1.2 [September 2014]: 249)

experience global warming in any direct manner, he contends. Rather, single events, he explains, including earthquakes, mediate the capacity to have knowledge of, and to interpret, the impact of climate change.[21] By now, several critics have called into question the bracketing of humans as a collective "geophysical force ... [of] pure, nonontological agency" ("Postcolonial Studies and Climate Change," 13).[22] Alaimo, for one, provides an extensive rebuttal that ultimately takes issue with the reductive and, strangely, immaterial conception of humankind. She explains, "Just because the scale of humans as a 'geological force' is so immense, nearly unthinkable from the minuscule moments of everyday life, does not mean that it is an entirely different entity. It is a matter of scale, not a difference of kind" ("Your Shell on Acid," 102).[23] To emphasize force, as Alaimo argues in her critique of the "dominant figurations of the Anthropocene" (103), is to risk an abstraction that removes different ideas of the human – and thus the historical hierarchies of being human – from the material world altogether.

Perhaps the clearest way to expose the risk of Chakrabarty's vision of humanity as an undifferentiated force is to come back to Wynter. In a long, profound essay on the "coloniality of being," Wynter includes the environment, climate change, global warming, unequal distribution of resources, rampant pollution, and so on, as "all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle" ("Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 260–261). It comes as no surprise, then, that in the extended conversation with McKittrick Wynter insists that these global problems only make it *more urgent* to interrogate what it means to be "Man."[24] In fact, as Aaron Kamugisha points out in his

21 Anderson makes a similar distinction between one-time events, such as earthquakes, and recurring events, such as droughts and volcanic activity (*Disaster Writing*, 193).

22 For another critique of Chakrabarty, see Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Ordinary Futures: Interspecies Worlding in the Anthropocene," in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 352–372.

23 See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Brute Force." *Eurozine*, October 7, 2010. http://www.eurozine.com/brute-force/ (accessed September 16, 2016). For another take on the question of scale, see Claire Colebrook, who points out that it resonates with "the classically feminist question of the *scale of the personal*" ("We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene," 1; emphasis in original).

24 Wynter emphatically tells McKittrick, " ... *the* single issue with which global warming and climate instability now confronts us [is] that we have to replace the

work on Wynter and C. L. R. James, leading black intellectuals in the Caribbean had long equated suffering systematic oppression with the survival of the Earth itself. Like Trouillot, if through a deeper historical frame, Wynter retraces a genealogy of Western conceptions of Man through a symbiosis of religious and imperial missions that separated the human from the subhuman. Building on seminal critiques of a generation prior, including Césaire, James, and Fanon, Wynter argues that the destruction of the colonial legacy remains the great struggle of our time. It is the only way, she continues, to "secur[e] the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself / ourselves" ("Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" (260). For Kamugisha, this is a plea that demands a wider audience:

> The stakes for Wynter and James could not be clearer. The colonial condemnation that has been the lot of blacks will extend to encompass humanity if the wisdom and experience of African diasporic populations, those forced 'to pay the most total psycho-existential price' for the Euro-American West's victory, are ignored. This was the simultaneous warning and hope that James and Wynter could announce at the end of the 1960s and 1970s respectively, before the advent of global neoliberalism and the environmental questions concerning human survival on this planet that would be omnipresent a generation later. ("The Black Experience of New World Coloniality," 139)[25]

Kamugisha urges readers to see that Wynter's theories of the abduction of black bodies and of a "global theory of coloniality" appear "even more prescient and of lasting value" (143–144).

Wynter predicts the ongoing struggle for equality in an Anthropocene that is indifferent to different realities of being human. She envisions not the "politics of climate change" that Chakrabarty beholds, in which thinking the human as a geological force would lead to a non-ontological mode that is "justice-blind" ("Postcolonial Studies and Climate Change," 14). Crucially, Wynter remains grounded in the "*referent-we in the horizon of humanity*" (*On Being Human as Praxis*, 24; emphasis in original).[26]

ends of the referent-we of liberal monohumanist Man2 with the ecumenically human ends of the *referent-we in the horizon of humanity*. We have no choice … " (*On Being Human as Praxis*, 24; emphasis in original).

25 Kamugisha cites Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 306.

26 Wynter refers here to Jacques Derrida's talk "The Ends of Man." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 30.1 (1969): 31–57.

As Claire Colebrook points out in another rejoinder to Chakrabarty, "The time of politics and the time of the planet, once deemed to be distinct, are now colliding, but not converging" ("We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene," 5). For Wynter, the dark future has long been on the horizon, and it is most certainly not a shared catastrophe. The Haitian texts taken up here provide a creative point of entry to the complexity of Wynter's writings. These stories flesh out figures of the *anthropos*; they give them voice and imagine the fullness of a life. Haitian literature and history speak volumes to the experiences of uneven human lives on this deeply unsettled planet, and so I now return to the texts, opening with Victor, before moving to Dalembert and finally to Pierre-Dahomey.

Gary Victor: Unearthing the Necropolis

> This ceremony of the Souls is regarded by the Haitian peasant as a solemn communion; for he hears, at first hand, the secrets of the Dead.
>
> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 9

> Le tremblement de terre a déplacé les rochers qui empêchaient d'avoir accès à la nécropole. Alors tous les récits que j'avais voulu oublier se sont échappés et viennent frapper à ma porte.
>
> Gary Victor, *L'Escalier de mes désillusions*, 61

Having survived the earthquake by a "caprice du hasard," Carl Vausier is a man in shock. Although physically uninjured, he sits down next to his mother-in-law, Man Hernande, unable to move or talk. She, too, is in intense psychic pain, but Carl cannot find the words to comfort her. He laments, "Je ne parviens même pas à allonger la main pour la consoler" (60). Yet while they wait, immobile and silent, to learn the fate of Jézabel, his ex-wife, and their daughter, Hanna, the stories of the past come crashing down into his mind. The conceit of the novel is that the fractures opened in the earth also tore apart the "grands rochers dans [sa] mémoire," (60) those that had prevented him from gaining access to the necropole. No longer. Carl continues, "Dans les décombres de cette nuit, comme les prisonniers de la prison civile qui se sont échappés, mes souvenirs libérés prennent leur revanche dans la prairie de ma mémoire" (61). The first exhumed memory is of his father's funeral, which then

unleashes an avalanche of recollections of his upbringing in the greater "city of the dead" that was Port-au-Prince under François Duvalier.

Like Victor, Carl is an established writer. He realizes that, before the earthquake, the necropolis had always been there; it's just that he had been able to craft stories that "embellished" the "darkness" (60–61). Throughout the novel, past and present clash repeatedly, like aftershocks of the mind. In the end, seemingly by the sheer force of Carl's will, Jézabel and Hanna reappear. It is by way of the "staircase of disillusionment" that he realizes the absurdity of trying to escape from the past. "La frêle beauté du present," he learns, "est souvent le meilleur bouclier contre les jets assassins du destin" (190). The last line of the novel – "la fureur des roches avait ses vertus" (190) – could be read as a tentative acknowledgment of moral reckoning, a recognition of human frailty on an equally fragile earth. Carl's disenchantment is an expression of uncertainty regarding the future. *L'Escalier de mes désillusions* is an imaginative reflection on the ways that the past mingles in the present, drifting between memories and dreams. In this sense, it is also an elaborate contemplation of life and death, on what the necropolis holds in store for Carl. Having survived, rather than expressing a newfound respect for life, much less a shared humanity, Carl discovers this "frail beauty," whose vulnerability nonetheless serves as a "shield" against a "murderous fate."

To date, Victor has created a considerable body of work. Known above all as a master of the short story, a genre in which he has published some thirteen volumes,[27] he has also written some twenty novels that range from a series of "vodou mysteries"[28] to the biting social and political critiques of the "marvelous realism"[29] inherited from his Haitian and Caribbean predecessors. In his early years, Victor penned a column for *Le Nouvelliste* and later held various governmental posts. Finally, he has also written for the stage and screen (big and small). The decision to limit analysis here to two recent novels is an effort to give some focus to the function of time in these works. For such a robust literary history, the critical bibliography on Victor is surprisingly thin, yet Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo is a trustworthy guide. In addition to her work on the short stories, N'Zengou-Tayo

27 These include *Nouvelles interdites*; *Quand le jour cède à la nuit*; *Treize nouvelles vaudou*; and *Albert Buron Anthologie*.

28 *Saison de porcs*; *Soro*; *Cures et chatiments*; *Nuit albinos*.

29 *Clair de Manbo*; *La piste des sortilèges*; *Le sang et la mer*.

has examined the pantheon of vodou spirits and rituals that have long held a place of privilege in Victor's eclectic literary imagination. In an analysis of texts from the late 1980s to the 1990s, she argues that his varied representations of vodou, particularly the ludic dimensions of certain characters and scenarios, stand out in a Haitian literary history rife with ideological depictions of religion and spirituality. Her work sheds light on the overlapping religious and political significance of the allusion to the necropolis in *L'Escalier de mes désillusions*. "Sur fond de rituels vodous et de pratiques magiques," N'Zengou-Tayo concludes in a paraphrase of a well-known adage, "Gary Victor nous rappelle que le rire est parfois la politesse du désespoir" ("Le vodou dans les romans et nouvelles de Gary Victor," 271). For N'Zengou-Tayo, the commingling of fantasy and magical realism attests to Victor's attempts to make sense of the dereliction and violence that followed the ouster of Jean-Claude Duvalier.

This analysis holds up well, especially for the way it highlights literary depictions of the despair of the Haitian people through the rituals and epistemologies of vodou. The playfulness of Victor's earlier fiction, already betraying a darker side, has long been cut with a fearless critique of societal ills and the political forces that exploit them. The multi-faceted representations of vodou, of its many spirits and of those who serve them in ceremony, are "possible," N'Zengou-Tayo contends, leaning on the late Max Dominique, because they "shed light on the contradictions of Haitian society" ("Le vodou dans les romans et nouvelles de Gary Victor," 258).[30] In the novels in question here, the fantastical has been replaced with a sober assessment of the collusion between religion and politics, and of vodou ceremonies as "lieux de pouvoir" (*Maudite éducation*, 179). For Carl, the capacity of the spirits to inhabit space-times of the dead and the living collides with the historical time of politics, and with elites in government and business that masquerade as secret societies. The city of the dead that resurfaces in *L'Escalier de mes désillusions* can thus also be read in terms of Achille Mbembe's theorization of "necropolitics" as the "subjugation of life to the power of death" ("Necropolitics," 39). If Victor evokes spirits connecting past and present, he also fleshes out a protagonist fully aware that it was the dictatorship that populated the necropolis.

30 N'Zengou-Tayo cites Max Dominique, "Vodou et littérature," in *L'Arme de la critique littéraire: littérature et idéologie en Haïti* (Montreal: Éditions du CIDIHCA, 1988), 141–150.

L'Escalier de mes désillusions is the sequel to *Maudite éducation*, a novel published two years prior that recounts Carl's early years. This "damned" education makes for a gloomy *bildungsroman*. On the surface, the life of the fictional protagonist thinly disguises that of Victor, who was born in 1958 and whose father was also a sociologist named René. Carl grows up in a bourgeois home with his father, mother, and two siblings. The atmosphere is claustrophobic and tense. The house is small yet also frequented by high-ranking officials of the regime, who occasionally seek the speechwriting expertise of his father. What is more, the *tontons macoutes* live in the neighborhood, mingling among and patrolling its residents. Carl escapes this sequestered, surveilled existence to two forbidden zones, his father's library, where books are kept under lock and key, and a vacant lot, where he meets young prostitutes. This dangerous blend of sex, violence, and politics, in the blurred boundaries between private and public, frames the acts of reading and writing that alternately frighten and titillate the young Carl. This tangled web of relations is the source material that will shape future memories and dreams released by the earthquake.

The texts that Carl reads in secret with equal parts pleasure and fear, and those that he is encouraged to study, shed light on a range of experiences in the present, at once grounding and unsettling the affective, social, and environmental dimensions of life and death under the dictatorship. Yet outside of the petit bourgeois spaces of these readings (his father's study, the library of the Brothers of Saint-Louis de Gonzague, and the apartment of a closeted gay intellectual, briefly his tutor, Gaston Paisible), Carl also listens to stories told by the prostitutes he frequents. These girls eke out a living on pieces of cardboard, selling their bodies for a few gourdes. A few confide in Carl, recounting unofficial histories of oppressed life. The "terrain vague" becomes, paradoxically, a site of meaning, rich in social and political lessons that are unavailable to him through published sources.

There are parallels in these works to the nineteenth-century French social novels of Balzac and Flaubert. Beyond the references to the former's *Illusions perdues* and the latter's *Éducation sentimentale*, Victor's novels are no doubt inspired by the attention to the place of the individual in various social milieux, as well as the intricacies of time and space in these fine-grained *étude de mœurs*. Victor develops a portrait of a young man who undergoes a series of personal struggles that give way to larger political and religious questions. Together, these novels shape a Haitian ethos. But perhaps the tightest connection to

Flaubert's novel of education, in particular, is Carl's perception of time, specifically to the disjunction between his inner experience of time and its outer progression in the world around him. The different temporal states collide at key moments, such as the death of his father and, later, the earthquake.

The dislodging of "rocks" that had sequestered memories brings Carl to confront the resurrected city of the dead. Victor stays on the edge of metaphor, but the reader cannot help but read the vulnerable space between human and geological histories, thus taking in the entanglement of natural and political disasters. For Carl, memories of the past are turned toward the earth-shattering present. The adult comes to terms with, embodies even, these overlapping space-times: "Le présent lui-même n'est qu'un espace incertain à peine palpable, déjà évaporé alors qu'on n'a même pas profité de ce qu'il offre" (*Maudite éducation*, 128). Drawing on the insights of psychoanalysis as well as his various experiences with vodou, the narrator conceives of fluid temporalities. Victor focuses on the present as something tangible, "à peine palpable," like an organ in distress. Carl perceives it less as an abstraction than as something real, something felt, even as it begins to slip away. Moving between destruction and reconstruction, the novels take apart then rebuild the individual psyche by recording social and political histories. Moreover, the story of these human lives is set against the dual background of religious and ecological dimensions: the deep time of the spirits and the planetary time of the shaking earth. Shifting tectonic plates do not discriminate against the populations that build upon them, yet they do expose the differential conditions of human life. This widespread inequality provides the various settings of the pleasure and pain of Carl Vausier's life.

The earthquake compels a reflection on life and death as passages of time, from the human to the world of the spirits. This interruption of time is a critical moment of uncertainty.[31] If the movement from life to

31 The speculative representation of time is a major motif in several of his short stories, which experiment with multiples genres, especially science fiction. In "L'Utopie de l'envers du temps," an earlier story republished in the collection *Quand le jour cède à la nuit: premières nouvelles 1977–1987* (La Roque d'Anthéron: Vent d'ailleurs, 2012), Victor writes about the possibility of parallel universes. After "l'impression soudaine d'une chute vertigineuse dans un gouffre" (95), the protagonist, Hannibal Ferjuste, awakens in a modernized, gleaming metropolis, one that he slowly recognizes as an alternate Port-au-Prince.

death is unavoidable, the experience of time is not universal. For Carl, the link between life and death under the dictatorship is so fragile as to be absurd. When his father dies of a cardiac arrest, it is because Carl and his mother are unable to find a properly staffed emergency room. On a walk several years later, Carl discovers that the first hospital they went to, closest to their house, was only 333 steps from the national palace. "Chaque fois que je me retrouve dans une impasse de ma vie," he relates, "chaque fois que cette terre risque de m'engloutir dans ses mythes et ses impostures, je vais mesurer la distance entre les bâtiments de cet hôpital et le Palais national" (*Maudite éducation*, 209). The retracing of this short distance becomes a ritual of protest, personal and political. It is a re-enactment of life and death that allows for a kind of catharsis from resentment and leads to a clear distinction between the land on which he lives and "un État qui a condamné dès le départ des centaines de milliers d'être humains aux conditions de vie les plus abjectes" (209). The personal memory of his father's untimely and, upon retrospection, unnecessary death here opens to a profound political critique of abject lives. If so many people perished in the earthquake, Victor seems to suggest, it is because, in Mbembe's terms, the dictatorship has the power to confer upon its subjects the "status of *living dead*" ("Necropolitics," 40; emphasis in original). Near the end of *Maudite éducation*, Carl continues to retrace these steps, seemingly unaware of cars and other pedestrians. "Ils devaient me prendre pour l'un de ses dérangés si nombreux," he surmises, "qui arpentent les rues de la capitale" (271). Yet if Carl's folly is to be out of step with his surroundings, he is quite rational in his condemnation of the regime's systematic oppression of its citizenry.

On the surface, *Maudite éducation* and *L'Escalier de mes désillusions* are an extended meditation on memory. However, by leading the reader to reflect on Carl's derangement – that is, a man who attempts to straddle the line between past and present – Victor creates an ambiguous sense of contemporaneity. Two different eras come together yet remain distinct. This novelistic conception of the present – specifically, the way that literature grasps the coevalities of the "espace incertain à peine palpable" – offers a way to come back to the different ideas of human and natural history at play between Wynter and Chakrabarty. I do so by way of Ian Baucom's perceptive reading of Walter Benjamin's concept of *jetztzeit*, or "now-being," in Thesis XIV of "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (*Illuminations*, 261). As Baucom points out in his summary, the "now-being":

> repudiates the historical profession's dominant, abiding belief in historical "progress" (and the concomitant conviction that history progresses by sundering the past from the present) by instead asking us to grasp hold of an image (flashing up in a moment of catastrophic danger) that contains within itself the power to reveal that the "past" is not past, that "what has been" and "what is" come together in a constellation. ("The Human Shore," 10)

Baucom recalls Benjamin's famous allegory, in Thesis IX, of the angel of history. "Where we perceive a chain of events," Benjamin wrote, "he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" (*Illuminations*, 257). With his face turned toward the past, the angel deliberately refuses the imperative of the future, even though the "storm" of progress will throw him forward. For Benjamin, the idea of progress creates a one-sided "eternal image of the past" (*Illuminations*, 262). Instead, one must "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger," he argues, that "affects both the content of tradition and its receivers" (*Illuminations*, 255).

Baucom picks up on Chakrabarty's reference to Benjamin. "Species may indeed be the name of a placeholder for an emergent, new universal history of humans," Chakrabarty writes, "that *flashes up* in the moment of danger that is climate change" ("The Climate of History," 221; emphasis added). Yet, as Chakrabarty points out in his response, Baucom subtly revises his more conventional use of "species" to "species-being" for the purpose of aligning it with, and updating, Benjamin's now-being ("Baucom's Critique," 246). In support of this move, Baucom recalls Benjamin's last thesis. The gaze of the angel took in more than the "wreckage" of human history. Thesis XVIII – "in relation to the history of organic life on earth" (*Illuminations*, 263) – as Baucom writes, "massively expand[s] the scale of now-being to encompass the full five thousand years of recorded history in this, his final recorded piece of writing ... " ("The Human Shore," 11). Benjamin's "now-being" and Chakrabarty's "species-being," Baucom contends, operate from a "similar vantage point" (10). "Taken together," he continues, we are witness to a new angle of humanism from which to take in and critique "both the catastrophes of recorded history and the twinned, linked, catastrophes of natural history affecting the earth's continents and shorelines" (11). Baucom's emphasis on "humanism" seeks to ground Chakrabarty's conclusions. "If it is to be more than a view from on high, however," he cautions, "it must be more than that, or perhaps more accurately, less than that; it must be less distanced, less empyrean, and

less stratospheric" (11). We could thus say that, where Baucom keeps the angel facing the past to stress Benjamin's strategic focus on transition, Chakrabarty turns the angel around to look ahead to the survival of the species.[32]

Benjamin's constellation allows for a way to make sense of Victor's sketch of the "palpable present." To be sure, Carl Vausier survives not only the earthquake but also several other traumatic events. These include his father's death, the suicide of Chantal (a pen pal from his childhood, whose nom de plume is "Cœur qui saigne," and who reappears later to become his forbidden love); his kidnapping by Chantal's husband-to-be, an army colonel; and the dissolution of his marriage. Yet, in the arc of a life that unfolds across the two novels, it becomes clear that survival does not necessarily mean a brighter future. Ultimately, what "flashes up" in the earthquake is the fortunate, yet devastating, face of vulnerability.

Louis-Philippe Dalembert: Incomplete Lives

> Le malheur sait aussi bien diviser les gens que de les rapprocher.
>
> Louis-Philippe Dalembert,
> *Ballade d'un amour inachevé*, 129

Maudite éducation and *L'Escalier de mes désillusions* are novels that refuse to jettison the past, despite being faced with a disaster that would appear to usher in a radically new and bleaker future. Dalembert's *Ballade d'un amour inachevé* is a similarly moving parable of twinned catastrophes, natural and political. The novel's protagonist is Azaka, who lives through two earthquakes, the first during his childhood in an unnamed island country, which, for reasons addressed below, the reader may assume to be Haiti, and the second as an adult in Italy. Dalembert intertwines the 2009 temblor in Aquila with the 2010 earthquake in Port-au-Prince, but, for the purposes of fiction, sets the latter twenty-five years in the past, and inside the traumatic memory of Azaka. This reverse chronology underscores the importance of time and memory to the project of the novel and to the way that Dalembert submits

32 Chapter Four suggests that, in her reading of the tent canvas angel of the internal refugee camp, Danticat also keeps this angelic figure turned toward the past.

history to the structural imperative of his literary imaginary. Although Dalembert lived through the aftermath of both events, the novel refracts the Italian present through a Haitian past. It could also be read the other way around, so that the meditation on the Haitian past is central to Azaka's experience of an Italian present. Like the temporal conceit of Victor's novels, in *Ballade* the present is "palpable" and fugitive. Instead of unearthing a necropole, it releases memories of temporary entombment, when the young Azaka was trapped under the rubble for three days. Like many works in Dalembert's œuvre, *Ballade d'un amour inachevé* is a novel of migration. Unlike Victor, whose texts are firmly situated within Haiti, Dalembert writes of both internal and external migratory experience. Comparing these works of the two authors allows for further reflection on the movement between migration and refuge. Furthermore, as N'Zengou-Tayo demonstrates in an essay that contextualizes the writing of Victor and Dalembert in a longer literary history, the question of migration from rural to urban space is central to literary representations of Port-au-Prince.[33]

In *Ballade*, the historical distance between the two earthquakes is necessary to plot the migrant's journey from Caribbean to European shores. Before addressing the complex structure of the novel, a summary is helpful. Several events are pieced together in the story of what I am calling an "incomplete life." To explain what is meant by this phrase, I must reveal spoilers to the plot (apologies to my readers). This may not be too disconcerting, however, as tragedy is announced in the opening lines. Before we learn about the defining moments of Azaka's childhood – how he nearly died in an earthquake that took the life of his older brother; how his father abandoned his family in the aftermath; how he watched his mother struggle to raise him and his siblings in a makeshift tent – we read that, years later, Azaka is an *extracomunitario* in a village in Abruzzo, a mountainous region of central Italy. As the narrator explains, "extracommunautaire, appellation dont était affublé tout natif du Maghreb, d'Europe de l'Est, de l'Asie ou tout Noir non étasunien" (38). Literally, "outside the community," Azaka's presence recalls James Baldwin's famous essay of his experience in Switzerland. One could say, echoing Baldwin, that Azaka, too, "is a 'sight' for the village" ("Stranger in the Village," 117).[34] The narrator hints at the long journey,

33 See Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo, "Imaginary City, Literary Spaces: Port-au-Prince in Some Recent Haitian Fiction." *Matatu* 27–28 (2003): 375–396.

34 The essay first appeared in *Harper's Magazine* in 1953.

"après bien des péripéties sur lesquelles il n'aimait pas s'attarder" (38). Details on his itinerary are scarce in the novel, but the reader discovers that Azaka would eventually make his way to northern Italy, near the border with Slovenia, in a region openly hostile to foreigners. Two years later, he arrives in the village. The novel leaves the reader to imagine the predictable account of migrant hardship, as Dalembert spends more time developing a rich portrait of an immigrant as a young man who also finds hospitality and acceptance.

The journey at the heart of *Ballade* is also one of an unexpected love. One fateful day in the photocopy store where he finds work and which he will eventually manage, Azaka meets Mariagrazia, a local woman, who becomes enamored of Azaka's kindness and patience. That he is an "extracom" adds to her reputation as a rebellious daughter of the village. Mariagrazia is outspoken in her desire to do away with the patriarchal traditions and chauvinism that have long held sway in Abruzzo. At first, she keeps her relationship with Azaka a secret. Before long, she confronts the mores of her family and village with their "couple mixte," only to discover that most of her family, even those branches in the diaspora, welcome her relationship with Azaka. But there is one tradition that cannot be discarded. Marriage is necessary for the *extracomunitario* to become part of the family and wider community of the village. After some resistance on the part of Mariagrazia, the couple wed and eventually expect a baby. The pregnancy augurs a different future for the family and the village, whose *centro storico* houses an aging population that is being replaced, slowly but surely, by the *extracomunitario*, who rent apartments *au noir*. The novel dwells on the intimacy of the mixed couple as well as their standing in the tight-knit community of the village. Dalembert strikes a delicate balance between the *oikos* of the interracial home and the insular ethos of Abruzzo. The ballad alternates between these private and public spaces, both of which undergo significant change over the course of the novel. The reader is brought into the private language between Azaka and Mariagrazia, following the ups and downs of their relationship. At the same time, their cultural and racial *mixité*, as well as that of the child to come, produces tension in the village. The literary representation of this couple can be read as an allegory of the ongoing transformation of Italian national identity.

The slow-moving plates beneath the ground accelerate the shifting cultural and racial fault lines around which the novel has moved with care. The physical destruction of the earthquake does not discriminate along human boundaries. As the narrator relates, "les événements …

allaient surprendre avec une égale violence natifs et métèques" (197). The community comes to terms with the geological disaster through a widely broadcast political ceremony informed by cultural and religious knowledge. These rituals of mediation help the villagers come together, but they also risk dividing them. As Mariagrazia's womb trembles along with the earth, the future lies in the balance. The novel raises questions about the possibilities for (future) collectivity – Chakrabarty's "us" and Wynter's "horizon of humanity" at the tipping point of ecological disaster – that continues to fracture as continents shift, physically and demographically.

"Ces vies en dérives"

Like Victor, Dalembert asks his readers to stay in the suspended present. Instead of seeking resolution about the future, the reader is left to sift through the memories of Azaka's childhood. His journey as a migrant holds the key to the frailty of his present. Dalembert's interest in the plight of the migrant goes back to his earliest writings. His first novel, *Le Crayon du bon dieu n'a pas de gomme* (1996), is about a man who returns to his childhood home after years of living abroad. As with *Ballade*, Dalembert fictionalizes Haiti, which he renames Salbounda. Port-au-Prince, the city of the author's birth, becomes Port-aux-Crasses, "une zone urbaine aux abois, coincée entre les rêves avortés des uns, et la morgue indifférente des autres. A l'image de Salbounda tout entier qui n'en finissait pas de partir à la dérive et s'éloignait de jour en jour des autres îles caraïbes" (*Le Crayon du bon dieu n'a pas de gomme*, 15–16). This description of the city only piles onto the aesthetic of filth and grime announced in the fictional renaming of Port-au-Prince to Port-aux-Crasses. It is a pessimistic vision of the city that reappears in his next novel, *L'Autre face de la mer*, whose second section, "Ville," links the first and third sections, which are recounted in the first person of Grannie and Jonas, her grandson, respectively. A narrator follows Jonas as he crosses the city on foot with great difficulty: "La ville, si on peut nommer ainsi ce marasme où cohabitent des millions d'humains et trois fois plus de cochons. Tous se vautrent dans la merde" (*L'Autre face de la mer*, 115). In these early novels, Dalembert wallows in the chaos and excrement of a city that suffers from overpopulation.

The theme of migration in *Le Crayon du bon dieu n'a pas de gomme* goes beyond what N'Zengou-Tayo concludes to be the "obsession with

the overpopulation of the city" ("Imaginary City, Literary Spaces," 394). The man is on a quest to find Faustin, "fameux cireur de chaussures du bord de mer" (*Le Crayon du bon dieu n'a pas de gomme*, 16) – a "shiner" – who was a memorable father figure when the man was a boy, and who "allait marquer, de cette empreinte indélébile des rencontres vraies, sa vie et sa perception du monde" (16). Like everyone else from these early years, Faustin has long since disappeared from the man's life. "Sono partiti tutti," he says to himself in a language unknown to the neighborhood and which "port[ait] les traces de son interminable errance" (17). Reading this Italian verse, it is tempting to reimagine the man as Azaka. Unlike *Ballade*, *Crayon du bon dieu* reveals little of the man's current circumstances, details which might explain the enigma of this return. Like Laferrière, Dalembert suggests that this homecoming holds meaning for the man's present, such that, as the surrogate father, "l'image persistante de Faustin, et ses chimères d'empereur … [est] la seule susceptible de donner sens à ce retour" (17).

Instead of drawing out the theme of the return or the historical symbolism of the shoe shiner's imperial name, which invokes Faustin Soulouque, the nineteenth-century Haitian emperor, I wish rather to draw out the novel's attention to "ces vies en dérive," drifting lives, beginning with the man himself and then moving to Faustin, who, like his namesake, seems to have reached great heights, only to drift away, like Salbounda/Haiti itself.[35] Dalembert recalls the historical isolation of Haiti from neighboring islands. The central theme of drifting reveals crucial insights for a reading of *Ballade*. In *Crayon*, the man is unable to locate Faustin, and his search fails to turn up any clues as to what may have happened to the emperor of his childhood. The novel is structured around this quest and alternates between two narrators: a third person who relates the man's journey in the present and, in the absence of the man's knowledge, the personified sea, who tells the story of Faustin's life. In the epilogue, the two narrators merge into a second person, who concludes on a wistful note. The man "se laissa apaiser par les rumeurs des vagues" (46), and, as he yields to this rumbling, the sea assumes a voice that moves between lamentation and celebration of a drifting life. Like Philoctète, Dalembert lets the natural world speak for itself.

35 On Soulouque, see Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Picador, 2012); see also Léon-François Hoffman, *Faustin Soulouque d'Haïti dans l'histoire et la littérature* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

As with *Le peuple des terres mêlées*, the environment is in distress. Faustin is a proud son of Trou-Coucou, a coastal village where life has become harder than it already was. Like Nozias in *Claire of the Sea Light*, he and his fellow fishermen face the reality of "la mer qui n'avait plus rien dans le ventre" (73).[36] Their inability to provide sustenance for the household makes them, in the words of Marie, Faustin's husband, "naufragés de la vie" (99). In the evocation of the shipwrecked, which reappears to describe the *extracomunitario* in *Ballade*, Dalembert reappropriates the shipwreck, a central metaphor of the Caribbean and Atlantic worlds that calls forth the Middle Passage, to make it speak anew for the harsh reality of climate change. If the slave trade brought his ancestors to the Caribbean, it is environmental dispossession that causes Faustin's displacement to an internal exile into the shantytowns of Port-aux-Crasses. Now living among the "détresse humaine dans une si grande ville," Marie continues, reflecting on the misery of Trou-Coucou, " … ses hommes s'échinant soir et matin dans les rares champs cultivables … ses marins au visage raviné par les vaines attentes en haute mer, qui rentraient avec de plus en plus d'air dans leurs nasses" (99). With the land and sea heating and drying up, Faustin and Marie are *en dérive*, literally "unshored" and thrown at the mercy of Port-aux-Crasses.

The exodus from the desiccated coast to the city might be reasonably understood as a consequence of a warming planet. To recall, in addition to the plans of an American company to use Port-à-l'Écu as a toxic dump, it is the depletion of ancestral lands, in Ollivier's *Passages*, that eventually drives away Amédée and Brigitte. In this respect, it is not only political oppression and redevelopment that create the refugee, but also climate change. To be sure, in Amédée's case, the cause of the environmental dispossession appears to be more proximate than the circumstances of Faustin's *dérive*. However, even if the responsibility for the "empty belly of the sea," whether through warming oceans, rising sea levels, or acidification, lies on a scale beyond what Faustin and Marie can grasp, the consequences of such ecological degradation for their way of life are quite clear to them. If this is plausible, another leap can be made. The resulting overpopulation leads to the hazardous conditions that will make the lives of Faustin and Marie more vulnerable, especially

36 The plotline of environmental dispossession and degradation is a hallmark of the Haitian eco-archive examined herein. It also runs through additional texts, including Gary Victor's *Le sang et la mer* and Marvin Victor's *Corps mêlés*.

during hurricanes and earthquakes. It follows, then, that the same is true for Azaka as a child, buried in the rubble of an earthquake that exacerbates, and is exacerbated by, precarious conditions.[37]

The links between environmental degradation, drifting lives, and the politics of (im)migration illuminate a reading of *Ballade*. Dalembert's poetry can show the way, as one of its central themes is the perilous existence of the refugee. The poems collected in *Transhumances* and *En marche sur la terre* represent an extended meditation on different kinds of migration, including the idea of *vagabondage*, and the role of the *étranger* in the disruption and reconstitution of communities throughout Europe. The opening poem of the former, "Étranger en marche sur la terre," composed in 2008, places in epigraph a well-known verse from Psalm 119, "Je ne suis qu'un résident étranger sur la terre. / Ne me cache pas tes commandements" (v. 19). The biblical texts of the Hebrew and Christian traditions hold a place of privilege in Dalembert's œuvre. The widely accepted interpretation of this verse is that human life is a kind of worldly exile from the divine. Human vulnerability on earth can be understood in the possibility that God has turned away from his creation. Thus, the expression of fear: do not hide from me your commandments. In his poem, Dalembert grounds the spiritual meaning of exile in the painful journey of the refugee. In this way, he turns it into a prayer for the refugee.

Transhumances serves as a poetic prelude to *Ballade* through its evocation of an arduous journey, perhaps of someone like Azaka, who begins his "march" in the face of "insultes et crachats / … il traverse la vie / drapé dans sa solitude d'animal / en pérenne transhumance" (17). The foreigner here is not the shepherd but part of the herd; he is the object of scorn and hostility, because he "porte son nom et sa voix / en écharpe / … leur tempo a une cadence rampante / obscure à nos oreilles et à nos sens / il séisme la terre / à l'approche de leur pas" (17). It is revealing that the narrator assumes the voice of the host (*our* ears and *our* senses), who is confronted with the difference of "*their* tempo … *their* footsteps." Yet in the clear-sighted depiction of the trials and tribulation of this stranger, who "se bat … / sous les climats nouveaux / maculés de mépris et d'indifférence … " (22), the narrator appears

37 As Bonneuil and Fressoz observe, "At the present time, 20 to 30 million people each year migrate in the wake of natural disaster, and the UN envisages 50 million environmental migrants a year by 2030, due in particular to changes linked to climate disturbance" (*The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 25).

neutral, even compassionate. But this empathy seems to have limits, as the narrator, accompanying the *étranger* on his long journey, wonders "quand est-ce que tu repars / que tu rentres chez toi" (30). In the end, the narrator comes to see the stranger as a religious, even Christ-like, figure, who "brandit ange déchu / des stigmates nouvelles" (32). In the closing stanzas, the narrator recognizes the humanity of such suffering, and so the poem ends on a more positive note:

> par moments pourtant / une main tendue
> ramasse sa chute / colmate les blessures
> une main tendue / saute dans l'arène
> au nom de l'humain / et pacte nos sueurs comme d'autres jadis leur sang. (33)

The hand that gestures at healing and coming together can be read as an act of hospitality in a time of combat ("dans l'arène"). The expression of some common humanity anticipates the eventual welcome of Azaka in the village. Another poem in the collection, *En marche sur la terre*, "Un homme a tendu la main," dedicated to Cédric Herrou, the French farmer convicted for aiding migrants, is an ode to the possibility of humanity – "un homme ni tout à fait toi / ni tout à fait moi" – and a simple gesture that "a gommé les frontières."[38] In *Ballade*, however, it is a fragile pact, always threatened by the "peur de voir la terre / s'affaisser sous ses pas" ("Étranger en marche sur la terre," *Transhumances*, 30).

Life and Death in the Earthquake

Azaka lives as a "résident étranger," an immigrant among natives, an outsider who speaks the local dialect but whose very appearance calls forth an elsewhere. By way of two epigraphs, to the Book of Revelations and to Charles Darwin's diary aboard the Beagle, *Ballade* is ushered in with two distinct accounts of the power of an earthquake. The first announces the fire and brimstone of an impending apocalypse, while the second contemplates the sublime wonder experienced by the naturalist during his long voyage. In a sense, both express worldviews, one in thrall to divine power and the other in awe of the "geological structure of the

38 See "French Farmer on Trial for helping migrants cross Italian border." *The Guardian*, January 4, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/04/french-farmer-cedric-herrou-trial-helping-migrants-italian-border (accessed October 9, 2017).

world" (*Beagle Diary*, 445). Dalembert invites the reader to consider how both perspectives are revelatory yet lead to different ideas of the relationship between human and world.

In *Failles*, an earthquake is a sign that the planetary gears move more slowly than humans do; in *Create Dangerously*, its destructive force recalls ethically charged politics and art of an earlier time and inspires those of the future; in *Ballade*, it reveals the frailty of human foundations, whether they be physical structures or social and political relationships. The structure of the novel, especially its attention to the intimate connection between time and bodies (individual, social, political, and the earth itself), is composed of spiral-like structures that spin around, in nonlinear fashion, Akaka's migrant journey between the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. The ethics of vulnerability that issues forth from Dalembert's fiction – that is, its representation of a precarious life that finds a foothold only to fall at the hands of the "nébuleuse Brigade de défense de l'identité péninsulaire" (*Ballade*, 18) – opposes the universalizing, dehistoricizing conception of human responsibility in a future-oriented Anthropocene.

In *Ballade*, it is not just bodies that migrate and interact through time and space, above and below the surface of the earth, but also the air, smells, and effluence that emanate and flow from this diverse matter, animate and inanimate. The novel's opening lines conjure the smell of sulfur that, it is alleged by some in the village, intensified in the days leading up to the earthquake:

> Longtemps après, lorsque les douleurs se seraient refermées, que les survivants raconteraient l'événement sans que l'émotion vînt leur nouer la gorge, certains jureraient avoir senti la veille une forte odeur de soufre dans l'atmosphère. D'autres diraient l'avoir humé depuis trois jours, sans toutefois y avoir prêté attention … . Peut-être, allez savoir, l'odeur n'avait-elle existé que dans leur imagination, ou n'avait-elle pas été assez persistante pour qu'on s'en alarmât. Et puis, les effluences, l'air d'ici en regorgeait: celles de bouse fraiche, de l'herbe à peine fauchée, de la terre retournée, de la fumée lourde montant nuit et jour de la Vibac, l'usine de plastique … (15)

Two aspects of this passage stand out: the narrator's meticulous attention to time and the inhabitants' relative inattention to everyday odors that permeate their environs. The environment is replete with culinary aromas, the smell of ink from the photocopy boutique, the smoke from the factories, and the blend of rain and sand that the winds blow over the Apennine Mountains from the Mediterranean and, farther afield, the

African desert. That the air is thick with these odors has perhaps made it impossible, the narrator speculates, for the villagers to take note of the earthen gas, however unpleasant its smell. In fact, this is the air that one breathes in the Abruzzo, from the first to the last.

The air also fuels the imagination, such that the smell of sulfur might never have been there in the first place. The narrator reflects on this possibility after the fact, sometime in the near future. The use of the past conditional here and throughout the novel speaks to the uncertainty of the events of the earthquake, and more so to its almost unreal, even otherworldly dimension. It also underscores Dalembert's focus on the passage of time not as a straightforward progression but rather in terms of the Benjaminian notion of transition that I discuss in relation to Victor's "palpable present." In *Ballade*, the grammar signifies a "what might have been." It is a tense that closes in on itself, as if without a future. In this sense, it suggests how memory plays with the imagination. The *décalage* that strikes the narrator as peculiar ("allez savoir") also reveals, for the reader, the disjunction of geological and human time. The violent shock of this temporal dislocation will reverberate, between past and present, for years to come, until memories begin to fade. Or will they? The narrator's ability to project far into the future ("longtemps après que les douleurs se seraient refermées" (15); "bien des années plus tard, lorsque le temps aurait refermé les blessures" (20); "bien des années après, lorsque l'on ne parlerait plus de l'événement que dans les livres d'histoire et les brochures touristiques … " (51)) is called into question by the fact that Azaka will always dwell on the details of that tragic day in April.

Do minds and bodies heal over time? The imploding earth compels Azaka to confront the wounds – the "noires blessures" – of the past and to relive them as integral to those of the present.[39] As in Victor's *L'Escalier de mes désillusions*, in *Ballade* the reader is taken back to the past and then returned to the present, and thus straddles these different temporal zones. Like Carl, Azaka must come to terms with the dead that now surround him, but he is not immobilized in the present. Seeking a

39 I refer to the title of another of Dalembert's novels, *Noires blessures*, which is constructed around two interlacing narratives, that of Mamad White, an African, and Laurent Kala, a Frenchman who works in Africa for an unnamed NGO. Ironies and contradictions abound, beginning with the last names of the protagonists and ending with Laurent, a humanitarian agent who nearly kills Mamad, his domestic servant.

diversion, Azaka lets his mind "dériver" (70). Unlike Carl, he does not resurrect a necropole. Drifting back to his childhood, he remembers being buried, reduced to a body that could barely breathe. Trapped under cement, "il invente des histoires qu'il se raconte dans le noir, des histoires merveilleuses où un héros sans peur et sans reproche protège les enfants, débarrasse le monde de toute injustice" (82). These stories can be understood as a kind of life support for the child, a way to cope with the sudden fragility of the body in an abyss. The novel is structured around this corporeal acuity, with alternating sections of "respirations" and "cris." Like a body in distress and shock, the novel takes a first breath, then cries out. Three additional breaths follow, some deep, some halting, and each is interrupted by a cry, before a final breath brings the story to an end that, nevertheless, keeps readers holding their breath.

The structural conceit of the novel as a series of breaths and cries compels readers to reconsider the old dichotomy of mind and matter. In so doing, Dalembert's literary imaginary imposes a rhythmic, bodily order to memory. The narrator describes the most minute details of the physical experience of pain, hunger, and thirst, as well as the heightened senses of smell and hearing in the dark. Even as Azaka feels all of this, he hears his father's voice, "tout est dans la tête" (88). As the narrator tells it, the adult intellect struggles to makes sense of the memories of a body reduced to such a primal state. As Darwin surmised, the "labored works of man" are rendered insignificant by the earthquake (*Beagle*, 445). To be sure, in his retrospective regard, looking back on his long journey, Darwin offers a reflection on what is to be learned from the encounter with the unknown. In *Ballade*, Dalembert appears to ask, what does it mean to be human and to experience the thin line between breathing and asphyxiation? What awaits in the greater unknown of death?

The child trapped in the rubble tells (himself) a different story, not about the hereafter, but simply about his short experience with life. The younger Azaka seeks what amounts to a "good life": the protection of children, freedom from injustice, and, shortly after he is rescued, a reunion with his father. Or, at least, this is the memory that the adult has carried with him. The novel drifts back to the child's reveries in the dark silence to return to the adult and thus to reveal insights into the experience of the *extracomunitario*. In this way, the reader follows the individual experience to the greater social and political bodies and the communal mentalities that attempt to shape and govern them. As I have argued, Azaka's presence as the "résident étranger" leads to the central drama that "flashes up" in a time of disaster. What future do he

and Mariagrazia offer to the political body of the village, and how will the latter react? Does the trembling womb portend a similar mixture of anxiety and hope as the regular, though no less ominous, tremors that the inhabitants feel beneath their feet? In some sense, these are inevitable questions, yet Dalembert offers no comforting resolution. Because the narrator hints at Azaka's future retrospection – "Longtemps après, lorsque les cendres se seraient refroidies … Azaka se souviendrait … " (60) – the reader knows that he will survive. Yet this future is marked by the same stillness that characterized the aftermath of the earthquake in Abruzzo. "Depuis cette nuit-là," the narrator observes:

> a-t-il confié au silence le soin de servir de passerelle entre lui et les autres. Dire ce que les mots taisent ou ne savent pas exprimer, tandis que lui trimballe, tel un zombie, un corps d'emprunt sans savoir s'il faut le laisser retourner dans le monde des morts ou le retenir du côté des vivants. (132)

When Mariagrazia dies in the earthquake, Azaka is left with an incomplete love. He feels this loss physically, as if he now "borrowed" a body but is disconnected from it. In this ultimate uncertainty, he experiences a kind of disembodiment, carried (*trimballé*) between the worlds of the dead and the living.

An "amour inachevé," then, is also a life incomplete in that Azaka risks losing the capacity to serve as a bridge (*passerelle*), a cultural link between the Caribbean and the village in Abruzzo. Whereas the second section, or "cri," anchors the novel in Azaka's childhood, in the "thing" that nearly entombed him, and in the no less shocking abandonment by his father, the third and fourth "cris" give depth to the rebuilding of a new life in Italy. The novel takes the time to create a nuanced portrait of his relationship with Mariagrazia, and of his assimilation into the multiple generations of her extended family. In the desire for rootedness, Azaka remains connected to his fellow *extracomunitario*. He understands well the sense of isolation and continued precarity of their lives. Mariagrazia refers to her husband's ethical role as a "bel ensemble" (199). As she elaborates, "Il incarnait à la fois cet ailleurs dont elle avait toujours rêvé et quelque chose de connu, de rassurant" (199). Azaka has become such a familiar figure that, despite having a name that "sonnait d'ailleurs, pas grand-chose ne le différenciait d'ici. L'accent peut-être, qu'il lui arrivait parfois de ne pas placer sur la bonne syllabe" (200). And yet, while Azaka is acutely aware of this accent of difference, he insists on retaining it, because history has shown, time and again, the narrator reminds us, that the political erasure of different voices can be

deadly: "Combien de gens avaient trouvé la prison ou la mort sur leur route à cause de leur accent différent, de leur incapacité à prononcer 'juste'. Combien avait dit … 'pelehil' plutôt que 'perejil'" (201).

If the reader is wary to accept Mariagrazia's praise of her husband's innate wisdom, one could then trust in his very name, Azaka, which resonates, perhaps on a lower frequency, for readers with a knowledge of creole and vodou. Azaka is the name of the loa of agriculture and of the harvest. Of peasant origin, he is depicted in a straw hat and red neck scarf. Moreover, Azaka is characterized by his patience and honesty, and in this he contrasts with Papa Gede, the more rambunctious, sometimes vulgar loa of the dead with whom he is often associated, even as his younger brother.[40] Azaka is believed to have a tight bond with, even sharing some traits with, the multi-faceted spirits of the dead. It is tempting to suggest that Azaka and Gede represent two poles of human experience in life (Azaka) and death (Gede). The loas cannot, of course, be reduced to one-dimensional figures. I do not wish to oversimplify the emblematic place of a vodou spirit in the novel, but it is worth considering how Dalembert develops its symbolism for the larger story he tells about migration and refuge. The allusion to the vodou imaginary is suggestive of the complicated coevalities represented in the novel. Moreover, the numerous epigraphs for each of the four "cris" (in addition to those mentioned above, these references go from Cyrulnik to Voltaire, Hemingway to Delorme, and finally to the Book of Zachary) also serve as signposts of this longer history. Azaka resides in these multiple temporalities, and is portrayed as wise, calm, generous, and idealistic. He is also a passionate lover and a connoisseur of Italian cuisine. But perhaps most important to the conflict at the heart of the novel, he is generally optimistic about a common humanity. As he often explained to

40 A bibliography on vodou abounds. For representations of Gede and Azaka, I draw from the following sources: Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York: McPherson & Company, 1953); Leslie Gérald Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Gerdès Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals of Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel, eds, *Haitian Vodou* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). See also Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, *Spirit Possession in French, Haitian, and Vodou Thought: An Intellectual History* (Lanham, KY: Lexington Books, 2015).

fellow migrants, “Sous quelques cieux qu’il nous ait été donné de naître et de grandir, nous avons plus ou moins les mêmes qualités et défauts” (232). And, as the narrator reports, he will be remembered for having incarnated this ideal for many years to come.

The earthquake shakes this worldview to its core, reducing Azaka, at least temporarily, to silence. Despite his overwhelming loss, despite history repeating itself, Azaka continues to honor his ethical commitment to others. In the novel’s final breath, Mariagrazia sings a ballad in which she wishes him to “go far away / seek another world” (263). Her song might be heard as a contemporary *congedo*, a taking leave in the humanist, poetic tradition of the Italian Renaissance.[41] Mariagrazia performs an act of letting go, a prayer-like goodbye that invests her immigrant husband with a measure of dignity. After the rescue team has taken her body away on a stretcher, and after the baby miraculously clings to life, Azaka returns to the ruins of their apartment. Along the way, an elderly woman asks him to retrieve a photo of her deceased husband. He does so at great personal risk, as he runs into a group of vigilantes, animals full of hate, who nearly beat him to death. The novel ends with Azaka, inert on a stretcher, placed in an ambulance, “dont la sirène déchirera le silence mortifère de la ville (283). While Mariagrazia’s death in the earthquake evokes a spiritual departure into the afterlife, Azaka’s exit, presumably to a local hospital, is a terrible political aftershock. Without the possibility of *hospes*, or the reciprocal relation between host and guest, the future is very much in doubt. From *Crayon* to *Ballade*, Dalembert dramatizes the causes and effects of disaster in two visions of the migrant’s search for a better life. Faustin flees an unhospitable coast for an equally precarious existence in Port-au-Prince, while Azaka rebuilds a life as a cultural bridge between Haiti and Italy, only to suffer beyond measure. What holds the two stories together is the journey of the migrant, who seeks refuge in a new land, on a distant shore. Yet just when we

41 My interpretation is inspired by a lecture given by Jane Tylus, “Saying Goodbye in the Renaissance.” The Tucci Lecture, University of Pittsburgh, April 3, 2017. Tylus draws on “*Congedo della Vergine*,” a painting by Sano di Pietro, the fifteenth-century Sienese artist, that depicts the apostles saying goodbye to the Virgin Mary. Tylus argues that this scene of leave-taking provides a way to understand how artists and poets depicted rituals of separation, including that of sending out a work of art into public view. In this historical and religious light, we might also read the powerful scene in *Ballade* as Dalembert letting go of his novel and its evocation of the earthquakes in Italy and Haiti.

might see in these new encounters the "bel ensemble" that Mariagrazia describes, the ground caves in beneath their feet.

Rapatriés: Les damnés de l'errance

> Elle avait la sensation d'être spectatrice de sa propre errance, comme si chaque particule d'elle-même avait déjà vécu cette route, condamnée à la vivre toujours. Sans le secours de sa crampe dorsale, déflagration impitoyable qui frappait dans les moments cruciaux, Belli aurait pu croire cette errance irréelle.
>
> Néhémy Pierre-Dahomey, *Rapatriés*, 9–10

Pierre-Dahomey's debut novel, *Rapatriés*, recounts the life of Belliqueuse Louissaint. Born in the fictional southern coastal village of Port-les-Sables, Belli moves to Les-Miracles, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, in the mid-1970s. A little more than a decade later, she attempts her first and only clandestine voyage on the *Agwéton*, a small boat destined for the "belles plages de la Floride" (10). The boat encounters a storm, and, facing what appears to be an imminent capsizing, Belli makes the fateful decision to throw her two-year-old son, Nathan, into the sea. But the *Agwéton* is rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard, and, in accordance with President Reagan's Executive Order of September 1981, the *Agwéton* and Belli and most of the survivors are repatriated back to Haiti.[42] The novel opens ten years later, with the memory of her drowned child juxtaposed with her own "naufrage avorté," both images seared into Belli's vision (14). With her oldest son and newborn girl, Belli leaves her parents' house and makes a new home with Nènè, the father of her children, in "Rapatriés," the name given to vacant land set aside for boat-people who survived their journeys but failed to reach "l'éden de l'autre côté des vagues" (16). In an ironic twist of fate, Belli becomes a refugee in her own land. The government decree relocates survivors to a place that the narrator bluntly describes as uninhabitable. The desire to take root is thwarted by a continued sensation of "errance." Belli is haunted by a failed migration and condemned to relive it. In spite of this perpetual condemnation, like a Haitian Sisyphus, she remains courageous.

42 On Reagan's Executive Order, see Chapter Two.

Rapatriés sets Belli's struggles against the backdrop of turning points in Haitian history, beginning with the perilous voyages of boat-people after the ouster of Duvalier and moving on to the violence in Port-au-Prince during the Aristide presidency, and finally to the earthquake and its aftermath. That the novel neither dwells in poverty nor celebrates resilience can arguably be understood in terms less of a political stance on the part of Pierre-Dahomey than of an economy of stylistic and aesthetic choices that has the effect of curbing the ambition of its chronological sweep and biblical depths. *Rapatriés* is not a study of social mores and norms, in the manner of Gary Victor's texts, but rather a poetics of errance that also delivers a critique of the dispossession of the Haitian people at the hands of political and humanitarian actors.

Published in early 2017, the novel follows Belli from the late 1980s to 2010, with infrequent flashbacks to her childhood. It seems fitting to close this last chapter with a brief analysis of a new text that harks back to the central themes and questions raised by all of the writers in this study. *Rapatriés* casts the multiple layers of the eco-archive on migration and refuge into sharp relief with two key contributions. First, by depicting the earthquake as one event in a series of calamities, Pierre-Dahomey evokes a "temps de catastrophe" that suggests a longer view of Haitian history (*Rapatriés*, 143). This phrase echoes the Nobel speech of Camus, who defined the generation born between the two World Wars as those who learned to "forge an art of living in an age of catastrophe." That Lahens, Danticat, and Laferrière (who borrowed the phrase for the title of his 2009 Kreisel lecture) have all reappropriated Camus's thought is evidence of its cross-cultural and cross-generational appeal. Furthermore, the novel might be read to corroborate Laënnec Hurbon's idea of a "catastrophe permanente," or the notion that disaster is an ongoing experience rather than an abnormal rupture of time and space.[43] The injustice of Belli's condemnation is revealed in this apocalyptic light, but her story also collapses the distinction between natural and political disaster. The particular cruelty of her frustrated migration is that it leads back to an apparently new place and status. The second and most original contribution to the eco-archive is the novel's extended meditation on the irony of "Rapatriés," which must be understood both as a place and a classification of people. Attention to the environmental

43 See Laënnec Hurbon, "Catastrophe permanente et reconstruction." *L'Observatoire de la reconstruction* 6 (2012): 8–10. See also Munro, "Disaster Studies and Cultures of Disaster in Haiti" and *Writing on the Fault Line*.

and humanitarian subtexts exposes the underbelly of the Anthropocene and its undifferentiated mass of humanity. Pierre-Dahomey contrasts the political and juridical language of Belli's experience as an "internally displaced person" – repatriated and processed yet denied the privileges of citizenship, including a passport – with a ecopoetic depiction of an individual life as a "sinistré," a victim trapped in a "conscience du désastre" (136) and, in the end, reduced to a "folle lucidité" (158).

The fictional representation of refugee experiences risks crossing a fine line between solidarity and appropriation. Part One demonstrates that a similar struggle to bring stories of refugees to the page, through reporting and fiction, can be found in the writings of Ollivier and Charles. Part Two points to the skepticism of April Shemak, among others, with regard to the absorption of *testimonio* of refugees into the literary marketplace. Upon consideration of various narrative strategies that depict refugees in fiction and nonfiction, Shemak finds that they "encounter their own literary checkpoints … pressing the boundaries of the categories by which we study literature, [and] call into question the configuration of literary study in national and even regional terms" (*Asylum Speakers*, 37). Shemak goes on to contend that while many disciplinary fields in which literary studies play an integral part have focused on conditions of exile, they have generally struggled to shed light on the phenomenon of "statelessness without arrival nor statelessness within the state" (38). Because of its attention to national, regional, and transnational flows of migrants and refugees, Haitian studies has long been well positioned to carry out the transdisciplinary work of comparing specific historical and political circumstances of migration. In *Haiti and the United States*, whose first edition was published in 1988, J. Michael Dash observed:

> Haitian writers have been struggling to come to grips with a new mobile identity and a new imaginative geography within which to establish a feeling of belonging. Gone is that traditional literary convention that sees exile simply in terms of banishment and alienation and the nation as a lost paradise. (152)

Dash is squarely focused on the plight of refugees in the wake of the agreement between Duvalier and Reagan to enforce repatriation. His work on Ollivier and other writers of the eco-archive under analysis here foregrounds the ways that their texts grapple with the real differences between exile and statelessness. As we recall, in *Passages* Ollivier juxtaposes the exilic mobility of Normand in Montreal and Florida

with the incarceration of Brigitte and the death of Amédée in Krome. Belli's *errance* surely has something in common with the struggles of the latter – indeed, readers might even be permitted to imagine Brigitte's repatriation through Belli's story – yet their individual trajectories are also distinct. Readers also become aware how each is represented, in different ways, between an ongoing past and a future that will continue to confine them.

Pierre-Dahomey envisions repatriation not simply as a return to the native land. Her journey cut short, it is as if Belli had never left. This return has the illusory effect of a stalled departure. "Rapatriés" captures this ambiguity. To get a better sense of its peculiarity as a purgatory-like space *and* as a substantive (those who dwell in this space), one can contrast it with Lahens's use of the verb *rapatrier* in *Failles*. To recall, Lahens attempted to define her writing as a means to "rapatrier ce malheur à sa vraie place. Au centre" (18). She employs the active voice to underscore the power and agency required to argue that the earthquake was a global *malheur.* Yet this positive verbal charge is weakened by the history of its passive use to describe refugees who have been deported back to Haiti. In the metaphor of the "aborted shipwreck," Pierre-Dahomey links Belli's traumatic migration to the history of the Middle Passage. Yet her political status also has implications for the future. It puts pressure on the Haitian state to recognize and protect those on the edges of citizenship, at the same time revealing the tactics deployed by a larger, regional power such as the United States to prevent migration under the guise of saving Haitian refugees at sea. As A. Naomi Paik argues,

> Just as the intimacy between nationalist, imperialist power and human rights discourses has enabled the US to code martial invasion as humanitarian intervention and circumvent international laws against torture, it has produced the conditions in which interdiction and repatriation to certain persecution becomes rescue, a prison camp becomes a humanitarian mission, and abusive conditions that promote slow death become life-preserving care. ("Carceral Quarantine at Guantánamo," 161)

Belli's attempted flight is not, strictly speaking, to escape persecution, but given the history of neoliberal trade agreements and their destruction of Haitian markets and economic structures, a neat distinction between socio-economic precarity and political violence is by now dubious, even disingenuous. This was, of course, a key lesson imparted by Jean-Claude Charles, Michel Laguerre, and others. Rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard, Belli is returned to camp-like conditions, where, as Paik describes it

above, the Haitian governmental decree to provide land for survivors of shipwrecks ends up in a "slow death."[44] This phrase echoes Nixon's "slow violence" but redirects it to illustrate the insidious, incremental effects of carceral-like conditions on the mind and body of the refugee. In Belli's case, political violence, enacted in the short term, becomes visible over the long term. As she toils on a daily basis, she embodies unjust suffering and exclusion.

Belli's embodiment of exclusion and dispossession can be understood in terms of Mimi Sheller's argument, in *Citizenship from Below*, on the bodily performativity of citizenship and agency. In a key section, Sheller elaborates on her title:

> In what sense is citizenship made (or remade) from below? Citizenship from below not only refers to the struggles for state recognition by excluded subaltern groups who exist "below" the level of citizen, as non-citizens or second-class citizens (i.e., the enslaved, foreign immigrants, women in many cases), but also alerts us to questions of embodiment, corporeality, and the "vulgar" (cf. Cooper 1993). It brings into focus the everyday aspects of physical life, the disavowed, and the abject … that are usually excluded from the "high" political realm … . (24)[45]

Sheller adds that the experiences of migrants and refugees have "challenged regimes of exclusionary citizenship and negotiated with states and with existing citizenries for inclusion" (25). I want to suggest that Belli incarnates both aspects of the above definition in her status as an internally displaced refugee *and* as a woman who embodies the ordinary struggles of a mother and a partner to a violent man. Equally crucial for the question of embodiment, Belli's body also becomes the site of a

44 A closely related idea of "slow death," which Paik does not mention, comes from David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Although she takes the concept in a more contemporary direction, Lauren Berlant neatly summarizes Harvey's argument in his chapter "The Body as an Accumulation Strategy." Berlant writes,

> The phrase *slow death* refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence. The general emphasis of the phrase is on the phenomenon of mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality. ("Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," 754; emphasis in original)

45 Sheller cites Frederick Cooper et al., eds, *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

humanitarian exchange. In fact, well before the earthquake, Rapatriés is a humanitarian ground. The barren land makes it impossible to sustain her family, and Belli becomes desperate. She makes two critical decisions: to give herself over to God and to give away for adoption her daughters, Bélial and Luciole, whose names evoke darkness and light, respectively.[46] Belli sees the adoption, which she likens to giving her son to the sea, as an escape from a miserable future. As she puts it to her neighbor and companion, Diogène, "J'ai jeté leur grand frère à la mer et elles, je les ai données, c'est bien mieux, n'est-ce pas?" (84). In representing these dual gifts, the former in the hopes of salvation and the latter for a better life for Belli's daughters, Pierre-Dahomey lays bare the political ecology of foreign adoption. The apparent humanitarian rescue is only possible in a place without refuge. While Luciole eventually departs for Canada, Bélial is adopted by Pauline Lagarde, a French NGO employee. In her youth, Pauline was considered a tormented soul who rebelled against her family and lashed out at the injustices that, she felt deeply, degraded the world around her. Diagnosed early on as a case of "extralucidité pathologique" (89), Pauline would later suffer a breakdown and spend almost two years in a psychiatric institution. Pierre-Dahomey portrays her path from madness to maternal humanitarian as a kind of reverse mirror image of Belli's descent from motherhood to dementia. By the time Pauline alights on Port-au-Prince, she has a history of good deeds and real contact with people on the ground, yet her militancy is prone to excess.[47] In this way, her charitable spirit recalls the psychic disturbances of her adolescence, when, as the narrator puts it, any injustice could "alimenter son *indignation*" (89, emphasis in original). The suffering of Belli and her daughters excites Pauline's sense of indignity and compels

46 Bélial is a mythical and biblical figure who incarnates evil on earth. As a character in the novel explains, Victor Hugo refers to this demon in book 6, poem XXVI of *Contemplations*.

47 Pauline's humanitarian history includes multiple trips and residencies around the world. Her ability to travel at will sets her apart from Belli. For Mimi Sheller, this mobility creates an "islanding effect":

> … mobility regimes in post-disaster situations bring highly motile foreign responders and assistance to some of the affected population, while holding the "internally displaced" in place, in an ongoing process of marginalization, serial displacement, and containment – as if they were marooned on an island of misery, even while surrounded by the coming and going of well-equipped frequent flyers. ("The Islanding Effect: Post-Disaster Mobility Systems and Humanitarian Logistics in Haiti." *Cultural Geographies* 20.2 [2012]: 187)

her to intervene by way of the adoption. The novel thus epitomizes what Jacques Rancière has called "the right to humanitarian interference" ("Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man," 308). In this view, the deprivation of Belli's "human rights" does not remain in an abstract realm but is rather "inherited" and "enacted" by others ("Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man," 308).[48] This dispossession is also material in that Belli loses her right to raise her own flesh and blood. To come back to Sheller, we might see the foreign adoption in terms of "bodily matters … [that] press up against the disembodied realms of high politics and constitutional law and lay bare the limits of civil, political, and social rights" (*Citizenship from Below*, 24). Characterized as a "virement humain" (80), in the haunting language of the historical abduction of the bodies of slaves, the adoption masks the transfer of a human being and the rights she is unable to enjoy to the custody of Pauline.

The relationship between repatriation and humanitarian intervention not only reinforces Belli's powerlessness but also sends Bélial on her own incomplete migration. She, too, becomes an internally displaced person, though not in the political sense of Belli's exclusion. Bélial finds that she is not at home in France, despite the fact that she likes the village where she lives. She laments, "Je cherche un lieu, dit-elle, dans ma tête et dans ma vie. Car ce village … n'est pas mon lieu. Comme si dans ma personne je me battais avec quelqu'un d'autre, mais que celui-là n'était qu'une ombre de moi-même" (126). Like Belli, she is condemned to endure alongside the spectral presence of her recent past. Where can Bélial possibly find a place, the novel seems to ask, between the "virement humain," which recalls the history of the slave trade, and the unnatural present and future in France?

The absence of her daughters leaves a void in Belli's life. It manifests mentally, her mind slipping away, and physically, as the back spasms return. In her experience, Rapatriés has always been "un vaste inachèvement, un lieu raté," where everyone is a victim of some disaster (136). Seven years later, the earthquake ravages the land. Yet the novel announces its arrival not in terms of an unexpected geological rupture but as an episode of Belli's journey: "Comme surgi des entrailles de Belli torturées par l'absence, un terrible événement arriva" (141). Rather than the monster that Lahens imagines, the catastrophe is conceived here as another offspring of Belli. By way of the extended metaphor of

48 In this essay, Rancière critiques Hannah Arendt's articulation of the plight of the rightless in *Origins of Totalitarianism*.

parturition, an organic connection is made between the near capsizing [*naufrage avorté*], the birth and adoption of her daughters, and now the earthquake. The link between the natural and the political in this chain of events is so tight that it stirs in Belli the urgent desire to be reunited with her daughters. Although she is able to locate Pauline and Bélial in France, Luciole remains lost to her. Yet Belli is denied a passport in a political decision that induces a mental breakdown that the narrator relates to a kind of drowning.

Belli's ultimate errance, in the novel's final act, begins among the crumbled monuments of the city. Joining a coterie of crazed and homeless wanderers, she recites a litany of figures and episodes of Haitian history. Amused by her performance, the people call her "Manzè Filo," and thus she loses her patronymic in favor of a prophet-like presence who captivates the public of this post-seismic space. Manzè Filo soon flees the capital to the southern coast, the site of Belli's childhood. Outraged at the injustice of Belli's state, Pauline returns to attempt one last rescue. This time, she is accompanied by Bélial, who discovers a foreign land and realizes that she has lost her mother tongue. With the help of Diogène, they find Manzè Filo, near death, lying in a patch of shrubs behind a cemetery in Port-les-Sables. They soon bring her back to Rapatriés, but this resurrection is temporary. In the end, having traversed so many crucial moments, Belli finds refuge from this calvary of a life.

Conclusion

It is significant that Belli's descent into a "lucid-madness" coincides with the mapping of names and sites of Haitian history:

> Elle … rôdait sur le Champ-de-Mars, errant nuit et jour parmi les lieux symboliques de son égarement, l'ambassade de France, les ruines du palais de justice et du Palais national, récitant les pans de l'histoire d'Haïti, la cérémonie du bois caïman, la bataille de Vertières, Toussaint Louverture et Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Jean-Claude Duvalier, Jean-Bertrand Aristide et les *boat people*. (*Rapatriés*, 157–158)

If these symbols stand like stations of the cross for Belli, they also historicize the ongoing passion of the Haitian people. Like Carl, whose derangement at the conclusion of *Maudite éducation* allowed him to peer into an ambiguous temporal zone between past and present, Belli's visionary persona crosses this landscape of unfinished history. Moreover,

if Azaka is buried under the rubble and nearly beaten to death, Belli is beaten down on a more existential level, her life worn away at a slower pace. Each embodies disasters past and present. And yet, of these three protagonists, Belli's trials in Rapatriés more closely resemble the kind of daily banality of disaster that Lahens has worked through over several years of fiction and non-fiction writing on Haitian experience. Belli's life alternates between economic precarity, political insecurity, and the imposition of humanitarian aid. Pierre-Dahomey's rendering of the internally displaced, a refugee in uninhabitable space within the nation, revives the agony of intransitive migration that Jean-Claude Charles had described some thirty-five years earlier. *Rapatriés* may be a timely novel, but its protagonist feels like she has already lived through this journey.

Epilogue

Land and Seas of Migration and Refuge, Past and Present

> … Ces nègres polychromes avaient décrété que tout individu persécuté à cause de son ethnie ou de sa foi peut trouver refuge sur le territoire sacré de la nation. Et il devient *ipso facto* haïtien, c'est-à-dire placé sous la protection des esprits vaudou. Une promesse que les générations successives prendraient très au sérieux.
>
> Louis-Philippe Dalembert, *Avant que les ombres s'effacent*, 12

In the prologue to Dalembert's *Avant que les ombres s'effacent*, a historical novel that retraces the migration of a European Jewish refugee to Haiti during the Second World War, the narrator recalls Article 14 of Dessalines's Constitution of 1805. Along with Articles 12 and 13, it inaugurated a radical reconception of race and citizenship in the Atlantic world: "All distinctions of color will by necessity disappear among the children of one and the same family, where the Head of State is the father; Haitians will henceforth be known by the generic denomination of blacks."[1] Sibylle Fischer has underscored the many tensions that held together the early Haitian constitutions, among others, between universal and particular claims, between provisions for asylum and declarations of non-intervention in the affairs of other states, and between their national and transnational aspirations.[2] Dalembert's

1 Cited in Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*.

2 See Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 232–241. For additional scholarship on the early Haitian constitutions, see Claude Moïse, *Constitutions et luttes*

narrator is less interested in historiographical nuance than in the legacy of freedom on Haitian soil passed down since the country's founding. As the narrator puts it, "Premier pays de l'Histoire contemporaine à avoir aboli les armes à la main l'esclavage sur son sol, le tout jeune État avait décidé lors, pour en finir une bonne fois avec la notion ridicule de race, que les êtres humains étaient tous des nègres, foutre!" (*Avant que les ombres s'effacent*, 11). It might very well have been a "foundational fiction," more dream than reality, but the narrator does not give a damn.[3] These constitutions were radical because they abolished slavery and established racial equality. For the narrator, this is the promise that future generations would take seriously.

The novel's prologue is meant to provide context for the remarkable, transnational journey of its protagonist, Dr. Ruben Schwarzberg, who is born in Lödz, Poland, flees with his family to Berlin, survives temporary internment in Buchenwald, is welcomed by the Haitian community in Paris, and eventually finds safe haven in Port-au-Prince in the fall of 1939. Earlier that spring, Haitian president Sténio Vincent had signed a decree-law granting naturalized citizenship – "sans *grate tèt*," the narrator points out – to all Jewish refugees willing and able to make the voyage.[4] As the narrator recounts, if this act was no doubt a political attempt to extend Haiti's "influence dans le monde" (12), it was also part and parcel of a longer history of providing refuge to the oppressed. Ruben suffered a great deal over the course of a long life, but his journey ends on an uplifting note.

The 1939 decree also harked back to the 1816 constitution of the Republic of Haiti, then under the leadership of its first president, Alexandre Pétion. Although this constitution removed Article 14, it included a number of articles that shaped rights and restrictions on residency and citizenship, and provided asylum for nonwhites, a groundbreaking precedent that Dalembert's narrator might also have cited. For these less well-known stories, we can turn to Ada Ferrer. In her article "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic," and

de pouvoir en Haiti (1804–1987), 2 vols. (Montreal: Éditions du CIDIHCA, 1988–1990); and Julia Gaffield, "Complexities of Imagining Haiti: A Study of National Constitutions, 1801–1807." *Journal of Social History* 41.1 (Fall 2007): 81–103.

3 Fischer's chapter on the constitutions is titled "Foundational Fictions."

4 See Joseph Bernard, Jr., *Histoire juive d'Haiti* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps, 2013).

Freedom's Mirror, the larger study that followed, Ferrer demonstrates that the Haitian revolution not only influenced antislavery movements in the Americas but also led to the reinforcement of slavery in Cuba. In particular, Ferrer calls attention to Pétion's strategic and revolutionary interpretation of the principle of "free soil," or the legal right to freedom and citizenship for all "Africans and Indians" on Haitian lands. As Ferrer points out, the history of "free soil," "free city," and the Catholic notion of sanctuary predates its application in Haiti. According to Ferrer, "Pétion's version of free soil, however, was significantly more radical than any British or French precedent" ("Haiti, Free Soil," 50). While Article 1 remained unchanged from previous constitutions ("There can be no slaves on the territory of the Republic; slavery is forever abolished"), Article 44 was a new provision that extended asylum:

> All Africans and Indians, and the descendants of their blood, born in the colonies or in foreign countries, who come to reside in the Republic will be recognized as Haitians, but will enjoy the right of citizenship only after one year of residence. (Article 44, Haitian Constitution of 1816, cited in Ferrer "Haiti, Free Soil," 43)

Pétion published the new constitution in late September. As Ferrer relates, two incidents that took place in the following year would reveal the powerful transnational reach of Haitian laws on universal freedom. First, in January 1817, seven enslaved Jamaican men and boys commandeered the schooner *Deep Nine*, after their master, James McKowen, had disembarked in order to restock the ship. The slaves managed to escape to Haiti's southern republic, and, Ferrer continues, when McKowen arrived to reclaim his property, Pétion informed him that they were, "recognized to be Haitians by the 44th Article of the Constitution of the Republic from the moment they set foot on its territory" ("Haiti, Free Soil," 45). By refusing to return the men to McKowen, Pétion fulfilled the promise of the constitution because he recognized their right to freedom and set them on a path to citizenship. As Fischer argues, Pétion's bold act is evidence that Article 44 empowered the "idea of transnational liberation [which] itself becomes part of a nationalist rhetoric" (*Modernity Disavowed*, 241).

Ferrer uncovers a second act of liberation that extended the "free soil" principle into international waters. In late December 1817, the Spanish slave ship *Dos Unidos* left Cádiz on a triangular route to Havana by way of West Africa. In mid-June, as it entered the Caribbean and neared Les Cayes, Haiti, the *Wilberforce*, a Haitian ship, fired at the

Dos Unidos. The Haitian captain had orders from the new president in the southern Republic of Haiti, Jean-Pierre Boyer, to "detain and seize any vessels carrying shipments of slaves" (*Freedom's Mirror*, 330). Once again, the slave owners protested, and once again Haitian authority prevailed by invoking not only Article 44 but also Article 3 (the sacred right to asylum); and, when the Spanish captain demanded indemnity for his lost property, the Haitian government asserted Article 2, which established that "any debt contracted for the acquisition of men is forever canceled." On the surface, none of the articles explicitly allowed for Haitian authorities to intercept foreign vessels beyond Haitian territorial borders. And yet, as Ferrer shows, this is precisely what happened on multiple occasions. She writes,

> Haitian law elevated the new nation as a potent example of freedom and citizenship for any black person – no matter his or her location or status – who could make it to Haitian territory. The state's flexibility in defining the limits of that territory, its apparent willingness to offer that asylum and freedom to men and women on slaving vessels headed elsewhere, stretched the reach of Haitian antislavery even further. (*Freedom's Mirror*, 334)

The almost celebratory tone makes it appear as if Ferrer will close on a positive note. Yet she brings the reader back to the problem of insubstantial archives. Unlike the trove of documents on cases of European free soil, no such body of evidence exists for Haiti's admiralty courts. "There is no cache of petitions and legal decisions," Ferrer laments, "to illuminate the thinking either of the political class or of the men and women who sought freedom from slavery by its means" ("Haiti, Free Soil," 66). In the absence of records, or when sources are scattered around Europe and the Caribbean, many in private hands, the historian loses the trace of her historical protagonists and is left to imagine their fate.

In *Avant que les ombres s'effacent*, Dalembert picks up the trail of Haitian asylum. Reading the novel alongside *Freedom's Mirror* – or, for that matter, the historical research on Jewish families in Haiti that informed Dalembert's writing – is to put the historical archive into contact with the literary eco-archive. Weaving together the historical and imaginary threads of Article 14 of the 1805 Constitution, Article 44 of 1816, and the decree of 1939, we can grasp how the historian and novelist revive stories of the land and seas of refuge, and of the soil of freedom and justice that transformed the lives of the enslaved and

persecuted migrants. The intervention of the *Wilberforce* and other Haitian ships that took the principle of "free soil" into Caribbean and Atlantic waters provides a stunning historical contrast with President Reagan's interdiction policy, more than 160 years later, that commanded the Coast Guard to extend the territorial boundary of the U.S. The former enacted a radical projection of antislavery and freedom, while the latter was a pre-emptive attempt to erect a barrier against refuge. One welcomed the enslaved and honored their humanity, while the other kept migrants in perpetual flight or returned them to an uncertain fate under the guise of "repatriation"; one took national pride in the revalorization of race, while the other mobilized a rescue that effectively masked a racist immigration policy. In different ways, Dalembert and Ferrer offer views of Haitian land and seas that historicize the movement of migrants and refugees in the present. Ferrer takes the pulse of the archives to craft a story about emboldened Haitian presidents, international merchants and diplomats, and the ships that trafficked in human cargo. Dalembert channels the epistemic anxieties produced in the margins of histories of the Second World War into an imaginative form that projects a Haitian future. In the texts of Dalembert and Ferrer, Haitian pasts are "re-read in the light of the present and future," in the words of Stuart Hall. Belonging to this "living archive," their stories are unfinished because they remain vital to a more complex understanding of Haiti today. Multiple images of Haiti appear over the course of Ruben's journey, from the early/mid-twentieth century all the way up to the early twenty-first, as Dalembert's novel closes with a glimpse of the generations that inherited the legacy of Ruben's safe passage.

In this way, one might read *Avant que les ombres s'effacent* as the kind of centrifugal story that Rob Nixon called attention to in his address to the Modern Language Association. Ruben's itinerary across Europe and the Atlantic traces a personal and social movement within and away from centripetal powers. His journey highlights the sacrifices made to escape violence and oppression and offers an alternative vision of Haiti as a refuge from European pogroms and concentration camps. The novel's attention to the impact of war on vulnerable populations contrasts sharply with the tendency of dominant narratives of the Anthropocene to generalize and de-historicize local and global views of the present. And yet, the distinction between centripetal and centrifugal narratives feels too neat for the often messy, multi-directional social movements and multi-layered environments depicted in the corpus examined in this book. Moreover, studies that focus on the flight of migrants are not

immune to sweeping claims. In *The Figure of the Migrant*, Thomas Nail begins, "The twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant" (1). At first glance, the reader could reasonably infer that Nail is inspired by the opening paragraph of W. E. B. Dubois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. "[F]or the problem of the Twentieth Century," Dubois famously wrote, "is the problem of the color-line." Yet, if Nail meant to invoke Dubois, which would be quite logical given the latter's writings on the "Great Migration" of former slaves during Reconstruction in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Dubois is nowhere to be found in Nail's otherwise exhaustive history and theory of migration. To be fair, Nail's stated critical purview is the history of counter-movements coming out of Western Europe, including their political and philosophical origins in Ancient Greece and Rome. Yet the historical and geographical scope of European incursions into the "New World" would seem to require more than the three pages that Nail allocates to the Atlantic slave trade.

These lacunae notwithstanding, two additional problems come to the fore. First, by emphasizing the twenty-first century, Nail risks a distorted history of migration that is disconnected, curiously enough, from the very past that he analyzes in such detail. Just as the "problem of the color-line" neither began nor ended in the twentieth century, the same can be said for migration. To be sure, the extensive transhistorical and interdisciplinary analyses and the rich intertextual references that inform Nail's political philosophy of "kinopolitics," or a politics of social movement, have the effect of moderating the rather dramatic opening. Indeed, one of Nail's great insights is to theorize migration outside state-sanctioned social formations in order to move beyond the idea of the migrant as a failed citizen. Nail tracks the "continuous oscillation" of migrant figures, especially the proletarian, across centuries (137). Moreover, he argues that previous ages of migration are essential to grasp the complexity of contemporary forms. "The history of the migrant traced so far is not simply a history of the past," he writes, "it is also a history of the present in which all of the historical conditions and figures of the migrant return and mix together" (180). Yet Nail also asserts that migration has reached a tipping point in the twentieth-first century. By insisting on a political crisis, he arguably arrests the various social movements and flows across time that animate his kinopolitics. Tempted by the idea of a new, pervasive era of global migration, Nail employs language that has much in common with the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene. In looking to the future of migration ("The twenty-first century *will be* the century of the migrant"), Nail adopts a

prophetic language that compels him to speak in universal terms, which is the second problem of his theoretical approach. “In other ways,” he continues in the following paragraph, “we are all becoming migrants” (1). The collective “we” remains ambiguous through to the end of the book: “The migrant is the political figure of our time,” Nail proclaims (235). This conclusion soars to a view of the globe from on high, like the satellite’s perspective that illuminates Serres’s vision of the Earth’s “immense human plates.” The spatial distance gives the illusion of a common humanity that blurs the fault lines between the universal and the particular that can be read in the Haitian constitutions and, later, in Lahens’s reflections on the earthquake in Haiti as a global problem.

The Figure of the Migrant begins with a grand vision of migration as the great problem of the present and future and ends with an urgent appeal to a shared humanity. Nail situates the migrant first as the figure of the more expansive twenty-first century and finally in the ambiguous “our time.” In both phrases, it is impossible to locate the “migrant figure” with any precision. Yet the long histories of social movement at the heart of his book make it a compelling intervention into the question of migration and refuge. It also reframes a number of questions with which I began this book, especially the stakes of future-oriented politics and neoliberal conceptions of human value for social and environmental justice. Migrants and refugees are without question ubiquitous political figures today, but it is imperative to hold on to the tension between particular experiences and their implications for wider, varying flows of people in search of refuge. To universalize these different movements is to look for solutions in the short term that either forget or deny what has happened in the past. This is, of course, the lesson imparted by Lahens in *Failles*, a text that makes a vital contribution to the Haitian eco-archive. This body of literature, from the fall of Duvalier to post-earthquake Haiti, attests to and imagines histories of migratory and displaced people amidst inequality and precarity. The “high pressure” of the Caribbean zone, as Charles put it, is the space where centripetal and centrifugal forces have a long history of conflict. Haitian writers past and present have shed light on the pain of the “stalled present.” But they have also drawn inspiration from their surroundings to envision spaces of refuge, among the whispering trees of Philoctète’s borderland and under the protective glow of Lahens’s moonlight.

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