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Ecowomanist Endeavors: Race, Gender, and Environmental Ethics in Contemporary Caribbean Women's Literature

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

ECOWOMANIST ENDEAVORS: RACE, GENDER, AND ENVIRONMENTAL
ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

By

Debbie-Ann C. Morrison

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2012

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ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

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Ecowomanist Endeavors: Race, Gender,
and Environmental Ethics in Contemporary Caribbean
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This dissertation examines the intersections of gender, sexuality, community, landscape, ecology, and social justice as they appear in selected literary texts by contemporary Caribbean women writers. Beginning with an awareness of the various ecological crises enveloping the Caribbean as well as with a firm belief that an analysis of literature might reveal inherent values regarding ecological sustainability and the need for propagating environmentally ethical practices throughout the region, the project uses Alice Walker's notion of womanism to craft what it calls an "ecologically womanist" reading of these texts. While using Walker's definition of womanism to help identify the values that characterize ecowomanist texts, the dissertation simultaneously places ecowomanist texts and ecowomanist inquiry in relation to ecocriticism and ecofeminism as they have been articulated by Western authors and critics. Chapter One of the dissertation, "Ecowomanist Gardens and New World Poets," identifies "the garden" as one of the images historically central to human beings' articulation of the self. The chapter proceeds by using this primary identification with garden imagery as a means of exploring the ways in which contemporary Caribbean women historicize, define, and redefine themselves and their creative processes in relation to the natural world. By beginning with a reading of Alice Walker's seminal text, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* as

well as selected poems from *Revolutionary Petunias*, the chapter mounts a comparative reading between Walker, who is arguably a New World poet in her own right, and Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior, and Jamaica Kincaid. In its consideration of Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness*, Chapter Two, entitled "Island in Inverse: Mirroring in Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness*," considers the trope of mirror images, doubles, inverses, and crosses as they are defined in Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen*. The chapter achieves this by tracing Columbus's original voyage to the Caribbean and by placing this voyage, and the socio-economic and ecological patterns that voyage set in place, into juxtaposition with Montero's modern Haiti. The chapter suggests Columbus as a fitting counterpoint to Montero's contemporary protagonists as the novel critiques environmental ethics divested of any considerations of race, gender, or religious autonomy. Chapter Three of the dissertation, "Landscape, Love, and the Ethics of Choice in Dionne Brand's *Another Place, Not Here*," asserts that Brand's novel is governed by themes of choice and consequence and that the "ethics of choice" that emerge from those themes parallels a broader environmental ethics consistent with the ecowomanist leanings identified in other contemporary Caribbean women's writings. For Brand, like the New World Poets and Montero, the ethics of place are inextricably bound up with a woman's place in colonial and postcolonial structures. The final chapter of the dissertation, "Nature, Eroticism, and Communal Ethics: Social Justice in Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*," asserts the importance of what it calls an eco-human community in mediating environmental crisis and achieving environmental justice. Moreover, with its unabashed look at sex, incest and land politics among the Wapisiana of Guyana, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* suggests the possibilities (and perils) in looking at

erotic power as an integral component of communal agency and environmental sustainability. The dissertation concludes with a brief review of ecowomanist literature not included in the primary study as well as with some suppositions about the role environmental consciousness in actual and literary landscapes of the Caribbean.

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When I began working on this degree, before I had any real sense of what my project would entail, my daughter was just six weeks old. At the age of nine, she is now joined by two younger sisters, ages seven and one. Needless to say, this project was a long time coming. That it happened at all is because of the support of many incredibly special people.

Beyond the institutional resources the University of Miami has provided me with, it has also placed me in the path of people—administrative staff, fellow students, and professors—who have been instrumental in the completion of this project. Time and time again they have given freely of their advice, intellect, and encouragement. Among them are Lydia Starling and Dr. Pamela Hammons, who have more than once helped me navigate the treacherous path of paperwork and requirements; Drs. Joni Adamson, Brenna Munro, and Patricia Saunders, who somehow managed to help me see my project in new ways without sacrificing my original vision. I thank you all. Of special note is Dr. Sandra Pouchet Paquet, the chair of my committee. Without your kindness and patience, I know I would have given up long ago.

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Ecology

1. The study of the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings
2. Study of the interaction of people with their environment.

--*The Oxford Essential Dictionary*

Womanist

1. From *womanish* (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans.: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

--Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*

INTRODUCTION

Relation comprehends violence, marks its distance.

Every poetics is a palliative for eternity.

--Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

In these two brief sentences Edouard Glissant describes two of the central axioms that have driven Caribbean artistic and intellectual production in the postcolonial era. The first recognizes that despite advertisements and travel brochures that depict the Caribbean as “fresh and untouched,” “isolated,” or “exotic” (Strachan 30; 84; 89), the modern Caribbean was born of extreme violence. This violence, as Mimi Sheller outlines in *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003), is manifest in the historical consumption of Caribbean resources, people, and culture (3). And as Ian Strachan also suggests in *Paradise and Plantation* (2002), it is manifest in a plantation-culture form of modern tourism (9). Multi-disciplinary scholarship, like that of Sheller, Strachan, and others has demonstrated that this violence ranges from the displacement and decimation of indigenous populations, and the initiation of slavery and indentureship to the bloody revolutions, tyrannical repression, contemporary gang warfare, economic exploitation, and sexual abuse that have all come to characterize the years following the European imperial “discovery” of the New World.

Recently some scholars have been paying critical attention to another powerful site of violence and injustice in the Caribbean: the land itself. Like “race” or “gender,” land has also been a site of much conflict in the Caribbean because it represents a continuous struggle to maintain control of both the socio-economic and political power that accompanied colonial occupation (*Postcolonial Ecologies* Introduction, location 244,

par. 9). Alongside physical claims of territory and the impact those claims had on indigenous, settler, and imported populations, wrangling over the symbolic and ideological value of the land has also done its damage. Sheller suggests that “[i]n so far as the Caribbean has been naturalised and denaturalised as ‘natural paradise’, it defies separation into the real versus the imagined; what we think of as material or actual is always already formed by the spectacular and the virtual” (*Consuming* 224). For example, when discussing the trajectory of African-based religion in Haiti, Kate Ramsey argues that Vodou has been so fictionalized by outsiders that there has been both a split between and, at times, an intersection of Vodou as it exists in reality and “Voodoo” as it exists in a Western imagination (13). So too has the Caribbean, its traditions such as Vodou as well as its inhabitants, occupied both real and imagined spaces. In his discussion of postcolonial literature in *Caliban’s Voice* (2009), Bill Ashcroft adds to this idea of the real versus the imagined by explaining how the occupation of real and imagined space has supported colonial efforts. He writes, “Most people see ‘place’ as a concrete physical setting, but this distinction between space as unbounded extension and place as location is peculiar to the English language...” (75). He explains that the “distinction between space and place in English is important for the particular nature of the occupation of space by British imperialism” (76). In such contested physical space and symbolic place, not only is one’s sense of self in constant flux, but to some extent, Caribbean identity becomes that much more difficult to negotiate or define. Within such a framework, perhaps Jamaica Kincaid, one of the writers whose work forms the basis of my inquiry into the connections between environment and identity, is right to wonder about the idea of Caribbean identity; “Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound

and each breath I take in and expel healing and opening a wound again and again, over and over, or is it a moment that began in 1492 and has come to no end yet?" (*My Garden Book*) (1999) 153). The fact that she embeds her contemplation of an abstract within writings about her material place—her garden—in many ways mirrors the dual, or perhaps multi-layered, position of land and environment within the Caribbean.

The first Glissant axiom, "Relation comprehends violence, marks its distance" (*Poetics* 188), confirms that Caribbean scholars and artists like Kincaid have spent a good deal of their time and creative energy marking the distance of this violence across time, cultures, nations, and physical spaces. Like Kincaid, they have been chronicling it, critiquing it, sharing information about it, and, of course, trying to predict its future manifestations. Moreover, if titles such as the Antonio Benitez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (1996) are any indication, traditional explorations of land might be seen as part of the Caribbean's recurring trauma, but unlike the implicit suggestion of Kincaid's question, scholarly research has demonstrated that this process does not *have* to be one typified by an obsessive or neurotic return to past traumas. In her examination of African American literature and environment, Kimberly Ruffin similarly argues that by re-visiting those moments of "burden and beauty" inherent to the African American environmental experience there is a "psychological promise ... [of] a point of entry into ecological discussion that includes but is not limited to domination" (Introduction, location 222, par.31). Critically re-visiting these manifestations of violence as they are connected to the environment can prove useful to bettering the lives of Caribbean peoples in the here and now as well. As the editors of *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* write, "Despite their differences, contributors to this volume agree that our intellectual priorities

must respond not only to the search for historical clarity about the making of the modern empires but also to the continuing and bloody ambition of neocolonialism” (Loomba et al. 13). The writing (or *righting*) of historical record is, and will remain, important work. However, adequately considering the “here and now” requires that Caribbean scholars and artists bring explicit environmental values to bear in their work and in the face of current “bloody” ambitions. Identifying these values and establishing the usefulness of an environmental ethic could well address the relationship between the socio-economic and political aftermath of colonialism, the various environmental crises that have been *concurrently* mounting in the Caribbean, and the potential shades of violence that these entail.

In the midst of all of this vigilance, this rooting out of land-based violence and environmental degradation, it is important to note that the many environmental problems of the Caribbean have not been completely neglected. Emerging primarily in the 1980s, non-profit organizations such as The Organization for the Rehabilitation of the Environment, headed by Mousson Pierre Finnigan in Haiti, The Caribbean Forest Conservation Association headed by Brian James in Trinidad, and The Eastern Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness, headed by Mona George in Dominica have been in existence since 1985, 1987, and 1995 respectively. Additionally, scholars like Richard Grove, Ian Strachan, and others have already done academic work in this area. For example, in her introduction to *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005), M. Jacqui Alexander echoes Wackernagel and Rees’s *Our Ecological Footprint* in pointing out the disconnect between environmental awareness and social discord when she asserts that Americans (and other Western societies) are under “...the mistaken belief that we can be against the

war [in Iraq] yet continue to brand this earth with a set of ecological footprints so large and out of proportion with the rest of life on the planet that war is needed to underwrite our distorted needs” (2). Alexander’s point relies on the paradox of a populist disapproval of the war on terror in America when it is precisely the popular (though not solely Western) demand for resources that helps drive violent imperialism. And yet, while such analyses are vital, they do not specifically address the ways in which race complicates the issue of environmental ethics and sustainability in a post-colonial or neocolonial era and the sort of disconnects, or dislocations, that can exist in these situations. Also pointing to America as example, in “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” (2005), Rob Nixon highlights what he sees as part of the postcolonial paradox of sustainability. It is a paradox of need. Nixon quotes Aldo Leopold’s idea about what it means (at least in part) to be an American: “When I go birding in my Ford, I am devastating an oil field, and re-electing an imperialist to get me rubber” (qtd. in Nixon 238). However, there is also the paradox of language and scholarship. In the same essay Nixon laments the absence of postcolonial writers on a *New York Times* list of natural and environmental writers and the disgraceful marginalization of Nigerian writer and environmental activist Saro-Wiwa (233). But he juxtaposes this lack of representation on the part of mainstream editors and literary critics with the need for more scholarly attention to environment on the part of postcolonial literary scholars. Nixon is one of a small, but growing, number of critics who *have* begun to fill in (or perhaps fill out) this discussion with their voices. In short, the sort of social justice, reform, and redress that many Caribbean scholars and artists strive for in their work cannot exist without environmental consciousness.

Moreover, even though creative literature—poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction—is very often one of the first places in which a given society will record its grievances, uncertainties, and fears, thus potentially planting the seeds of reform and activism in the minds of readers. Until the publication of *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* in 2005 there was a dearth of inquiry in Caribbean literary criticism and theory regarding the connections between the decisive role of colonial rule in the Caribbean—with its legacy of sexual violence, biological piracy, and racism—and contemporary manifestations of oppression and environmental crisis. This is not to suggest that no work was being done in this area. Though perhaps not identified as a postcolonial environmentalist, Nixon himself has been publishing on the intersection of race, colonialism, and environment for the past twenty years. For example, his 1991 essay, “Border Country: Bessie Head’s Frontline States,” analyzes what it means to be without a “legitimate” claim to land or country and whether or not that perception of landlessness or wandering itself becomes a rationale for dispossession (113). Similarly, scholars like Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, whom I often cite, have been specifically linking postcolonial literary criticism and ecocriticism since the early 2000s.

Recently though, a marked enthusiasm for the possibilities in this area seems to have replaced what Nixon identified as absence. In the last year alone, four book-length projects specifically dealing with post-colonial literature and the environment have been published.¹ This recent response is significant for many reasons. First, not only has this

¹ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narrative (Under the Sign of Nature)* (2010), Laura Wright, *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial*

specific kind of work been quantitatively lacking, it has lagged behind other disciplines. Of those scholars whom I've mentioned already, very few are performing literary scholarship. Others cited, like Strachan, Alexander, Grove, Sheller, etc., are more accurately grouped in the fields of Cultural Studies, Women's Studies, History, and Sociology respectively. Moreover, although Caribbean writers and theorists such as Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Wilson Harris have produced seminal works that include some analyses of environment within broader elaborations about Caribbean literature, full-length works like the ones noted are significant because they assert the importance of language and literature in molding environmental attitudes. With regard to the African American experience, Ruffin also writes:

Language is a key tool in how people relate to nature. Since language also carries the conceptual legacy of racist ideology, it is a key tool in the creation and maintenance of human hierarchies that often put people of African descent among those at the bottom where they are subhumans unable to speak for nature. Simply put, language, in the form of speech or documents used by those in power has been employed to keep people of African descent in undesirable places. (Introduction, location 174, par. 24).

While I agree with Ruffin's assessment about the importance of language as a mediator of environment, I also wonder what differences exist in the Caribbean. While Caribbean literature has long dealt with the legacy of slavery, it is also home to people of non-African descent who are equally, if perhaps differently, affected by language as a tool.

It is with this clarification in mind that I return to the second Glissant axiom, "Every poetics is a palliative for eternity" (*Poetics* 183), as it might further inform how vital literature is in understanding and tackling ecological disaster and injustice in the

Environment (2010), and Elizabeth M. DeLoughery and George B. Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011).

Caribbean. If marking the distance of violence is necessary for survival, Glissant's sense of poetics seeks to soothe psychic wounds, those immortalized by Kincaid's obsessive questioning or those Strachan speaks of in his analysis of the "apocalyptic" vision of Naipaul's texts. Strachan writes that in Naipaul's vision the pluralistic society brought about by colonialism is a

... pattern that dooms the Caribbean to a mimicry of the mother country, whose history and mores replace the ones lost to the colonized through plantation slavery and indenture. Then this impersonation leads to perpetual insecurity of identity among the colonized and sentences the society to never-ending racial conflict. It also causes a lack of connection between Caribbeans and their landscape. Deep down, Caribbeans sense they belong somewhere else. (174)

This perpetual loop of mimicry and displacement as a part of the Caribbean identity echoes Sheller's earlier point about the coexistence of the real and the imagined in the Caribbean. It also echoes the kind of vulnerability that Ashcroft claims it can create. It is the burden that Ruffin writes about. However, even if it cannot, in and of itself, effect a cure for issues of identity, economics, gender, or environment, an attention to poetics and other forms of creativity is one that scholars seem to recognize. Sheller herself writes, "In considering the sites of agency within the Caribbean, it is crucial to note that recent research and writing on the Caribbean emphasises resistance to colonialism (and more recently neo-imperialism and globalization) and the creative agency of people who are not simply victims of history, but survivors" (7). Ruffin, too, sees the primary importance of creative artistry. For her, African American artistic products "are a reservoir of moments of insight that wrestle with a history of environmental injustice and a desire for environmental belonging" (Introduction, location 148, par. 20). Like Nixon, Sheller, Ruffin, and others, my dissertation suggests that artistic production in and about the

Caribbean cannot and need not be divested of important conversations about the need for and practical application of environmental ethics or the practice of positive communion with the landscape.² And while this dissertation aims to be one of the voices that help fill out a discussion about the connections between post-colonial literature and the environment, it also diverges from much of this recent work in appreciable ways. Crucially, I use of Alice Walker's notion of womanism as a primary methodological and investigative tool. Thus, the overarching goal of this project is to investigate the psychological, social, and political implications of the distinct, yet inextricably linked, literary representations of gender, sexuality, community, landscape, ecology, and social justice, in contemporary Caribbean women's literature.

Creative Resistance to Violence

In order to understand the connections between literature and the environment in Caribbean literature as well as my parallel focus on gender, I have also found it important to understand the role ecocriticism has had in defining the region's "environmental literature." Ecocriticism is a field of study that considers "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader* xviii). Other than Glotfelty's "most cited definition," definitions of what ecocriticism is and what its primary aims are have been difficult to come by (Buell 88), and this is part of what makes continued articulation of postcolonial ecocriticisms so important, yet also so challenging. In one of the more recent attempts to clarify its many directions, Lawrence Buell's essay, "Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends" (2011), explains ecocriticism's trajectory as

² In *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx similarly argues a similar connection, though he ultimately suggests the problems of symbolic nature and "real" application is one best left to politics (365).

having been defined by two distinct waves. The first wave, which he describes as the “project of reorienting literary-critical thinking toward more serious engagement with nonhuman nature ...” (89), is also described as emanating from English and American epicenters of British romanticism and American nature writing (89). And though Buell writes that most scholars would have embraced a broader scope within the field (89), DeLoughrey and Handley question whether or not postcolonial ecocriticism has received the recognition it deserves, or whether questions about definition and direction in the field merely support “the production of a discourse of irreconcilable difference between these fields [that] serves to relegate postcolonial literatures and methodologies to the footnotes of mainstream ecocritical study and tends to homogenize the complexity of ecocritical work” (*Postcolonial Ecologies* Introduction, location 272, par. 11). Without the maintenance of scholarship in postcolonial ecocriticism as well as the addition of new voices to articulate the legacy of colonialism on the planet, this important work may well fall victim to the breadth of the field and its foundational impulse to place Western texts at its epicenter.

Buell does note, however, that the lack of diversity within the first wave of ecocritical inquiry was part of the impetus for the second wave. He writes:

A more representative expression of the sociocentric thrust of second-wave eco-criticism, however, is the 2002 *Environmental Justice Reader*, which in a spirit of sober-toned moral and political conviction pits itself against the 1996 *Ecocriticism Reader*. This collection has not yet become the reference point that the earlier one still remains, but the significance of the shift of priorities toward a fusion of cultural constructionism and social justice concerns cannot be denied. The prioritization of issues of environmental justice—the maldistribution of environmental benefits and hazards between white and nonwhite, rich and poor—is second-wave

ecocriticism's most distinctive activist edge, just as preservationist ecocriticism was for the first wave. (96)

After the emergence of the second wave, yet well before the recent advancements of post-colonial ecocriticism, this activist edge found its voice among many second-wave feminists (many of whom were already advocates of environmental awareness and protection) who connected the struggle against sexism to the struggle to preserve and maintain the environment. In "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism (1996)," Karen J. Warren outlines this gap between environmental activism, literary scholarship, and feminist values:

Ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections—historical, experimental, symbolic, theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding which is crucial to both feminism *and* environmental ethics ... [A]ny feminist theory and any environmental ethic which fails to take seriously the twin and interconnected dominations of women and nature is at best incomplete and at worst simply inadequate. (*Ecological Fem. Phil* 19)

As notions of "difference" continued to gain popularity in the 90s, many newly minted ecofeminists broadened their definitions in an attempt at inclusiveness. Warren later writes in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (1997), "Ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other" (xii). Yet, very few works actually took on the large task of analyzing the role of color and gender in relation to the environment.

One of the early texts that supported the idea of a need for this sort of work was Greta Gaard's *Ecological Politics: Ecofeminists and the Greens* (1998). Chapter One is devoted to the development of ecofeminism and an analysis of its contemporary factions.

To this end, Gaard creates what she calls a “geography of ecofeminisms,” wherein she physically maps out the various paths that have led women to ecofeminism (15). She writes, at length, of womanism:

In this geography, I am using the potential conjunction of womanism and ecofeminism to explore the relationship between women of color and ecofeminists exclusively in the United States ... Notice that though womanism is one of the great mountains of feminist thought, when the womanist rivers flow into the lake of ecofeminism, there is no corresponding category of “womanist ecofeminism.” Certainly, one can find U.S. women of color who have foregrounded issues of race and class at the same time as they have embraced ecofeminism or have worked within an ecofeminist framework: Cynthia Hamilton, Rachel Bagby, Paula Gunn Allen, Andrea Smith, Lourdes Arguelles, Luisah Teish ... Finally, not all those who would claim the term ‘womanist ecofeminist’ have written about ecofeminism, though they may have written widely and their activism articulates their vision as well. (40-41)

It is interesting to note at this point that the scant connections between environmentalism and Caribbean studies may be because of what Nixon cites as a “second irony: that postcolonial literary critics have, in turn, shown scant interest in environmental concerns, regarding them implicitly as, at best, irrelevant and elitist, at worst as sullied by ‘green imperialism’” (234-235). And yet, juxtaposing the first Glissant epigraph with what Gaard suggests, might reveal that the relational potential in using Alice Walker’s notion of womanism—the potential for deliberately connected ways of thinking about such issues as gender, race, cultural politics, and environment—has broad applications for Caribbean literary criticism as well. For example, in the introduction to Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse* (1998), J. Michael Dash writes that, “In the postcolonial Caribbean situation, the artist, intellectual, leader, attempts to give definition to an existential void, to impose a total, transcendental meaning on the surrounding flux. Glissant has observed

that the problem has traditionally been that the intellectual has looked outside of the land and the community for a solution” (xvii). Thus there is great potential in doing as both Glissant and Gaard suggest and merging the ecological, the womanist, and the creative.

In fact, the driving hypothesis of this project is that contemporary women writers from the Caribbean have already been doing this kind of work. There is, and has been, an impetus among contemporary Caribbean literary artists, and particularly female artists, to explore the complex connections between nature, landscape and community as it has traditionally been conceived in the Caribbean literary imagination. One of the primary differences between this Caribbean literary movement and what Ruffin, for example, has been able to isolate from the African American literary tradition, is the sometimes drastic difference in regional, national, ethnic, racial, sexual, literary, and linguistic frameworks from which these women write. In choosing to use Alice Walker’s work as a means of exploring Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior, Jamaica Kincaid, Mayra Montero, Dionne Brand, and Pauline Melville, I have attempted to acknowledge these wide variances. It is, admittedly, a mere sample of what exists in the Caribbean, much less the broader New World. Yet even in this small sampling there are multiple genres (poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction); multiple regional and national affiliations (Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad, Cuba, Haiti, Canada, Antigua, Grenada, and the U.S.); multiple racial identities (peoples of African descent, European descent, Asian descent, Indigenous descent, and multiple racial origins); multiple sexual identities (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and omnisexual); and multiple linguistic backgrounds (Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, and Arawakan). Yet alongside these differences, there is also some continuity as the work of these writers generally involves a vision of environmentalism

that recognizes a need for a sustainable environmental ethics in the Caribbean, and social justice that takes into account the politics of land use, cultural inheritance, community, spirituality, aesthetics, gender politics, sexuality, and corporeal need. For these reasons, this dissertation explores what it sees as representative of the ecologically womanist, or ecowomanist, in contemporary Caribbean women's literature.

However, it bears repeating that this project is also by no means an attempt to define the concept of ecowomanism as strictly contemporary or female at its core. Ecowomanism, as it is used in this dissertation, and as previously suggested, is grounded in Glissant's notion of Relation, in which "one's specificity is not enough if one is to escape the lethal, indistinct confusion of assimilations; this specificity still has to be put into action before consenting to any outcome" (*Poetics* 147). So even though Alice Walker's original notion of womanism, from which the present term "ecowomanism" partially derives, is African American in origin, ecowomanism in a Caribbean context is "not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge" (*Poetics* 18). In this spirit, the dissertation not only makes use of Glissant and Walker's theories, it also makes use of Audre Lorde's notion of erotic power,³ Carol Boyce Davies' concept of migrating subjectivities,⁴ Joan Dayan's theory of a landscape of loss,⁵ and many others whose work might illuminate the intersection of creative literature and environment in the Caribbean. With these theories and others in hand, as Glissant might suggest, the hope of this project is to be able to take the element of intellectual and cultural exchange to pluck knowledge from the infinite abyss (*Poetics* 8).

³ "Uses of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider* (1984) pp. 53-79

⁴ *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994)

⁵ "Landscape of Loss," in *Haiti, History and the Gods* (1995) pp. 79-85

One of the primary themes that emerges in my investigation of these works is the recurrence of particular natural motifs, and in addition to drawing attention to their existence I attempt to understand how and why the writers deploy them in their writing. I begin with perhaps the most recurrent and most vexing image in Caribbean literary and cultural history: the garden. The image of the Caribbean garden and the associated notions of harvestable fecundity have historically evoked visions of the forced transplantation of labor as well as peoples, plants, and animals. It has also represented the physical and spiritual dislocation and domination that happens to a people as a result of the gleaning of “resources.” The history of the botanical garden, for example, and how it changed after contact with the Caribbean exemplifies the sort of violence that gardening in the Caribbean has come to represent, when, as Kincaid notes in one of the subtitles in Section II of her *Garden Book*, “to name is to possess” (114). Yet, I begin here because the image of the garden also emerges in contemporary Caribbean women’s literature not only as a source of pain and displacement, but also as a symbol for and a physical site of aesthetic connection with the land, spiritual transcendence, and political empowerment. It is one, far-reaching example of how much of the work being done by Caribbean women writers simultaneously considers both the socio-political and the spiritual/communal source of power in reclaiming the image of the garden and in reclaiming the physical space and the physical act of gardening. This physical act of gardening, as has been argued by Caribbean cultural archaeologists like Lydia Pulsipher and Jonathan Skinner, is equally as important in reclaiming and maintaining socio-political and spiritual power in the Caribbean as it also recognizes the material benefit gardening provides the people

who inhabit the land and as it encourages a physical engagement with the land for people who may have been estranged from it.

To explore these assertions further in the literature, Chapter One turns to Alice Walker's foundational book on the role and rights of women and the connections between women of color and their art. In the title essay to Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, her mother's physical garden becomes emblematic of the potential within collective female artistry. She boils it down to a figurative place where "a creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see..." (240), but the promise of which now blossoms in contemporary female artists as they "[order] the universe in the image of [their] personal conception of Beauty" (241). Caribbean women writers have certainly reaped the benefit of this seed, and this Beauty is evident in their artistic works. Yet, for many Caribbean women writers this Beauty (a capitalization practice which is also borrowed from Walker) is also bound to the seeds of social justice and environmental reform. In creating these connections between Walker, whom the chapter identifies as a New World writer herself, and its selection of contemporary Caribbean women writers, this chapter develops as a cross-cultural study of selections from Walker's *Revolutionary Petunias*, Lorna Goodison's *To Us, All Flowers Are Roses*, Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics*, and Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden (Book)* and *My Brother*. Though there are many other instances in which gardens are invoked in contemporary Caribbean women's literature, the ones chosen for this section exhibit repetition of garden imagery that seems particularly freighted with moments where dual concerns about dislocation and relocation collide. These moments are of particular interest to this project because they highlight what it contends is a burgeoning effort to

create emotionally and physically sustainable connections within the landscape. Goodison's invocation of the rose as a symbol of female aesthetic value forms the primary basis of the chapter's investigation of colonial anxiety within the garden while both Senior and Kincaid's exploration of death-as-regeneration form the primary basis for the chapter's exploration of the writer's efforts to recoup a sustainable relationship with their physical space. While Alice Walker's creative writing and essays may not be necessary to a study of Caribbean women's writing, the chapter will show that her distinctive ecowomanist framework is particularly illuminating in any exploration and characterization of ecowomanist values in Caribbean women's writing.

In Chapter Two, "Island in Inverse: Mirroring in Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness*," I begin again with the garden motif. While the first chapter examines the image of the garden as a place in which writers simultaneously mark the distance of colonial violence and cultivate their spirituality through creativity, I examine the novel's shift from that kind of image to yet another recurrent motif within the Caribbean literary imagination: the notion of the "barren" Caribbean state. In a chapter entitled "Writing Misery," Joan Dayan contends that there is a "landscape of loss" in Haiti (*Haiti, History and the Gods* 79). At one level, this characterization seems painfully appropriate given the contemporary psychosocial and political landscape of the island. For example, from the 1970s on, Haiti has been noted as the premier exporter of blood and cadavers for U.S. labs and medical schools (which earned Duvalierist [,] Luckner Camborne the moniker "vampire of the Caribbean") (Sheller 146, 171, 172). The characterization of Haiti as a "landscape of loss" also seems appropriate when considering the environmental crisis on the island-nation, which, to date, has included flooding, massive soil erosion, and a

steady depletion of natural resources compounded by a near-total economic embargo in 1994. Ironically, it was not until after the Haitian revolution, and the decline of European power on the island, and later with different US occupations of the island, that the contemporary vision of an irredeemably defunct (environmentally, socio-politically, economically) island-nation arose. Moreover, it is at this pivotal point in Haiti's history that it seems to emerge as a nation in inverse, a nation whose contradictory turn has been described by LeGrace Benson in "Haiti's Elusive Paradise" (2011). In it she describes the disjoint between anachronistic artistic representations of Haiti's landscape and the current state of the physical environment. She writes, "...[T]here is something to be learned about what landscape objects reveal regarding a fundamental human yearning for what scientists call 'a sustainable ecosystem' and popular discourse refers to as 'paradise.' An unbridgeable chasm seems to lie between the beauties of the painted tropical paradise and the wretchedness of a failing ecosystem" (*Postcolonial Ecologies*, location 1251, par. 1). The chapter explores a similar sort of chasm as it's identified in Montero's novel.

It explores the state of socio-political, economic, and environmental crisis in the country by investigating how and why the endless abundance of Haiti's past, an abundance that typified life to such a degree that the fear among European colonialists was that it might "go wild," transformed into a nation notable for its thriving and frightening trade in medical cadavers and its paucity of what is symbolic of life: food, vegetation, a healthy populace, etc. Montero's work, in particular, explores the current inner workings of an Eden undone, carefully tracing the negative impact of an imperial influence on both the nation's psyche and physical environment. It is a physical environment which appears in the novel as a series of desolate hillsides and barren forests

being traversed by the novel's dual protagonists (an American scientist and his Haitian guide) as they search for a near-extinct frog. In addition to their search for the frog, the novel is centered around both men's ability (or inability) to form sustainable relationships with the women, gods, and landscapes that surround them. Ultimately, the chapter argues that Montero's novel suggests the potential for a reversal of fortune for the nation that is inherent in and guided by the country's indigenous Vodou religious practices⁶ as well as a holistic examination of sexual politics and practices on the island. It continues to explore the broader contention of the dissertation that suggest the ways in which contemporary Caribbean women writers have, and are, actively exploring connections between spirituality and aesthetics, environment and socio-political empowerment.

As many, if not all of the chapters revolve around dualities and dichotomies, the prominent motifs of the third chapter, "Landscape and Love: Negotiating the Ethics of Choice in Dionne Brand's *Another Place, Not Here*," continues in that direction. It identifies "the city" and "the country," which in Brand's novel also takes various other forms such as "the train" and "the road" or "the urban workhouse" and "the canefield." It returns to the role of language as a tool in the relational experience of nature (Ruffin, Introduction, location 174, par. 24) and in creating the sort of activist rhetoric I call ecowomanist rhetoric. As a way of understanding the dynamic between the writer and reader in this rhetorical situation, I explore Wolfgang Iser's concept of aesthetic response and reception theory and its assertion that "choice" is one of primary connections

⁶ The closest corollary to this is what Ruffin calls "ecotheology" within the African American literary tradition (Ruffin, Chapter Three, location 1212). And though she uses Alice Walker as one of the primary examples of the use of religious tropes as an arm of environmental ethics, there are some distinct differences that Chapter Two explores.

between readers and texts. While continuing the focus on examining the ecowomanist characteristics of Brand's text, the chapter briefly explains the contribution of Iser's theories to my reading of ecocritical values in this novel, then shifts analytical focus to the role of choice in navigating often competing images of rootedness and escape that appear in Brand's novel. These motifs, the recurrent dualities, are made clear through the novel's dual protagonists: Elizete and Verlia. However, it is by focusing on Verlia, a woman who has been a victim of neglect and abuse for most of her life, that the chapter attempts to understand the way choice, or a restriction of choice and agency, affects the characters' relationship to island landscapes, urban landscapes—places more often than not identified as unfeeling, isolating, and dead—and emotional landscapes, thus forestalling the potential for ethical relationships to the land. The chapter also considers the consequence of this kind of labeling of place as sterile, at best, as it is reproduced and propagated by Caribbean peoples living at home and abroad, and whether or not it simply reinforces the sort of “environmental othering” that Caribbean people have endured since the onset of colonial exploration and settlement (Ruffin, Introduction, location 43, par. 4). Finally, the chapter considers whether or not this kind of ideological equivocation might be a necessary way, again, as Walker might suggest, to maintain an aesthetic sensibility and social consciousness through separation (*In Search of xi*). Perhaps it is only through the perspective of errant travel and relocation that positive and self-affirmed ways of thinking about the self, sexuality, and home become, as Glissant writes, “not rhizomatic but deeply rooted” (*Poetics* 41).

The fourth chapter, “Nature, Eroticism, and Communal Ethics in Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*,” incorporates several previously introduced themes:

divergent sexualities, community, environmental ethics and reform, as well as notions of social justice. It also returns to many of the motifs introduced in the previous chapter: the flower, the forest, the city and country. Melville's text is perhaps one of the most productive Caribbean representations of ecowomanism in that it takes to task many of the historical and contemporary issues that are at the heart of both womanism and (any) environmental ethics (such as the displacement of Amerindian peoples and the exploitation of Caribbean lands by multi-national corporations). The chapter also examines Melville's deep investment in Amazonian archetypes and contends that those engagements overlap with her use of Apollonian and Dionysian archetypes, cumulatively reflecting an ecowomanist sense of the conflict between Western imperialism and the imperialized.

In many ways, the character of Beatrice, one of Melville's protagonists, represents an unequivocal commitment to self-governed identity, sexual freedom, community, and environment. She is, as Walker writes, "outrageous, audacious, courageous, or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one ... Responsible. In charge. Serious." (xi emphasis Walker's) Through Beatrice's sexuality, Melville is able to explore the historical denigration of non-Western cultural values. Through Beatrice Melville is able to additionally explore the heavy weight of biological determinism present in the production and maintenance of Caribbean sexual identities. Sheller notes that, "... within Orientalist discourses there was a dark side, figured as savagery, wildness, and decay. Such notions of cultural decay were linked to ideas of environmental determinism, 'which suggested that Europeans who remained too long in the tropics would themselves decay and degenerate into hybridity' (Duncan 1999:

159) (Sheller 111)". That is to say, the same pseudo-scientific conventions that historically proclaimed the inherent or "natural" moral degeneracy and intellectual inferiority of black Africans, Amerindians and most other groups imported to the Caribbean, also underpins contemporary notions about sexuality and sexual orientation. Beatrice's incestuous relationship with her brother, Danny, emerges as Melville's way to analyze and critique many of the western power structures that have undermined native people's communal and environmental structures. Alice Walker's concept of womanism is the chapter's primary investigative tool; however, it also draws on Audre Lorde's notion of erotic power from her seminal essay, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" (1978), and Lúcia Sá's *Rain Forest Literatures* with its exhaustive catalogue of Amazonian myth and of their place in the literary imagination. In this particular case, Melville's text, with its unabashed look at sex, incest and land politics, suggests the possibilities (and possible drawbacks) in looking at erotic power as an integral component of environmental agency, sustainability, and social justice.

All of these texts—works by Olive Senior, Jamaica Kincaid, Lorna Goodison, Maya Montero, Dionne Brand, and Pauline Melville—are representative of an ecowomanist sensibility in contemporary Caribbean literature and are also representative of the different socio-cultural, racial, linguistic, and sexual pluralities found in the greater Caribbean. Additionally, the works of these women mark a particular moment in time. All are writing during a period which arguably has seen the most drastic alterations in the environment since the colonial period. I argue that in writing about themselves in relation to landscape, these women not only take on the task of articulating an identity in relation to the history of colonialism, but also take on the additional task of articulating an

identity in relation to the present environmental condition of a global economy. In other words, these women voice what it means to be a citizen of a liberated New World. I propose that their writing motions toward environmental activism as critically connected to issues of social justice and political activism.

CHAPTER ONE

Ecowomanist Gardens in the New World

[T]he act of creating a garden, however limited it may be, is not only an assertion of control over our physical surroundings but a symbolic refusal of the terms under which life has been presented to us and an insistence on determining the terms of our existence. As such it is always an act of hope.

--Mara Miller, *The Garden as Art* (1993)

One of the points that Mara Miller makes in *The Garden as Art* is that while the natural elements of a garden may exist and have ecological purpose without the presence of humans, the proliferation of human civilization has become the prism through which both historical and contemporary ideas about the garden *and* the human self have been refracted (25). In *Second Arrivals* (2007), Sarah Phillips Casteel similarly argues that “[g]ardens—real and imagined—have traditionally functioned as sites of self-reflection and as spaces in which to express social, economic, and power relationships as well as value and belief systems” (115). Even when, as Casteel explains, critics proclaim analyses of garden imagery obsolete, “the very history of associations that makes the garden appear so outdated and suspect might also be seen to be an advantage. The garden as a place of cultivation has etymological ties to both ‘culture’ and ‘colonization,’ and thus invites reflection on two concepts that are of particular concern to theorists of diaspora and postcoloniality” (*Second Arrivals* 111). This is particularly true of English colonial history. In *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World* (1995), Patricia Seed writes, “Spanish explorers and colonists were lured to the New World by tales, tall and true, of gold; the Portuguese were enticed by tales of spices and dyewoods; but the English, far more than any other group of colonists, were tantalized by

the garden” (26-27). In Caribbean literature, gardens continue to act as sites self-reflection and as spaces to express, or alter, relationships. This chapter explores how gardens and the act of gardening might refract an ecowomanist impulse discernible through a close reading of selected writings from contemporary women of the English-speaking Caribbean and the Americas. It contends, as Casteel also does that “[w]hile differences among the literatures and arts of the Caribbean and North America must not be underestimated...they share a common colonial inheritance of the centrality of nature to definitions of New World identities...” (9) Moreover, the chapter hypothesizes that this kind of cross-cultural and cross-colonial examination can further illuminate the role both physical and symbolic gardens have played in the negotiation of these women’s sexual, socio-political, creative identities and their environmental attitudes.

Caribbean gardens, both real and imagined, are important sites of exploration in part because, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey writes, there is “no other region in the world that has been more radically altered in terms of flora and fauna than the Caribbean islands” (“Island Ecologies” 298). Moreover, although humanity has labored with the creation of both symbolic and physical gardens for centuries, much contemporary knowledge and understanding about both gendered identities and the environment comes from the alterations set into motion by the process of settlement and colonialism that DeLoughrey alludes to. Additionally, even though the kind of grassroots environmental activism that has taken hold in the American South⁷ has increased in visibility, creative works may

⁷ After a scandal in the 1980s in which poor, black, and Hispanic communities in Warren County, North Carolina began protesting the dumping of toxic chemicals in their neighborhoods, Robert D. Bullard published *Dumping in Dixie* (1990), chronicling the Warren County incidents along with incidents of environmental racism throughout the American South. In his text, Warren also outlines environmental justice activism as the appropriate course. Often referred to as “the father of environmental justice,” the

represent key evidence of burgeoning Caribbean movements for environmental sustainability and justice. Casteel observes that, “Both literary and visual images of the garden and the design of actual gardens have served to convey ideological commitments and political ambitions” (111). It is in this context that the chapter analyzes selections from Alice Walker’s *Revolutionary Petunias*, Lorna Goodison’s *To Us, All Flowers are Roses*, Olive Senior’s *Gardening in the Tropics*, and Jamaica Kincaid’s *My Garden (Book)* and *My Brother* for clues about ecowomanist commitments and ambitions.

Alice Walker is the particular inspiration for this cross-cultural study, and the intention of this chapter is to move in a focused way from a study of Walker’s *Revolutionary Petunias* to select works by Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior, and Jamaica Kincaid, all of whom have made extensive use of this trope in ways similar to Walker but that are also specific to the Caribbean landscape and experience. The chapter is developed through three major sections. The first section uses Alice Walker’s writing selectively to establish a prototype for ecowomanist literature in general and as an example of the use of gardens and gardening as a metaphor for socio-political and creative agency in particular. Not wishing to elide Caribbean specificity in any way, the chapter outlines the historical use of gardens and garden imagery in the colonial era in the section that follows. This section historicizes the links between colonial anxiety and simultaneous attempts at colonial control as well as how the residual effects of anxiety and control may have emerged in contemporary Caribbean women’s writing in the trope

publication of *Dumping in Dixie*, marks the beginning of much scholarly and political attention to the issue. After its publication, Bullard went on to help organize the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 where the “Principles of Environmental Justice” were established; helped shape Executive Order 12898, which outlined federal procedures to address environmental racism; and is currently Director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University.

of the garden and gardening. The third and final section shifts focus from examining the vestiges of colonial metaphor to identifying a parallel, counter use of garden imagery in contemporary Caribbean women's writing that seems to follow Walker's prototypical link between creative expression, environmental ethics, and socio-political empowerment.

Flora-cultural Images and Meaning-Making in the Garden

Rebellious. Living.
 Against the Elemental Crush.
 A Song of Color
 Blooming
 For Deserving Eyes.
 Blooming Gloriously
 For its Self.

Revolutionary Petunia

--Alice Walker, "The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom"

When Alice Walker wrote *Revolutionary Petunias* (1973), she was also in the midst of developing the concept of womanism that she would present in her seminal work, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). Though Walker has written much since then, this period is a significant point of inquiry in this study because it establishes many of the ecowomanist characteristics and concerns that have continued to define her work and that of other contemporary women writers of the New World like Goodison, Senior, and Kincaid. My use of the phrase "New World" throughout this chapter exists not to dismiss the distinctions between an African American and Caribbean identity or experience. Rather, it is an attempt to acknowledge the connections that exist between sections of the planet considered part of the 15th century "discovery" of what was called a New World. It

is an acknowledgment of shared history, of shared disruptions and displacements. However, it is also an acknowledgment of what I see in the literature as a shared interest in changing the dynamic between human beings and the non-human elements of this changed world. One of the primary vehicles for exploring the creation and attempted re-creation of this dynamic is in looking at the trope of garden as a metaphor for the self. After reviewing Alice Walker's body of work, particular texts from her earlier writing emerge as apt studies. More specifically, both *Revolutionary Petunias* and *In Search of* explore what it means to redefine the female self through a vision of social justice and political empowerment that is dually rooted in natural images and artistic practice. However, understanding why images of gardens and gardening became one of the prevailing metaphors of this kind of writing is perhaps best achieved by an analysis of two particular poems from *Revolutionary Petunias*.

The title "The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom" (*Revolutionary Petunias* 70) is an interesting place to begin because of what the specific choice of words—"nature," "flower," and "bloom"—reveals about Walker's garden project. Yet, even before considering the nuances of Walker's symbolism, these words elicit many traditional, or familiar, connotations. Miller writes:

The basis for the metaphorical significance of gardens lies in the perceived similarities between human beings and plants. These similarities are both biological and cultural, in the literal sense of providing care for, hence training and disciplining-in specifically human terms, education and government. Plants are not born the way we are, but there the dissimilarity ends. They grow and change and age and die much as we do. Even more strikingly, in doing these things, they exhibit the same dependency on their environment for sustenance and support as we have. They flourish or wither, suffer injury, survive, for similar if not identical reasons. The vocabulary of their existence serves equally well to describe our own;

laying down roots, fertilizing, blossoming, budding, coming to fruition... (26)

However, though Miller's overview of floral metaphor is gender neutral, the language of gardens can also reveal a prevalent understanding of the female condition. In her assessment of the role of gardens in self-definition, Casteel observes that, "... [T]he garden's associations with regeneration and femininity draw attention to the spatial organization of foundationalist narratives and the gendering of space" (111). A quick review of the three key words in the title "The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom" as they appear in the *OED* further demonstrates their gendered weight. At some point in their etymological history, these words were commonly used to refer to female beauty (though not black female beauty, which the chapter addresses later on), virginity or "freshness," menstrual discharge, and sexual desire ("flower" defs. 2, 3, 7; "bloom" def. 2; "nature" defs. 2, 3). Other sources also recognize the gendered weight of floral or garden imagery. In *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974), Yi-fu Tuan writes that, "at the deepest level, it [the garden] may stand for the vulva of the earth, expressing humanity's yearning for ease and the assurance of fertility" (143), and scholars like Jennifer Bennett affirm this connection by detailing the historical association of "woman as mother is the earth" (17) and woman's role as the earliest gardeners (*Lilies of the Hearth* 1991).

Yet while Miller, Tuan, and, to a lesser degree, Bennett, explore the historical and gendered associations of garden imagery, in both the title and the poem itself, Walker invokes this flora-cultural history of the blossom and natural processes of gardens and gardening in order to destabilize traditional notions about women, but more specifically,

to destabilize traditionally negative notions about women of color. In “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” (1966), Barbara Welter famously outlines the restrictive roles and duties for women of the nineteenth century. To gain the sort of respectability and social status that went with being a proper woman, women of the nineteenth century had to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic (152). Even here, Welter discusses womanhood and femininity in the context of flowers. When explaining the importance of purity in the identity of a true woman, Welter writes that “[p]urity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and unfeminine...Even the language of flowers had bitter words for it: a dried white rose symbolized ‘Death preferable to loss of Innocence’” (154-155). In her contemporary analysis of floral symbolism *The Language of Flowers: a History* (1995), Beverly Seaton offers a correlative example of how this idea of true, or good, womanhood, translated into floral symbolism. She writes:

While flowers and flower gardening were associated with the enlightenment of the lower classes in Europe, in America flowers often symbolized the very civilization of wilderness. It was commonplace in nineteenth-century popular literature that if a character rode through rude frontier regions and arrived at a cabin with a rose bush by the door, he knew before he got off his horse that a good woman lived there. (6)

On the other hand, women of color were seen as the antithesis to the sort of femininity and respectability established by the historical image of flowers, most notably roses, and blossoms. In “Marriage, Family, and Other ‘Peculiar Institutions’” (2009), Ann DuCille points out the continued historical inaccuracy in the portrayal of black women’s domestic lives. She claims that this “has the overall effect not only of pathologizing the black family for its matriarchal structure but also of seeming to blame slave women for the disorganization and immorality of the plantation community” (610). In short, the long

period of slavery, which afforded black women no (or very little) access to piety, purity, domesticity, or submission, denied black women the opportunity to become “true” women. For example, the notion of matriarchy DuCille writes about—one which supposedly unfairly deprived males of their God-given positions of authority—made black women transgressors of the Cult’s rule of submissiveness.⁸ In an earlier essay entitled “The Black American Woman’s Literary Tradition and the Cult of ‘True Womanhood’” (1990), Justine Tally similarly points to these false assumptions about black matriarchy (47). In her work, Tally uses a series of rhetorical questions to emphasize the divide that the Cult of True Womanhood created. She asks:

How to be pious when white professors of Christianity denied them their human dignity? How to be pure when slaveowners repeatedly violated their integrity? How to internalize submissiveness, except as a coping mechanism before whites when there was no assurance that one’s mate would even be there the following day and when the weight of survival of the whole race was planted squarely on their shoulders? How to be domestic when required to labor in the fields or tend whites’ house and children to the detriment of their own? (48)

In “The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom” Walker’s attempts to claim an inherent place for black women within this discourse of femininity. Her use of language calls up and moves between these dueling images of womanhood (one black and the other white) to highlight the ways in which both dichotomous categories were, and still are, negatively shaped by juxtaposition with or exclusion from the language of flowers and gardens.

⁸ Referring to Angela Davis’s *The Black Scholar*, DuCille points out the illegitimacy of this claim as it inherently assumes power, yet even in the 20th century documents like the Moynihan report (1965) suggest the pervasiveness of this belief.

The title of the poem reads, “The Nature of This Flower is to Bloom.” Walker’s choice of words in the title of the poem illustrates Walker’s attempt to reclaim physical and metaphorical concepts of “the natural” in some positive way for women of color. For instance, in a botanical sense, “Nature” in the title at first may seem to point to the fact that “to bloom” is a process that inevitably will and should occur in flora. As a living organism the flower is inclined to bloom, or to produce a blossom, and one possible implication is that the imposition of socio-political philosophy or symbolism of any type does this process an injustice. After all, what does the flower care about representation? It is interesting to note, however, that if Walker has composed the poem’s title to encompass a purely botanical component (*In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* establishes her familiarity with this aspect of the process),⁹ botanically speaking a blossom is a “flower on a plant with edible fruit” (*Oxford Essential Dictionary*). Through this inescapable equivocation, readers can reevaluate the importance and use of this kind of symbolic representation as something that is not altogether negative. “To Bloom” exists in the title not just as evidence of a history of restrictive gender and racial codes, it exists to place the imperative of human experience—to be born, to live, and to die—into conversation with the flower’s imperative to bloom. It is, as Miller argues, a way of establishing control of environments and selves (25). So, on the level of symbolism, it is not difficult to see that Walker uses this specific vocabulary as a starting

⁹ In the midst of articulating her theory about cultivating creative gardens, Walker reveals information about her young years on farms, watching both of her parents perform the work of sharecroppers, tilling fields, gathering cotton before rain, etc. She also reveals quite a bit of what she learned about cultivating flowers—the best months for blooms, dividing clumps of bulbs, uprooting and replanting, etc. (pp. 240-241)

point in an examination of the interplay between nature and culture--culture in this case, specifically refers to the human overlay of meaning onto the botanical. Moreover, the implication of consumption through the image of edible fruit, prompts associations with the specific role of sexuality. Historically, the notion of “blooming” into edible fruit in English literature connected all women to their sexuality in a commodified way. A literary example of the early proliferation of this idea in Western discourse is seen in Samuel Johnson’s *The History of Rasselas* (originally published in 1759). In the 29th chapter of the novella that concludes the debate on marriage, Rasselas adds:

A youth and a maiden meeting by chance, or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, go home, and dream of one another ... From those early marriages proceeds likewise the rivalry of parents and children: the son is eager to enjoy the world before the father is willing to forsake it, and there is hardly room at once for two generations. The daughter begins to *bloom* before the mother can be content to fade ... (63 emphasis mine)

The *OED* cites Johnson’s text as one of the earlier uses of the word “bloom” as meaning “development.” However, a closer look at this early use also reveals the underlying sexual connotations of the word. For the two youngsters, the foray into marriage and into their impending adulthood revolves around the onset of sexual activity *and* sexual capital. This foregrounding is evident in Rasselas’s mention of the unspoken rivalry between parents and their (near) adult children. For the males, the unspoken conflict hinges on sexual pleasure and one’s access to it. The idea of the son “enjoying the world” evokes other euphemisms for sexual activity, such as “sowing one’s oats.” On the other hand, for the women, the conflict is about beauty and sexual desirability and it is euphemized in the image of and with reference to “the bloom.” For the daughter to bloom, or to mature to sexual readiness and desirability, means that the mother’s desirability must fade as the

bloom of a flower eventually fades. In both cases, the use of garden imagery (sowing and blooming) demonstrates the fact that both son and the daughter must take their parents' place as sexual commodities. This point about the onset of female sexuality as commodity is echoed in Jaclyn Gellar's essay, "The Unnarrated Life: Samuel Johnson, Female Friendship, and the Rise of the Novel Revisited (2001)" when she writes:

Like every dialogue in *Rasselas*, the marriage debate is unresolved. But it is taken up in the work of Johnson's contemporaries and successors...Burney's 1778 *Evelina*, for instance, demonstrates the point made in *Rasselas* that wedlock is a power-based social drama rather than a spontaneous effusion of love between two fated partners. The novel sympathetically depicts a woman of ambiguous social standing disadvantaged on a marriage market that values superficialities and encourages mutual deception... (91)

Though many contemporary Johnson scholars such as Gellar, Eithne Henson, Jessica Richard and others have focused on the empowering legacy of Johnson's works, the primary focus in this analysis is on symbolism. Regardless of his aims, or the effects of his work, Johnson's use of floral imagery to represent the marketplace of marriage and sexuality is foundational in what emerges in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

However, for women of color, this sort of commodification has manifested itself differently though. Although the notion of sex has always been an underlying subject for all mature or maturing women in Western cultures, in principle, many white women were ostensibly protected from any overt sexual debasement by social mores about marriage and respectability. In order for a man to satiate his sexual appetite, he first had to provide her with respectable social standing and financial security as his legal wife. Welter refers to this moment as the "single, great event of a woman's life, when she bestowed her greatest treasure upon her husband and from that time on was completely dependent on

him...” (155), and her reference to the loss of a woman’s virginity in material terms is telling of this conflation of sexuality and commodity. Many women of color, even after slavery, did not have the option of participating in the economy of marriage as their fruit (their sex), was already considered beyond the realm of the morally sanctioned (Carby 21, 27; Christian, *Black Fem Crit* 12-14; DuCille 610-611; hooks 77-85; Tally 47-48). Ultimately, if, as Miller asserts, “[e]very garden is an attempt at the reconciliation of the oppositions which constrain our existence...” (25), the symbolic layers of Walker’s title alone highlight the disproportionate burden that women of color have borne even within the most conventional of natural symbols.

While the title of the poem presents the vacillating biological and symbolic representation of nature and the symbolic consequence for women of color, the body of the poem makes clear Walker’s intent to unbalance these default associations. The sort of symbolic garden being cultivated here does double work. Not only does it highlight the often disparaged presence of black women, but it does this through a pointed contrast with representations of white women. In other words, if this sort of symbolism traditionally does women of color an injustice by denying them access to the sort of beauty and femininity inscribed in these symbols, it also does white women an injustice by confining them to these symbols (Christian, *Black Fem Crit* 11-13). There is an inherent passivity in an image of blooming and plucking that is for the sole material or sexual pleasure of some undesignated male that is undermined in lines three through where she writes, “Blooming/For Deserving Eyes./Blooming Gloriously/For its Self.” (lines 3-7). So though the focus is on a redefinition of the black female self, one of the characteristics of an ecowomanist garden, with the notion of interconnectedness as a part

of its ecological framework, is to abhor all forms of discriminations. In this brief poem, and these brief lines, Walker is able to articulate both a disapproval of negations of black femininity as well as the commodification of white female sexuality. These lines don't necessarily exclude men from this process, but it does insist on unions that are egalitarian. In blooming for *deserving* eyes the agency is returned to the women.

Ultimately, it is a "*Revolutionary Petunia*" because they have risen up against their own prescribed nature (line 8). In the case of an actual flower, it is its nature to respond to the elements—air, water, earth, etc.—by thriving without consideration of anything but that process. In the case of the flower as symbolic of the woman of color, to rise up against her nature means first to rebel against the sort of "nature" (of her personality, of her character, or of her capabilities) that has been wrongly attributed to her by the process of slavery and its aftermath. This reading is supported by a talk Walker gave in 1972 at Sarah Lawrence when she said:

But please remember, especially in these times of group-think and the right-on chorus, that no person is your friend (or kin) who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow and be perceived as fully *blossomed* as you were intended. Or who belittles in any fashion the gifts you labor so to bring into the world. That is why historians are generally enemies of women, certainly of blacks, and so are, all too often, the very people we must sit under in order to learn. (*In Search of* 36, emphasis mine)

As both Walker's Sarah Lawrence talk and the poem at hand suggest, "to grow and be perceived as fully blossomed as you intended" (36), means to reestablish a positive and empowering relationship with nature in general and with the specific process of gardening. In the poem, the "flower" does not give up on blooming all together even though it is "Against the Elemental Crush" (line 2). Instead, it continues to bloom. The

only thing that has changed is the ideological weight of the symbolism previously attached to such a process.

This shift in understanding comes from the renewed sense of power, beauty, and voice that the process of blooming entails. In the title essay of *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker discusses the historical impact of aesthetic sensibility among black women. She says, in short, that any sense of artistry was silenced save for a few things, such as gardening. She writes, "And so our mothers and grandmothers have more often than not anonymously, handed the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never *hoped* to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" (240, emphasis mine). The constant performance of this physical act was, and remains, a way to continually affirm the power of an aesthetic sensibility in nurturing the self by recognizing an entire lineage of women artists with strong ties to the land (Erickson 31-32). In "Gardens of Resistance" (2011), Jonathan Skinner notes, "Landscape artists who write, and who write well, with a poetics . . . , make a compelling case for the extension of writing by other means—as if their landscapes, gardens, and earth works were poems without books, written in the elements and in living matter, merely extended or refracted onto the page . . ." (261). It is also no coincidence that Walker links garden imagery to letter writing. The act of writing, and the simultaneously political and artistic power such an act refracts, was long withheld from people of color in general, and women of color in particular. In "Family-Based Identity in the Work of Alice Walker (1989)," Peter Erickson also connects the idea of lineage to writing. He writes that "one of the central motifs of *Revolutionary Petunias* is the successful search for the mother who presides over the poems by virtue of the master image of the flower" (16). But the hope of one day

being able to define one's place and potential in the world is maintained in the physical and literary cultivation of gardens. They are the physical and aesthetic arms of the same effort: as Walker says, to be able to "fully blossom as you were intended" (36).

But whereas "The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom" deals mostly with the symbolic consequences of natural representations and only hints at their material consequence, "Revolutionary Petunias" is emphatically focused on the physical manifestations of the historical and contemporary symbols of gardens and gardening. Walker creates a clear sense of this material consequence by deploying the petunia elsewhere in her work. In fact, the title of this poem actually harkens back to the last line of "The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom," which is, "*Revolutionary Petunias.*" On another use of the image, Erickson writes:

In the one-page story "Petunias" from *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, [Walker] individualizes an unnamed woman with a history and a sense of herself. The woman writes in her diary just before her death in an explosion of a bomb her son intends for the revolution: 'My daddy's grandmamma was a slave on the Tearslee Plantation. They dug up her grave when I started agitating in the Movement. One morning I found her dust dumped over my verbena bed, a splintery leg bone had fell among my petunias'...These characters become redeemed as individuals with an indelible sense of self. But that act of rising out of the depths of degradation or depression is accomplished by means of a person coming to terms with the truth of his or her community, with his or her social and historical place among others who have suffered, grieved, laughed, and lusted, but who miraculously have held on to dignity and selfhood. (32)

Walker's use of the petunia in her short story not only continues to fashion a legacy of women artists and activists, it does so by making gardening and flowers an integral part of the familial, artistic, and activist legacy. She continues this shift from flower as general emblem of woman artist and activist to a juxtaposition of flower specifically with woman

of color, artist and activist. And in the case of “Revolutionary Petunias,” that woman is Sammy Lou. The poem reads:

Sammy Lou of Rue
 sent to his reward
 the exact creature who
 murdered her husband,
 using a cultivator’s hoe
 with verve and skill;
 and laughed fit to kill
 in disbelief
 at the angry, militant
 pictures of herself
 the Sonneteers quickly drew:
 not any of them people that
 she knew.
 A backwoods woman
 her house papered with
 funeral home calendars and
 faces appropriate for a Mississippi
 Sunday School. She raised a George,
 a Martha, a Jackie and a Kennedy. Also
 a John Wesley Junior.
 “Always respect the word of God,”
 she said on her way to she didn’t
 know where, except it would be by
 electric chair, and she continued
 “Don’t yall forgit to *water*
 my purple petunias.”

If Walker’s poems and statements emphasize the importance of symbol and metaphor in the creation of ideology and socio-cultural meaning, she achieves this by continuing to stress their link to the natural environment. In “Gender and Justice: Alice Walker and the Sexual Politics of Civil Rights (2000),” Keith Byerman notices this tendency in her fictional characters as well. In his reading of *Meridian* he writes that “[those characters] who retain their status of being close to the land, with a southern mindset that resists abstraction, are the model...The folk she presents are capable of

change and political action; it is simply that change must be connected to concrete experience” (93). Sammy Lou isn’t an artist or an activist in the conventional sense. She is a “backwoods woman” (line 14) and her house is “papered with/funeral home calendars and/faces appropriate for a Mississippi /Sunday School” (lines 15-18). Sammy Lou is a conventional woman. In fact, Walker makes it clear that Sammy Lou is no agitator. She is a woman who, by and large, is not actively concerned about changing her ideological or symbolic place in the world. This is specifically evidenced by her children, whose names are George, Martha, Jackie, Kennedy, and John Wesley Junior. Rather than chart an oppositional, or even activist, path for her children, Sammy Lou tries to connect her children to a lineage of white political power and authority. Yet, in “Black Woman as Wayward Artist (1989),” Barbara Christian implies that the kind of commonness evident in Walker’s character is nonetheless revolutionary. She writes that “...in selecting the petunia as the specific flower [of revolution], she emphasizes the qualities of color, exuberance and commonness rather than blandness, rigidity or delicacy” (56). In Skinner’s analysis of French activist gardener Gilles Clement, he carefully notes Clement’s commitment to the ordinary, to weeds like Petunias, calling them the “emissaries of life” (259) and later counting them as part of “Third Landscapes” that will constitute the spaces of the future (264-65). There is a parallel between Skinner’s assessment of Clement and this chapter’s assertion about Walker. For Skinner, these ‘Third Landscapes’ only exist as a reaction to the denigrations of colonialism. Likewise, Walker creates possibility out of the ordinary and the despised.

Tracing the characteristics of Walker’s ecowomanist gardens, and her ecowomanist literature, reveals that beyond their focus on nature, actual and symbolic,

sexuality, and social justice, these two poems also present a unified voice about the power and promise still left in a positive connection to the land, rather than the negative legacy of land cultivation produced in the period of chattel slavery and indentureship. When writing about the present-day condition of the environment and the connection between the present-day condition of women and people of color, Walker has this to say in an essay entitled, “Everything is a Human Being:”

Some of us have become used to thinking that woman is the nigger of the world, that a person of color is the nigger of the world, that a poor person is the nigger of the world. But, in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world. It is perceived, ironically, as other, alien, evil, and threatening by those who are finding they cannot draw a healthful breath without its cooperation. While the Earth is poisoned, everything it supports is poisoned. While the Earth is enslaved, none of us is free.
(*Living by the Word* 147)

This connection--the one between women, people of color, and the environment--is one that is solidified and sustained by the beauty and artistry of gardening and its eventual reflection in the women’s own changing self-image and their changing perspectives on their communities and the world. It is, as Skinner concludes about Clement, the type of artistic practice that “seem[s] to emerge from the very space between books and earth . . .” (262). Though the observation that the Earth has become the “nigger” of the world is strong in language, the sort of call to action and hope for the future that it implies is apparent in Walker’s creative works. The tone of “The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom,” for example, is not solely, or even mostly, reflective of the injustices and confinements of past representations. The focus of Walker’s work,¹⁰ and, in fact, of many

¹⁰ Walker’s most recent works, *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth* (2003) and *There is a Flower at the Tip of my Nose Smelling Me* (2006) are good examples of her continued use of the floral metaphor.

ecowomanist texts, is to look to the power and possibility of refashioning the self through existing sets of codes and symbols. Despite the kind of work that the historical symbolism of the bloom has done, Walker's refashioned self is no longer in a passive, consumable position. It has not "bloomed," but is "blooming." In other words, rather than have it reach any finite state of existence, a state of decay, whether through the natural process of age or by plucking, from which there is no return, Walker's flower, though it may face death as Sammy Lou does, is perpetually in bloom as part of the natural cycle of life. Sammy Lou's last admonition before being put to death for avenging her husband's murder is to keep her petunias watered (lines 25-26). Here Walker connects Sammy Lou's fight for social justice to the continued care for the environment. This deliberate focus on the continual return to life, this evasion of finite decay and the constant supply of sustenance invites the reader to assume the proliferation and flourishing of this beautiful revolution.

Risk and Anxiety in the Garden

When renowned, contemporary gardener Sydney Eddison wrote that "gardens are a form of autobiography" (*Horticulture*, 1993), she tapped into the extent to which gardens emerge as a primary product of the human need to make and record personal meaning. She also tapped into the extent to which gardens and gardening emerge as an intermediary system between human kind and larger, more primal forces, such as the environment and death. In other words, humans not only use gardens to come to some personal understanding of their lives, but, more specifically, they use gardens to come to some personal understanding of the things that disrupt their lives. In both physical and symbolic form, gardens inevitably come to represent collective anxieties about the world.

Also, the various manifestations of gardens are living records of human attempts to remake the world in a more comforting image.

At the beginning of previous section, Elizabeth DeLoughrey was quoted as saying that the Caribbean was perhaps the place that underwent the most change in terms of plant and animal life during the colonial period (“Island Ecologies” 298). And, indeed, the Caribbean has been the landscape on which much struggle for both personal and collective order, control, and meaning has taken place. This is in part because in the early years of the colonial era, around 1493, the Caribbean represented both a biblical and cultural idea of paradise for potential European settlers (Tuan 120; Casteel 8; Coates 113, *Postcolonial Ecologies*). Tuan notes that long before any colonialist foray into the New World, both Eastern and Western societies had preoccupations with islands and had used them to “symbolize[] a state of prelapsarian innocence and bliss, quarantined by the seas from the ills of the continent” (118). During the Middle Ages, as Christianity rallied Western peoples together in religious allegiance, the idea of an island paradise took on a decidedly Edenic form, and many believed in its real location in the Atlantic ocean (Tuan 120). Additionally, in *Green Imperialism* (1995), Richard Grove traces the notion of tropical islands as a possible site of the Garden of Eden or a *type* of Eden back to *The Man in the Moone* (1638) (72). Grove also notes, “During the fifteenth century the task of locating Eden and re-evaluating nature had already begun to be served by the appropriation of the newly discovered and colonized tropical islands as paradises. This role was reinforced by the establishment of the earliest colonial botanical gardens...” (5). Moreover, many scholars, such as, Richard Grove, Helen Tiffin, and others who study the connection between the cultural environment and the physical environment of the

Caribbean generally agree on the cultural significance of coding the Caribbean as Edenic and then attempting to capture and catalog it in botanical gardens. In her article “Man Fitting the Landscape (2005),” Helen Tiffin summarizes the discussion:

For the West, the botanical garden stands at the crossroads of the beginnings of modern science (in its collection of data and experiments in cultivation) and the older Christian view of botanical gardens as recreations of an earthly paradise...In the case of the Caribbean, however, this “Paradise” existed from the seventeenth century onward in the context of plantation slavery, and while the Caribbean might seem to offer, for some, an abundant tropical paradise, it was one whose history had necessarily rendered it, as a potential New World Garden of Eden, parodic, ironic, and tragic. (202)

Yet while this summarizes the ideological outcome of early notions about gardens in the Caribbean, these assessments of the garden’s role, and especially the role of the botanical garden in the Caribbean, do not adequately account for the need for control or the sense of anxiety that informed many of these movements in the English colonial process.

Taking this step back from the relatively contemporary scope of the previous section is important in contextualizing any gaps between Walker's African American understanding and use of garden imagery and the ways in which garden imagery comes to be used by Caribbean women writers. Additionally, thinking again about the image of the garden and the Caribbean in terms of a historical lens is useful in this regard because an attempt to uncover the original function and purpose of the garden in the Caribbean yields a couple of important ideas: (1) all of the traffic and experimentation in transplanted, categorized, labeled, displayed, and ultimately diffused peoples, plants, animals, etc, were the direct outgrowth of an objective design--of set boundaries and cultivation, (2) this design, the one established by the colonizers themselves, was a way

to deal with the unfamiliarity of the islands and the notion of environmental risk (Grove 13-14). This last bit is especially important because at the same time that the Caribbean was imbued with mythic abundance, Europeans also felt threatened by their tenuous hold on all of this fecundity. This environmental risk not only encompassed the use and abuse of the natural environment, but also the use and abuse of the people who were forcibly lashed to the land.

By attempting to reclaim the Edenic garden through the colonization of the Caribbean and other parts of the New World, explorers and subsequent settlers also took on the risk and anxiety that is inherent in the original mythic garden site (Tuan 109-110). Sheller sees this anxiety as part of “introspection about the limits of human desires and pleasures” that go along with travel to the Caribbean (14). While this assessment about the Caribbean being coded as a place where one might shed inhibitions certainly rings true, especially given the context of Sheller’s focus on tourist culture, the early risks colonial explorers and settlers experienced was also deeply steeped in religious ideology, as Tuan alternately suggests. The risks and anxieties that came out of the search for these island paradises and Edenic gardens included: the risk of sin, expulsion from God’s paradise, denial of His grace, and, ultimately, death. And it is this last risk that is the foundation of much subsequent garden anxiety that comes through in the aesthetic representations of gardens at the time. On death in the garden, Miller writes:

The connection of death with the garden is ordinary, inevitable, unremitting, and quite complex. It begins with the fact that plants die, that gardens continuously provide us with incontrovertible evidence of death and its generality, while consoling us with evidence that the gardener’s art can also keep the plants alive ... But beyond all of this is the fact that the

garden is also our symbolic bulwark against chaos, against the randomness death introduces into our world ... (51)

The botanical garden was a way to safely strike back at the very prospect of this omnipotent control and censure which colonialists might have felt otherwise unable to evade (Braziel 186; Sheller 42). However, this sort of thinking also set the colonizers in direct opposition with all things “natural.” Although Nature was the intermediary force by which they might re-approach God’s paradise and evade death through their own “gardening arts,” it was also the force that was biblically used by God to punish man for his sins. Flood, famine, and drought not only signaled spiritual danger, but they also brought about simultaneous physical peril as well.

Moreover, as Strachan outlines, the groups that were put to work managing the environment or harvesting its bounty--Amerindians and Africans initially--were also a point of risk and anxiety for colonialists. Strachan writes, “...[N]ature ordered and working for Europeans was paradisiacal, safe, and Edenic; but nature under its own will was a wasteland, a place for Cyclopes and other monsters; and it was a place in need of domination” (21). These groups were seen as closer to Nature than Europeans, and, at times, they were seen as an extension of Nature. Through popular pseudo-scientific fields such as phrenology, Africans, for example, were perceived as more closely related to apes than to Europeans.¹¹ So, in this way, through this sort of animalization,

¹¹ In 1857, Nott and Gliddon published *Indigenous Races of the Earth*, in which they use phrenology as a basis for establishing biological and evolutionary differences between races wherein they position African man as a sort of missing link between apes and Greek man, which they posit is the pinnacle of human evolution.

Additionally, in 2008 Goff, Eberhardt, et. al published a paper in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, entitled “Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences,” which suggests that many Americans retain this link between people of African descent

colonizers were able to justify a forcible link between various peoples of color and land (Strachan 18). If Africans and Amerindians were closer to animals than humans or more in tune with the capricious nature of the environment, forcing them to work the land was no more a moral impediment than yoking an ox. This link harkens back once again to biblical ideals and the colonial attempt to recreate the Edenic garden. In this originary garden, Adam and Eve are given dominion over everything: the flowers, the trees, and the animals (*King James Bible*, Genesis. 1.26-29). The recreation of this dominion, however, also meant the further extension of anxiety over this New World garden site. It meant that the colonial anxiety over how to manage Nature was also extended to their management of these groups, and specifically, the notion of “environmental risk” that at any time both the environment and the people could “go wild.” Richard Grove concludes:

The landscape of island and garden were metaphors of mind. Anxieties about environmental change, climatic change and extinctions and even the fear of famine, all of which helped to motivate early environmentalism, mirrored anxiety about social reform (especially where the fragile identity of the European colonist was called into question) and motivated social reform. At the core of environmental concern lay anxiety about society and its discontents. (14)

In effect, the search for this originary garden, as Miller calls it, puts European settlers in opposition to the land, the people, and themselves by establishing a garden that was built upon subjugation and abuse of both the land and the people. Casteel suggests, for example, that “[p]astoral representations of New World landscapes not only inscribed colonial control but also facilitated settler cultures’ creation of a sense of place” (11). Historically, this place was one where forests were cleared to create sugar mills and

and apes and that those perceptions have also continued to shape perceptions of black aggression and criminality.

surrounding plantations, hundreds of thousands of Amerindians died of disease (Rogozinski 17, 28-33; Sheller 39) and millions of Africans died or suffered severe mental and physical injury (Rogozinski 126-127, 130-133; Sheller 167-168), by working in what Antonio Benitez-Rojo dubbed the “plantation machine” in *The Repeating Island* (5-9). In order to maintain a sense of control in the midst of all of this risk and anxiety, colonialists had to commit to the task, God’s original task, of (re)making the New World in their own image. This meant that they would have to take on a similarly paternal persona within the Caribbean. This also meant, however, that Nature (including its human components) had to become lesser members of the colonial family. In her analysis of the Victorian garden in the Caribbean, Kathleen Renk argues “... that this interpellation is also made in terms of the relationship between the slave and colonial plantation family. Slaves and their descendents are both embraced by and distanced from the colonial social family...” (*Caribbean Shadows* 63-64). And, in fact, those being “managed” by the colonials did eventually answer to the call of mother countries and master races, and they also began to suffer from similar anxieties regarding Nature, and specifically, regarding gardens.

Similar to the earlier analysis of Walker, much can be gleaned from a close reading of contemporary Caribbean women’s poetry and other works. Lorna Goodison’s poetry collection *To Us, All Flowers are Roses* is a good counterpart to Walker as it similarly employs the image of a particular flower as a metaphor for the self. Also similar to the trajectory of the Walker analysis is the initial focus on the negative connotations of Caribbean women’s floral symbolism. In the case of *To Us*, the focus will be on an examination of floral symbolism, specifically the rose, as vestige of colonial anxiety and

desire to control. In “In City Gardens Grow No Roses as We Know Them,” the speaker says:

Necessary medicinal herbs, flowers easy to grow
 no delicate blooms could survive here.
 In city gardens grow no *roses* as we know them.
 So the people took the name and bestowed it
 generic, on all flowers, call them *roses*.
 So here we speak a litany of the *roses* that grow
 in the paint-pan chamber-pot gardens of Kingston.
 (lines 84-90, emphasis mine)

According to Ernst and Johanna Lehner, roses are one of the “oldest flowers in cultivation” (77), and “[e]very mythological belief assigned the rose as the symbolic emblem of beauty, youth and love” (78). It is not surprising, then, that the rose would become the national flower of England following the “War of the Roses” when England was becoming one of the preeminent colonial powers in the world. The English Rose came to represent everything English, which “present England (and all things English) to the colonized culture as axiomatic, normative or ideal” (Tiffin, “Flowers of Evil” 59-60). For Caribbean women this normative ideal of beauty has devalued the sort of beauty and femininity present in women of color.¹² So, if the “colored” colonials were to be incorporated into the British national family, this also meant that they had to take on, or better yet, take in, the iconic value of the rose as a symbol of beauty, love, and refinement. Like Walker, Goodison means the floral images

¹² While this dissertation maintains that contemporary Caribbean women writers use, and react to, colonial garden imagery in specific ways, other Caribbean writers have also used garden, or natural imagery, to explore the notion of colonial anxiety. For example, in Derek Walcott’s *Another Life*, the speaker says, “from childhood he’d considered palms/ignobler than imagined elms,/the breadfruit’s splayed leaf coarser than the oak’s,/he had prayed/nightly for his flesh to change, (Chapter 1, ii, lines 3-8).

to stand in for real women, and the specific reference to “delicate blooms” (line 85) is particularly reminiscent of Barbara Christian’s idea that Walker uses a particular flower to undermine the characteristic of delicacy in women (55-56).

While on the one hand, “In City Gardens” seems to deal with the rose’s symbolic history by denying the importance of its delicate beauty, the repetition of the word “rose” hints at the remnant of colonial anxiety. The poem’s specific treatment of the rose is especially interesting since in a poem of more than 20 stanzas, the word “rose” is only mentioned in one. Its confined use is important though since, as the title might suggest, the symbolic image of the rose is the crux of meaning for the poem. The poem, overall, is a celebration of gardens and flowers that contrast with the “quintessentially English” iconology of flowers such as the rose and the daffodil (Tiffin, “Flowers of Evil” 60). On the use of cultivated spaces and flowers, Helen Tiffin writes:

Writers from Caribbean island communities refer very little, if at all, to remnant ‘wilder’ landscapes. Instead, the inescapable encounter between English and Caribbean versions of the West Indian environment occurs more often within the liminal zone of the garden, in areas of plantation or cultivated land, and over flowers and floral symbology. Just as the plantation necessarily emphasized an agricultural landscape ... [t]he psychic ‘battleground’ of representation occurs over ‘cultivated’ nature and most significantly, almost always involves reentry through English or European perceptions to effect the reexamination and revaluation of the local. (201 “Man Fitting Landscape”)

For the most part, Goodison’s poem diminishes the exalted nature of the rose by refusing to name it throughout the poem. Bill Ashcroft argues that the “[p]ost-colonial writer can oppose the colonizer’s naming of the world by taking over the role of name-giver and this is a specific function of the agency of literature” (87). This choice to withhold individual names is especially interesting given that scholars like Yasmine Shamma have noted

Goodison's often repetitive use of archetypal symbols, like water, specifically to deal with issues of displacement (30). However, the speaker's inherited anxiety over Nature, over gardens, and over the ability to transcend the colonizer's gardening arts, or the ability to control or remake the world in a more soothing image, seems evident in the *controlled repetition* of the word and the image of the rose. This reading is further strengthened by the fact that each repetition of the word "rose" adds nothing significant to the meaning of the poem. It is clear from the first use, "in city gardens grow no roses *as we know them*," and the context of the poem up until this point, which has already detailed the kinds of plants that have taken on the most importance in the lives of the city gardeners referenced, that the symbolic historical importance of the rose is being directly called into question. Though the symbol of the rose as beauty, as refinement, as England is supposed to have had a negative impact on the psychic lives of the colonial subjects, those subjects have hidden their own flowers and their own set of values under the adaptation of a forced, axiomatic image in a process of syncretization. But, the second specific mention of the word "rose," in fact, seems like an aside on the part of a speaker who cannot help but to slip it in as the speaker says "...on all flowers, call them *roses*" (line 88). And by the third specific reference to the rose, the speaker's intent is abundantly clear. While the repetition of a key word such as this is commonplace as a poetic device, it is the particular word of choice here and the further emphasis on it through the title that seems to suggest colonial garden anxiety. The burst of reference seems more related to the fears first established by colonizers in their New World gardens. Tiffin reminds readers that "[r]epresentations of crops, flowers, trees, and gardens in contemporary Caribbean writing cannot escape the symbolic freight of their

own indigenous heritages and their contrasting associations acquired in the Caribbean...” (“Man Fitting Landscape” 202). And for colonials, or former colonials like Goodison, that contrast manifests as the sort of ambivalent use of floral imagery in the poem.

Similarly, in “To Us, All Flowers are Roses,” the title poem of the entire collection, Goodison again relegates her use of the word “rose” to one stanza of the poem. In it, the speaker says:

I love so the names of this place
 how they spring brilliant like “roses”
 (to us all flowers are roses), engage you
 in flirtation. What is their meaning? Pronunciation?
 A strong young breeze that just takes
 these names like blossoms and waltz
 them around, turn and wheel them on the tongue. (lines 8-14)

After the pointed references to the rose in the previous poem, Goodison’s return to the word seems to indicate a continued attempt to reconcile the past negative role of floral symbolism with a contemporary definition of a Caribbean identity. The notion that this garden has been a source of anxiety for both colonizers and colonial subjects is also introduced in Jamaica Kincaid’s *My Garden (Book)*. In the chapter entitled, “In History,” she writes: “... [W]hat should history mean to someone like me? Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound with each breath I take in and expel healing and opening the wound again and again, over and over, and is this healing and opening a moment that began in 1492 and has yet to come to an end? ... Why should I be obsessed with all these questions?” (153) In the introduction I discuss this in terms of re-lived trauma; however, the history she writes about is the history of colonialism, and one of the ways that she deals with the obsessive question is to create (unknowingly) her home garden in the

shape of the Caribbean (*My Garden (Book)* 8). It is for Kincaid, as it is for Goodison, “an exercise in memory” (*My Garden (Book)* 8) and perhaps, as Casteel writes, “a space of becoming rather than of being” (118). For Goodison, it is interesting to note that the level of anxiety about the socio-cultural weight that the image of the rose has, acquires the connotation of sexual metaphor that we also see in Walker. The roses actively “spring” up in order to engage in “flirtation” (lines 9-11). In “To Us,” the local Jamaican sites and landscapes are supposed to supplant the formerly exalted sites of the English motherland being coded as roses. This is the same technique of usurping symbolism that Goodison demonstrates in “To Us, All Flowers are Roses.” However, alongside this active stance, there is a passivity as well as those same flirtatious roses taken by a “strong young breeze that just takes/these names like blossoms and waltz/them around, turn and wheel them on the tongue” (lines 12-14).¹³

Another brief example of what might be seen as remnant of colonial garden anxiety is Olive Senior’s collection of poetry, *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994). The title of the collection comes from the third section of the work where every poem begins with the same four words: gardening in the tropics. Often paired together in critical analyses with both Goodison and Kincaid, Senior’s own brand of repetition also reflects a sort of vestigial colonial anxiety. Jordan Stouck writes:

In Senior’s poems, gardening “in the tropics” is both an assertion of identity connected to that space and a return of historical oppression. The

¹³ While Goodison’s work takes on many archetypal themes, such as water (Shamma 30) and rocks (*To Us* has at least four poems with rocks, stones, or mountains as the prevailing metaphor), Goodison’s preoccupation with the image of the rose is one that also helps to define her other work. *Controlling the Silver* (2005), for example, continues this trend with no less than six poems where roses figure prominently.

colonial word “tropics,” used in Senior’s title, acknowledges the problematic history of the region, while the non-finite verb “gardening points to the ongoing dynamic identity process. Relationships to the land in this context can only ever be fraught and contradictory since Caribbean spaces at once recall a colonial past and establish intrinsic Jamaican identity. (Stouck, “Towards” 27)

Though the poems in this third section of Senior’s collection range from political and economic commentary to family remembrances and spiritual ritual they are all, to some extent, shaped by the ambivalence, or contradiction, often sexual in its association, inherent in garden symbolism. “Brief Lives,” for example, reads:

Gardening in the Tropics, you never know
 what you’ll turn up. Quite often, bones.
 In some places they say when volcanoes
 erupt, they spew out dense and monumental
 as stones the skulls of desaparecidos
 – the disappeared ones. Mine is only
 a kitchen garden so I unearth just
 occasional skeletons. The latest
 was of a young man from the country who
 lost his way and crossed the invisible
 boundary into rival political territory.
 I buried him again so he can carry on
 growing. Our cemeteries are thriving too.
 The latest addition was the drug baron
 wiped out in territorial competition
 who had this stunning funeral
 complete with twenty-one-gun salute
 and attended by everyone, especially
 the young girls famed for the vivacity
 of their dress, their short skirts and
 even briefer lives.

Here, death and socio-political injustice, marked by the desaparecidos and occasional skeletons; sexual exploitation, marked by the famously short skirts and short lives of young girls; and regeneration, marked by the continued growth of the dead in a kitchen garden, are all part of the tropical garden. And all appear as evidence of a continued

struggle with these seemingly irreconcilable elements. Perhaps this anxiety and ambivalence that may exist is

[b]ut what happens when memories of colonial space intrude upon pastoralism, disturbing its pretensions to national self-definition and self-containment[.] The result is a kind of writing that [Rob Nixon] call[s] postcolonial pastoral, writing that refracts an idealized nature through memories of environmental and cultural degradation in the colonies. Postcolonial pastoral can be loosely viewed as a kind of environmental double consciousness. (“Beyond What” 239)

However, if we stay focused on the physical and symbolic links inherent within all ecowomanist gardens, then the need for control and the anxiety in the foundation of the Caribbean/New World garden is not all defeatist. It is not all, as Kincaid speculates, the constant reopening of a wound (“In History” 153). Though there are hints of inherited colonial anxiety as evidenced through these various repetitions, there are stronger traces of a re-envisioned self for women of color in Walker’s work and in the work of contemporary Caribbean women writers as well. More specifically, this revision consists not only of unearthing older, disparaging symbols of the garden, but also of cultivating codes and symbols, once merely syncretic, until the garden that exists is one that is self-directed and most often one that is guided by an aggregate commitment to cultural reclamation, aesthetic significance, and environmental justice, all themes the following section explores more thoroughly.

Beauty and Creation in the Garden

In the first section of this chapter, Mara Miller is quoted as suggesting that the creation of a garden is a deliberate attempt on the part of humans to understand and control their lives (25). In this same passage she additionally argues that the creation of a garden is a

deliberate act of hope. Control, understanding, and hope: these are the words that characterize, in part, the collective project undertaken by contemporary Caribbean women writers. Despite the fact that traces of colonial anxiety remain in the physical and metaphoric creations of the garden, by and large, there is a conscious effort on the part of women writers like Goodison, Senior, Kincaid, and even Walker in highlighting the power and promise still left in a symbolic communion with Nature in general and the garden in specific. A large part of this power, this promise, this hope, comes from the pointed attention, on the part of these women, to an inherent creative force and to the encouragement of aesthetic production. Their work demonstrates that it is through the cultivation of a keen aesthetic sensibility, or by sowing the seeds of beauty, that a person can effect change on the articulation of symbols, on meaning-making, and, perhaps, on the material circumstances of lived-in spaces. In other words, through the foregrounding of art and aesthetics, these ecowomanist writers are able to rearticulate colonial garden anxieties in ways that allow for a more positive vision of the self and the environment.

One of the primary colonial anxieties the previous section touches on is the colonial anxiety over management and how those anxieties were and are reflected in garden imagery. However, in order to further map out these symbols, and how the later layers reflect a shift in consciousness for Caribbean women writers, the space between Caribbean gardens as they have been fictionalized, and physical Caribbean gardens as they existed historically needs to be briefly explored. Seed suggests in *Ceremonies of Possession* that the act of boundary-making in the process of establishing possession and control was a uniquely English endeavor (18). She further writes that in addition to the kind of boundaries that houses created, mundane activities such as hedging fields and

planting gardens established legal rights for the English in the same way spoken declarations established legal ownership and control for the Spanish (19). In “The Landscapes and Ideational Roles of Caribbean Slave Gardens,” cultural archaeologist, Lydia Pulsipher, describes the types of gardens in the colonial Caribbean:

There were, in fact, three contexts for slave gardening: (1) common grounds, (2) ravine and mountain grounds and (3) houseyard gardens...The first type was plantation-managed; the second and third were established and managed by the slaves, sometimes surreptitiously, but eventually with the tacit consent of the plantation management. (203)

The first type of garden, the plantation/European-managed garden was rife with anxieties over control. In her historical study of the slave garden in the West Indies, Beth Fowkes Tobin provides a telling example of this sort of anxiety, the sort that prompted the often-brutal control of those being colonized through garden spaces. She writes that rather than let slaves cultivate gardens (specifically provision grounds in this case) outside of the control and government of plantations, many plantation owners were “willing to rely on imported food even if it meant their slaves might starve when ships from New England did not arrive because of bad weather or war” (165). Though this may not have been the norm, it is an interesting point of inquiry. When slaves had so little power and influence in the broader plantation economy, why would plantation owners take such extreme, if isolated, stands against slave gardens? Allowing slaves the capital to purchase their freedom is one reason plantation owners might take such a stance. However, paraphrasing Mircea Eliade, Yi-fu Tuan suggests another possible answer:

The garden is a type of sacred place. Generally speaking, sacred places are the locations of hierophany. A grove, a spring, a rock, or a mountain acquires sacred character wherever it is identified with some form of divine manifestation or with an event of overpowering significance. If

Mircea Eliade is right, an early and fundamental idea in the sacredness of place is that it represents the center, the axis, or the navel of the world. Every effort to define space is an attempt to create order out of disorder: it shares some of the significance of the primordial act of creation and hence the sacred character of that act. (145)

Since the physical garden is the site from which much of the order, meaning, and control of the colonial world was established, it follows that plantation owners would feel anxious and prohibitive about letting slaves take on any self-directed roles in this process. Additionally, Miller writes, “The special appeal of the garden (as a work of art and not merely a sort of place with an inherited traditional design) in the early modern period is derived from the fact that it allowed man to remake the world itself, and to remake nature” (111-12). Miller’s quote simply highlights one of the primary points explored later in this chapter: the creation and cultivation of gardens (whether in art, literature, or on some physical landscape) are a primal space in which humankind also creates and cultivates order and meaning. As Christian monks had been using gardens to symbolize, and centralize, their ideas for centuries (Tuan 145), Christian-influenced colonialists may very well have known, or at least internalized, the significance of who organizes and maintains garden spaces. As a result, colonialists displayed their anxiety over any surrender of this power through their stern management of all gardens on or around the plantation. Maintaining this power not only meant continuing to yoke slaves and subsequent workers to the land in harsh ways, harvesting cane for example, but it also meant depriving them of source of art and beauty, even though such things are often what give a life, collectively or individually, meaning. Tuan writes:

Topophilic sentiment among farmers differs widely in accordance with their socioeconomic status. The farm laborer works close to the soil; his relation with nature is a love-hate bond. Ronald Blythe reminds us that

even in the 1900s the hired hand in England had few rewards other than a tie-cottage and a meager living. He had no greater source of pride than his own physical strength and the ability to plow a straight furrow—his ephemeral signature on the earth. The small farmer who owned his land was better off: he could nurse a pious attitude toward the land that supported him and that was his sole security. The successful proprietor-farmer took possessive pride in his estate, in the transformation of nature to a fruitful world of his own design. (97)

Similar to the English poor, meaningful connections between slaves and the land they tilled formed along similar lines. Economic control translated into an egalitarian understanding of nature and an increase in the slaves' sense of personal value (Strachan 57).

After the common grounds, the latter two types of gardens were offshoots of the traditional plantation garden system wherein slaves, their descendants and their latter-day counterparts, found the beginnings of this new self--a self that had symbolic significance, creative capabilities, and a self that was able to forge sustainable ties with the land. First, surreptitious gardens emerged in the form of ravine or mountain gardens. In the same study wherein she outlines the types of Caribbean gardens, Pulsipher cites Hills, writing that, "...gardens were important strategies employed by slaves to construct a decent life themselves within a hostile system. These gardens remained important long after emancipation and, indeed, are still central in the subsistence economy of traditional West Indian people (Hills 1989)" (217). From this increased economic presence, slaves began recognizing the aesthetic and spiritual presence of garden cultivation. When describing the effects of the mountain/ravine garden, Pulsipher writes:

Cultivating on high remote slopes early in the morning calls up feelings of freedom and independence, of affinity with nature, of the solidarity of black people in the landscapes where whites rarely tread. The cultivators

feel close to ancestors who worked the same spots and their labors give them the sense of prosperity that abundant food symbolizes. (217)

And in Jamaica, for example, a beautiful human form is connected to this abundant food supply, which is tied to the colloquial description of a woman or a child looking “fat and nice.” This sentiment, the one in which there is a reclamation of control and a quieting of anxiety over a garden’s yield, is further echoed in Anne Collett’s essay, “Gardening in the Tropics: A Horticultural Guide,” where she writes that “... the garden allotments of the plantation slaves might also be termed tropical gardens of subversion and dissent, for it was here, away from the eye of the plantation owner that the seeds of the old customs and new rebellions were planted and brought to fruition” (88). Whether through the physical cultivation of nourishing foodstuffs or the symbolic cultivation of re-envisioned notions of beauty and socio-political agency, it all took place within the confines of a refashioned garden space, one that placed, as Tuan suggests, slaves at the center of the world and at the center of their own sacred space (145).

In addition to whatever inherited anxieties may be present, the literature also shows evidence of this historic need or desire to connect to garden spaces as economic, political, and aesthetic centers. Whereas the previous critical focus on Goodison’s “To Us, All Flowers Are Roses” was in excavating remnants of colonial anxiety evidenced in the use of the word “rose,” she also uses the poem to re-envision Jamaica and textually re-fashion the place of roses and gardens. Goodison begins with,

home to bushmasters, bushmasters being
maroons, maroons dwell in dense places
deep mountainous well sealed
strangers unwelcome. (lines 4-7)

The garden of the new roses is one where maroons, the Jamaican rebels who lived and fought from the mountains, reside beyond the control or consent of colonizers. In fact, in this poem she invokes many colonial anxieties, including a dense, untamed natural environment. This place foregrounds the articulation of the self, a self not only outside the colonial family, but one that rejects the will of the unequal colonial family that Kathleen Renk writes of in *Caribbean Shadows* (63-68). Instead of regarding plantation owners and other colonialists with paternal deference, she goes so far as to implicate them as strangers in re-claimed natural spaces.

Additionally, both Goodison's "To Us" and Kincaid's *My Brother* (1997) refashion colonial anxiety over death in the garden. Of this stark difference between the refashioned ecowomanist garden and the original New World garden, Miller writes, "The (natural) or informal garden admits death, even exploits it. The 'Edenic' or formal garden, on the other hand, tries to replicate the conditions of the garden of Eden, denying change, death, and the cycle of life" (52). Cultivators of the New World Edenic garden, i.e., colonial explorers and settlers, could never rid themselves of this anxiety over death because they didn't accept death as a natural part of life. Ponce de Leon's infamous quest for the fountain of youth is one of the more famous examples of this phenomenon (Tuan 145). They were thus doomed to continually repeat attempts to manage this fear through the control of other peoples and the environment. This compulsive management, however, not only resulted in the depletion of peoples, but also the depletion of the natural environment (Grove 24). In order for a New World garden, a colonialist garden, to be planted, dense places, lush bush and landscape, had to be eradicated. And death takes over. And so, Goodison's poem is replete with references to death. Lines 47 to 48

where she writes, “But there is blood, red blood in the fields/of our lives, blood the bright banner flowing” and line 57 where she writes “They hung Paul Bogle’s body at sea” serve as examples. Elsewhere in the collection we see evidence of this as well. In “Mother, the Great Stones Got to Move,” Goodison’s speaker says,

For the year going out came in fat at first
but toward the harvest it grew lean,
and many mouth corners gathered white
and another kind of poison, powdered white
was brought in to replace what was green.
And death sells it with one hand
and with the other death palms a gun
then death gets death’s picture
in the papers asking

“where does all this death come from?” (lines 20-29)

Death comes in and takes over only after “what was green” is replaced by white poison of drug trafficking. But though the ecowomanist garden may still carry traces of this anxiety over death, by and large, it approaches death as a natural part of a broader understanding of life. When looking at “To Us,” as a whole, it seems the references shift to both symbolically and physically represent the idea that only by embracing death, a cycle clearly evidenced in the garden, can one embrace the sprouting of new life. What Goodison recognizes is the existence of these opposites as natural correlatives. Tuan refers to this as a “cosmological schema [where] earth mediates between the forces of upper-and underworlds” (16). Goodison writes,

The Hope River in hot times goes under,
but pulses underground strong enough to rise
again and swell to new deep, when the May rains
fall for certain. There was a surfeit once
of Swine in Fat Hog quarter an somehow

Chateau Vert slipped on the Twi of our tongue
and fell to rise up again as “Shotover.” (lines 50-56)

This approach to death not only assures that the life cycle of humans remains constant and flourishing, but this approach also underscores the importance of the maintenance of this life cycle among non-human elements of the environment as well. Without interference, the certain rain will fall on the low river.

Similarly, in *My Brother* Kincaid uses her brother’s dying body, a body whose putrid smell so exudes death that only the closest family members and medical professionals could ignore it (150), as a point of embrace for the notion of death as a part of the cycle of life. While coping with his disease, Kincaid learns that her brother has become a gardener (11). However, it is in his dying days that his gardening begins to shift to toward the kind of alternate vision that is evidenced in *Goodison*. It is at that time that his body is overtaken by thrush and pus (138). Of this, Jana Evans Braziel writes that, “Kincaid portrays Devon’s body as a flowering, spawning hummus for other life forms. Two tropes reside within Kincaid’s material-botanical portrayal of her brother’s body as *fleur*: Devon’s body as a gardener and cultivator of plants” (144). Braziel further asserts that, “Kincaid offers an alternate model of ‘production’—precisely that of gardening or cultivation—that disrupts not only capitalistic, bourgeois, and heteropatriarchal models based on procreation or reproduction within the family but also those of history and botany as grounded in violence and appropriation” (140). This vision of life and death in the garden is antithetical to what Casteel—following postcolonial ecocritic Susie O’Brien’s line of thought—sees as Kincaid’s overt resistance to ecological consciousness, and to Casteel’s sense that “...Kincaid’s admittedly bourgeois gardening

practice—gardening for pleasure rather than sustenance—is difficult to reconcile with the ecological imperative to exploit nature only according to necessity” (130). It is a sort of natural pleasure Kincaid writes about here, but that that pleasure is in watching her brother commune with nature as his body gradually returns to the earth from which it came.

Additionally, while Olive Senior’s repetition of the phrase “gardening in the tropics” may indicate some anxiety or some evidence of Kincaid’s open wound (153), it also offers glimpses of a reclamative vision of gardening. Returning to “Brief Lives,” for example, it takes on in its entirety, the notion of death. Senior writes,

Gardening in the Tropics, you never know
 what you’ll turn up. Quite often, bones.
 In some places they say when volcanoes
 erupt, they spew out dense and monumental
 as stones the skulls of desaparecidos
 -the disappeared ones. Mine is only
 a kitchen garden so I unearth just
 occasional skeletons. The latest
 was of a young man from the country who
 lost his way and crossed the invisible
 boundary into rival political territory.
 I buried him again so he can carry on
 growing... (lines 1-18)

Though the garden may at times bear the kind of strange fruit Billie Holiday sings about, it is always an organic gravesite.¹⁴ It is a place where things die and where things are buried. However, the tone of Senior’s poem is not one of fear or anxiety. The speaker

¹⁴ Often regarded as the first real protest song, “Strange Fruit” was actually written as a poem in the early 1930s by Abel Meeropol, Meeropol penned the verses after looking at a photograph of a lynching and first printed it as “Bitter Fruit” in the *The New York Teacher* (January 1937). Not long after, Meeropol set the poem to music and asked Holiday to perform it. In 1939, Holiday first sang it in an integrated jazz club in New York City (*Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* 2000).

recounts the unearthing of bones in the most matter of fact way. And though the end of the young man's life was violent, it does not mar his death, nor does it mar the role of death in the garden. As part of the garden he will be able to rejoin the life cycle as he begins to grow again.

A poem even more exemplary of the casting off of colonial anxiety in the creation of a new garden can be seen in another one of Senior's poems from this section of "The Tree of Life." The poem revisits the Edenic garden and the original source of sin and anxiety: the tree of life. Biblically, both Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden and from a life of endless abundance and peace because Eve has eaten from the tree (*King James Bible*, Genesis. 3.6-24). When Wilson Harris writes about the occurrence of the tree of life in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), he identifies the inherent Christian mythology. However, he ultimately claims that Rhys's work is an attempt to reconcile the three prevailing "tree" mythologies of the Caribbean: Christian, pre-Columbian, and African ("Jean Rhys's 'Tree of Life'" 114-117). Senior's origin story follows this pattern as well. The poem clearly refers to pre-Columbian flood mythologies (lines 1-2) and the African fire mythology surrounding the tree (lines 4-5). However, it is the references to Christian tree mythology that diverge from the traditional story that I find especially interesting. Like the Christian story of Adam and Eve, in this divergent tale all life forms are separated from the abundant tree after eating their fill (line 25). In contrast to Christian mythology, however, the inhabitants have not transgressed in any way. In fact, before eating from the tree they "fell down/and praised Him" (lines 24-25). It is for no clear reason, and certainly not for sin that they are estranged from the paradisiacal tree. Instead, they are told to chop down the tree so that it might be used to fertilize the rest of

the earth (lines 35-43). Instead of the blight and suffering associated with the traditional Christian mythology, Senior's version seems to deemphasize the desires or comprehensions of individual creatures or regions in order to illustrate the importance of environmental equity.¹⁵ Jordan Stouck similarly writes in "Gardening in the Diaspora: Place and Identity in Olive Senior's Poetry (2005)" that "Senior delivers a clear warning on the ways globalization perpetuates colonial agricultural practices in the poem 'The Tree of Life'" (28). Rather than holding dominion over all plant and animal life, Senior's Edenic scene features all animals, humans, pigs, rats, and birds, mutually engaged in chase for the tree's varied bounty and equally willing to relinquish this control after getting their fair share. This idea not only opposes the colonial notion of control, but it also positions humans in a position of parity with other living beings on the planet—an idea common to Amerindian lore that Chapter Four will take up. From such a position, they would hardly be able to unilaterally deplete resources, as has been the case in the actual history of the Christian-influenced New World.

Senior makes other strong gestures toward the link between environmental sustainability and the search for social justice in the Caribbean. In "Seeing the Light," she writes:

...By the time they've cut
the last tree in the jungle only our bones
will remain as testament to this effort to bring

¹⁵ Interestingly enough, on Senior's home island of Jamaica, the *Lignum Vitae*, or tree of life, has historically mirrored the kind of equitable use Senior writes about in her poem. The tree has helped support the island's local economy by providing dense wood for "[p]ropeller shafts for steamships, bowling balls, axles, chisel handles and bearings," artisan crafts, criminal forensics and anti-inflammatory medications ("A Heavyweight"). It has also provided dye for clothing and soap for bathing (Buckride pars. 9, 23) *as well as* a place for morning religious devotions (Ganley).

light (though in their chronicles they might have
 recorded it by another name: Conquista?
 Evangelismo? Civilización?)

Before you came, it was dark in our garden,
 that's true. We cleared just enough for our huts
 and our pathways, opened a pinpoint in the canopy
 to let the sun through. We made the tiniest scratch
 on Mother Earth (begging her pardon). When we moved
 on, the jungle easily closed over that scar again... (lines 9-20)

This poem lays out in no uncertain terms the damage done by the establishment of the original colonial garden. As previously stated, the anxieties over the potential danger the environment might hold gave way to colonial and post-colonial practices that sought to maintain a sense of order and control by subjugating and stripping down both the environment and the people. Her later work, *Over the Roofs of the World* (2005) echoes these themes. Kim Dismont Robinson writes that,

[L]ike Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), the thematic roots of this third collection of poetry often draws from the rich soil of the Caribbean landscape and the environment. Nothing in the landscape Senior imagines reflects a static, Edenic paradise; rather, she weaves together visions of a natural world in constant relation with the world of humanity preoccupied with conquest, ancestry, folk culture, history, sex, music, and the afterlife. (51)

“Seeing the Light” is one of her earliest examples of trying to expose the ways that colonial subjugation and environmental degradation are inextricably linked.

Ultimately, Goodison, Senior, and Kincaid demonstrate the power and the potential inherent not only in garden and floral imagery but also in their position as writers. Part of the travesty Walker writes about in “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” is the potential muting of this creative spark, like a letter not plainly read (240).

Simultaneously, however, the hope in the spark, the hope of moving beyond being the world's mule, as Walker also says, may lie in the cultivation of gardens. The knowledge and understanding of how physical gardens operate, and the how they operate symbolically are seeds of knowledge and creativity that are passed on to future generations. For these women, Walker, Goodison, Senior, and Kincaid, the physical process of gardening and the symbolic associations that come out of that process are also bound up with writing, the creation of art, and living well. Hannah Chukwu and Susan Gangell see "cooking and eating, sewing, gardening, laundering and body care" (44), as part of a life continuum that "exist[s] alongside language teaching, singing, dancing, and literary aesthetics... (44). In "Missing the Mountains," the opening poem of *To Us, All Flowers are Roses*, Goodison writes, "For years I called the Blue Mountains home. / I spent my days faceting poems from rockstones" (lines 1-2). Here, though the speaker tells us that she has abandoned the mountain out of reverence for its natural cycles, hands that "flung [her] down to the plains/was powered by the wrath of hurricanes," she still recognizes the power of poetry in changing a life and in marking one's place in the world. The poem itself allows her "proof of [her] past existence..." (line 11). Ultimately, though, the speaker's relationship to the mountain and to the environment is one that she intends to be mutually beneficial. As she now has a "wildness, an intensity drawn from the mountains' energy" (lines 13-14), when she dies she plans to be buried there "in the high blue mountains," where she will "return to teach the wind how to make poetry from tossed about and restless leaves" (lines 16-17). In this mountain garden, the wind, the environment will be able to reap the benefits of her creative seed. In the introduction to *My Favorite Plant*, Kincaid writes:

This book, this anthology, this collection of essay that you (a reader) hold in your hands is meant to be like a garden, a garden that I might make, for everything in it, every flower, every tree, every whatever enclosed here, everything mentioned has made claim on my memory and passion at some moment in my life as a gardener. (xvii)

For Kincaid, her garden is a collection of words about physical gardens that is as much about the cultivation of self and creativity as in Senior and Goodison's work. For Goodison and Senior, the symbolic act of gardening is represented in their cultivation of a poetic voice. Writing about Kincaid, M. M. Adjarian calls her "a kind of anti-Columbian figure..." (60), in that "[s]he is appropriating the story of Eden itself as a larger metanarrative upon which she bases a great deal of her writing. In so doing, she counters Columbus's own tendency to couch his exploits in Genesis-like terms" (60). This seems part of the writing project of all three women: anti-Columbian, appropriative, and perhaps Genesis-like.

CHAPTER TWO

Island in Inverse: Mirroring Colonial Encounter in Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness*

Some of us have become used to thinking that woman is the nigger of the world, that a person of color is the nigger of the world, that a poor person is the nigger of the world. But, in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world. It is perceived, ironically, as other, alien, evil, and threatening by those who find they cannot draw a healthful breath without its cooperation. While the Earth is poisoned, everything it supports is poisoned. While the Earth is enslaved, none of us is free.

--Alice Walker, "Everything is a Human Being"

When Alice Walker spoke these words in 1983,¹⁶ the Clean Air Act and the EPA had already been established, Francis Schaeffer had already published *Pollution and the Death of Man* (1970), and Robert Bullard had already started the environmental justice movement in the southern United States. All of these occurrences (and the many that have followed) signaled a new level of awareness among intellectuals and artists about the burgeoning global crisis enveloping both humankind and the environment. Yet, environmental degradation as it exists today, and the interconnected violence this kind of degradation indicates, continues to test the limits of Walker's prophetic metaphor. In the Caribbean, the repercussions of these interconnections weigh heavily on the region and, perhaps most prominently, on the island of Haiti. According to a report by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), even prior to the 2010 earthquake Haiti was the "poorest and most environmentally degraded country in the Caribbean ..." (par 3). The

¹⁶ Though published in *Living by the Word* (1989), "Everything is a Human Being" was originally a speech Walker gave commemorating the birth of Martin Luther King Jr.

article goes on to cite massive deforestation as one of the tremendous problems being exacerbated by the earthquake of 2010 and its aftermath. According to the UNEP, even before the earthquake, "... the total forest cover was approximately 2% in a country where 75% of energy demands were satisfied by wood fuel, and a lack of trees had in turn caused significant soil erosion" (par 4). Many have placed the blame for this pre-quake ecology on the shoulders of the Haitian government, citing poor oversight or outright corruption. For example, appearing on NPR's Talk of the Nation, Jared Diamond, professor of geography at UCLA explains:

Enlightened leadership might help overcome those severe disadvantages. But Haiti...has consistently not had enlightened leadership. Haiti, like the Dominican Republic, had a long series of dictators, culminating in the 1930s and 1940s in the two most evil dictators in recent New World history: Duvalier, dictator of Haiti, and Trujillo, dictator of the Dominican Republic...He [Trujillo] protected the forest carefully so that he could make money from the forest, whereas Duvalier was not nearly as interested in doing those things. ("History, Environment, Politics Makes Haiti Poor" 2010)

Yet even while Haiti's unstable political climate may have contributed to its environmental instabilities, sole focus on this factor tends to obscure the fact that much of Haiti's environmental vulnerabilities are rooted in colonialism. In "Haiti's Elusive Paradise" (2011), LeGrace Benson argues as much. She asserts that Haiti's environmental fate was set even before its independence: "As Saint Dominique, Haiti's cane fields had made it the richest of all colonies and probably the most altered ecosystem on earth" (*Postcolonial Ecologies*, location 1393, par. 19). And while Diamond identifies money as the primary motivation behind 20th century conservation efforts, broader notions of "profit" and "gain" have long fueled the island's ecological disasters. Mimi Sheller also

focuses on alteration of the environment begun in the colonial era. In her detailed discussion of Sir Hans Sloane¹⁷ she notes that Sloane was just one example of the many Europeans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who readily took advantage of Haiti's natural resources. According to Sheller, Sloane readily used Caribbean peoples, as well as the environment, for scientific research, medicine, or pure curiosity (14-22). Sheller traces that colonial pattern into the modern era explaining that the island has been continually exploited for medical and scientific research. She outlines how modern Haiti has become a prime location for devastating medical experiments (such as the Norplant scandal of the 1980s that left countless Haitian women with crippling medical problems) on the populace (Sheller 171-172). In the midst of these abuses, the U.S. Center for Disease Control, also in the 1980s, incorrectly cited Haiti as a probable source of the AIDS virus (Sheller 30; 146).

Along with its environment, Ian Strachan recounts that as the threat of independence approached in the eighteenth century, Haiti's image began to change as well. It went from being paradise materialized to hell on earth (Strachan 11-12; 21; 34). Strachan writes, "Haiti served as proof of what would happen if blacks were set free: European writers described mayhem, misrule, slaughter, evil, savagery, waste, and desolation" (75). For further support, Strachan bookends his analysis with quotes from British historian James Froude:

The prospect of a black legislature and a black prime minister giving orders to an English governor general in a British Caribbean island is to Froude an absurd situation' (124). In the historian's mind, 'The example of Haiti ought to [have] suggest[ed] misgivings to the most ardent philo-

¹⁷ Sloane was an Ulster Scot physician and collector who founded the British Museum 1660-1753.

negro enthusiast' (120). If the West Indian islands were ever governed by people of African descent, those 'beautiful countries [would] become like Hayti, with Obeah triumphant, and children offered to the devil and salted and eaten' (163-164). (79)

Though Haiti's natural resources had been co-opted for generations by the time of independence, Westerners—especially those whose textual depictions of despoliation and ruin solidified those images in the minds of readers—were unable to reason that the immediate and crushing amount of scorn and sanction from Western societies likely impacted Haiti's ability to develop its government, infrastructure, *and* environmental safeguards.

Instead, the anti-Haitian rhetoric that emerged in the wake of colonial rule and the struggle for independence relied heavily on images of barrenness and linked these to satanic red herrings. For Froude it was children being offered to the devil, but that was not where it ended; there is still evidence of this presupposed connection between Haiti's troubles and religious transgression to be found. Just after the 2010 earthquake, Danny Shea reported on Pat Robertson's on-air comments following the disaster. Quoting Robertson, Shea reports:

'Something happened a long time ago in Haiti, and people might not want to talk about it,' he said on Christian Broadcasting Network's 'The 700 Club.' 'They were under the heel of the French. You know, Napoleon III, or whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said, we will serve you if you'll get us free from the French. True story. And so, the devil said, okay it's a deal.'

Robertson said that 'ever since, they have been cursed by one thing after the other' and he contrasted Haiti with its neighbor, the Dominican Republic.

'That island of Hispaniola is one island. It is cut down the middle; on the one side is Haiti on the other is the Dominican Republic,' he said.

‘Dominican Republic is prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etc. Haiti is in desperate poverty. Same island. They need to have and we need to pray for them a great turning to god and out of this tragedy I'm optimistic something good may come. But right now we are helping the suffering people and the suffering is unimaginable.’

Robertson voices the belief that Haiti's dire change in circumstance is not only self-created but also some sort of karmic response and/or divine vengeance.

This chapter investigates Haiti's drastic reversal from paradise into a "landscape of loss" as Dayan describes it (*Haiti, History and the Gods* 79), by examining the way in which colonial interests have created and maintained this perception. It uses Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness* as its point of literary analysis and asks, as Walker has suggested, how the problems of poverty, race, and gender may have intersected with and, perhaps, culminated in, the sort of environmental trauma Haiti has experienced. This chapter additionally explores how religion, an area not anticipated in Walker's "nigger of the world" quote, further complicates the use of natural imagery and the development of environmental ethics on the island. The underlying argument of the chapter is that Montero's text, like that of Kincaid, Goodison, Senior, and Walker, reveals strong elements of the ecowomanist in negotiating these questions, in its use of existing codes, symbols, and historical revision to carve out a new space of understanding for a sustainable environment and gender identity.

Organized as a kind of travel log, *In the Palm*, follows two men as they journey through Haiti in search of a near-extinct frog. Yet it is from this basic plot-line that two of the most important themes of the novel emerge: historical revision and inversion. Often, these revisions and inversions manifest as a series of actual or implied doubles meant to expose the impact of the past on the present. For example, this chapter argues that Haiti

in Montero's text is designed to function in many ways as an inversion of colonial Hispaniola. In "The Trope of Nature in Latin American Literature" Becky Boling writes, "Although the novel [*In the Palm*] limits its story, situating this crisis in the postcolonial Caribbean suggests that we have arrived at the end of a story of self-destruction that dates from the first encounters between Old and New Worlds" (257). Boling describes *In the Palm* as part historical chronicle of colonial and ecological disaster (Boling 257), an important point of departure when considering the layered narrative structure that Montero employs in order to link Haiti's historical past with contemporary Haiti. The kind of layering that emerges is perhaps usefully described by David Hart in his essay, "Caribbean Chronotopes: From Exile to Agency" (2004). Following Bakhtin's notion of literary chronotopes, Hart argues that the chronotope, and specifically chronotopes of the threshold and historical inversion, are especially useful when considering Caribbean literature (par 4). Hart writes, "These narratives also show the fissures of the past becoming the rhetorical figures of a national present" (par 1), arguing that "[t]hrough historical inversion Caribbean literature liberates a fragmented and exilic history by identifying it, engaging it, and reclaiming it" (par 4). Using this basic premise, Chapter Two explores Montero's own engagement with and reclamation of colonial history by making it inextricable from any consideration of an ecologically viable future.

Historical inversion is important to Montero's sense of ecological viability in another sense. In invoking and reclaiming colonial history as an active component of Haiti's national present, she also invokes and engages indigenous Haitian concepts of the Cosmic Mirror, the Crossroads, and the Marassa or Divine Twins (which align with the Bakhtinian chronotopes of threshold and historical inversion at least in part) as a

framework for locating the themes of historical revision and inversion in a distinctly Haitian sensibility. In *Divine Horsemen*, Maya Deren carefully details the meaning and significance of the Cosmic Mirror:

For the Haitian, the metaphysical world of les Invisibles is not a vague, mystical notion; it is a world within a cosmic mirror, peopled by the immortal reflections of all those who have ever confronted it. The mirror is a metaphor for the cosmography of Haitian myth. The loa are addressed as mirrored images and summoned by references to a mirrored surface. (34)

According to Deren in some rituals “inversion and reversal suggest a mirror held up to time” (34-35). Thus the time/space axis in the novel is not so much a feature of Bakhtinian thought that Montero models. Rather it is present as a distinct feature of Vodou religious thought and practice that predates Bakhtin’s literary philosophy. Deren further explains that, “The metaphor for the mirror’s depth is the crossroads; the symbol is the cross. ... It is, above all, a figure for the intersection of the horizontal plane, which is this mortal world, by the vertical plane, the metaphysical axis, which plunges into the mirror” (35). Deren concludes that it is through the meeting points of the cross that mortals can access cosmic memory and wisdom (35). This “mirror held to time” supports Boling’s reading of *In the Palm* as part historical chronicle. This chapter argues that the related symbols of the cosmic mirror and the crossroads are apt metaphors for the organizing principle of narrative and character development in Montero’s novel in which colonial history and the contemporary Haiti of *In the Palm* intersect on multiple levels.

Also relevant to the structural arrangement of *In the Palm* and its many inversions is another Vodou concept, that of the Marassa or Sacred Twins. As Deren explains, “The worship of the Marassa, the Divine Twins, is a celebration of man’s twinned nature: half

matter, half metaphysical; half mortal, half immortal; half human, half divine” (38). Edwidge Danticat describes the Marassa outside the sacred framework of Deren, as a doubling or twinning, or shadowing that is as a pervasive rhetorical practice among Haitians. In an interview with Renee Shea, Danticat explains:

Marassa in common language means twins. Often politicians, if they want to identify with someone, will say, ‘He and I are twins.’...I wanted to use all the connotations of twins the story... the idea is that two people are one, but not quite; they might look alike and talk alike but are, in essence, different people. Doubling is a similar idea...The idea is that someone is doubly a person but really one person...” (385)

This framework of doubling, twinning or shadowing corresponds with the pattern of historical reclamation and inversion that Montero sets in place in the novel. Characters often mirror each other in the elaborate architecture of the novel and, in the process, generate new levels of meaning. It is from these inquiries that the idea for this chapter begins, and it is through these inquiries that this chapter attempts to extend and deepen the concept of ecowomanist criticism that links both the Introduction and Chapter One.

Mirroring Economics, Race, and Environment

If it is true that, as Pierre Deslauriers has argued in *African Magico-Medicine at Home and Abroad* (2003), “...Haiti has come to constitute a microcosm of some of the extreme inequalities that characterize the capitalist world economy” (339), the juxtaposition of the historical, colonial point of encounter and Montero's modern Haiti charts the environmental trajectory of the island as it has been determined by economic exploitation and racial prejudices. And it is, at this juncture, that cosmic memory might pair the historical figure of Christopher Columbus with Montero's fictional character, Victor Grigg. From the moment Columbus receives his mandate up until the point of encounter

with any of the islands, all he has is his royal grant. In *A Brief History of the Caribbean* (1999), Jan Rogozinski writes that “[i]n the event that he succeeded, the Crown would grant Columbus hereditary nobility and the title of admiral, make him viceroy of the mainland and islands he reached, and give him one-tenth of the profits taken from them” (24). This notion of eventuality is significant because it highlights the fact that Columbus’s title and wealth were all speculative. They were not only contingent upon “success” as defined by the Crown but also on a system of law and communication alien to those on the islands with whom he was expected to negotiate. In *Marvelous Possessions* (1991), Stephen Greenblatt adds that the performative and disingenuous nature of Columbus’s declaration of ownership once he reached the shores of the New World exposes the fact that “[a]t issue is not only the crown’s claim to sovereignty but Columbus’s own status” (57). Columbus’s “eventuality” is perhaps what Bakhtin would call a *threshold* moment, which, interestingly enough, “can be combined with the motif of encounter...” but is most associated with “the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life...” (“Forms of Time and of the Chronotope,” location 3553, par. 521). While the colonization of the Caribbean seemed to promise the sort of wealth that explorers and their financial backers could not resist, it also presented an enterprise much larger and potentially much more volatile than they had, or could have, anticipated. And for Columbus, this break in his old life, this promise of wealth and title, was his eventual undoing.

Yet even with all of these incentives, Victor’s trip, like Columbus’s, is conditional upon *successfully* completing his mission in an environment that is beyond his complete control. Anxiety over this conditional status shows itself in Columbus's writings. In *A*

Traveller's History of the Caribbean (2008), James Ferguson discusses one of Columbus's earliest accounts of Hispaniola, the island that would eventually become Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Of Hispaniola, Columbus writes:

The island and all others are fertile to an excessive degree, and the island is extremely so; in it there are many harbours on the coast of the sea, beyond comparison with others that I know in Christendom, and many rivers, good and large, which is marvellous; its lands are high; there are in it many sierras and very high mountains, beyond comparison with the island of Tenerife, all very beautiful, of a thousand shapes, and all accessible and filled with trees of a thousand kinds and tall, seeming to touch the sky. (qtd. in Ferguson 13)

As this passage illustrates, the wonder of a land so full of bounty is immediately tempered by a fear *of that bounty* and its potential wildness, or unmanageability. In reference to the same Tenerife passage, Greenblatt writes that the sense of wonder that appears in relation to the island's fecundity "...registers Columbus's fears and desires in the very objects he perceives and conversely the presence in his discourse of a world of objects that exceed his understanding of the probable and the familiar" (75). This delight over gain and the simultaneous anxiety it creates is underscored by the superlative language that peppers the Tenerife passage. For Columbus, the island is "fertile to an excessive degree" and in fact, it is "extremely so." Additionally, building on Greenblatt's analysis, Columbus twice points out that the island's natural wonders are "beyond comparison." While this anxiety may seem to have been initiated by the looming, complicated logistics of civilizing the island, it might also be seen as evidence of the kind of anxiety that revolved around what was perhaps the most primary of the colonialists' imperial directives: produce monetary gain. Later on, after Columbus lands on

Hispaniola, his writing conveys a drastic shift in his tone and his level of anxiety. He writes:

Some of the land we have seen is well cultivated, though in deed all of the land is well worked ... [The natives] brought us everything they had and thought we wanted, all with wonderful openness and gladness of heart. Let no one say that they gave freely because it was of little value, for those who gave us pieces of gold gave us gourds of water, and it is easy to see when something is being given with generosity. (qtd in *Libete* 21)

Additional statements such as, “I also wanted to see if these Indians had anything worthwhile,” and “I was anxious to learn whether or not there was anything of value here” (*Log* 133) indicate the fear and anxiety Columbus has over not succeeding in his mission, and therefore, not securing his own good name and fortune.

Yet even though this anxiety over his personal fortunes existed, Columbus was still blind to very real dangers and circumstances that might have negatively impacted his voyage. Paraphrasing Tzvetan Todorov, Stephen Greenblatt comments upon the fact that Columbus “was an intense reader of signs, and the details that he notes...are not attempts to record the world as it presented itself to his eyes but compilations of significant markers” (86). This idea of Columbus parallels Peter Hulme’s assertion in *Colonial Encounters* (1986) that his logs reflect the culture of European monologue, rather than dialogue, when interacting with island people (20).

Similarly, Montero’s text mirrors the push for exploratory and speculative gain through the character of Victor—a white, North American scholar and scientist, one of the two narrators of the text, and the novel’s Columbus-like character. Victor’s narrative is presented as a series of remembrances, much like a travel log, where he notes significant details about his journey to Haiti in search of an endangered species. One of

the first details he chooses to include in his narrative revolves around his original charge to go to the island. When describing the circumstances precipitating his arrival in Haiti, Victor relays an encounter with Patterson, a world-renowned, senior scholar. Through Victor we learn that “Patterson was the greatest living authority on everything having to do with the African anurans, his work with the Tasmanian axolotl was legendary, and he boasted of keeping alive, when the species was already considered extinct, the last specimen of *Taudactylus diurnus*, sole survivor of the colony that he himself had bred in a laboratory in Adelaide” (4-5). Montero is careful here to draw readers’ attention to the *enterprise* of colonialism. Patterson entreats Victor to search for the “blood frog,” *grenouille du sang*, on his behalf in exchange for a two-year fellowship for research on the subject of [his] choice, anywhere [he] wanted to go” (6). Just as Victor’s idol has secured his title by successfully establishing a productive colony, so must Victor participate in the mission to find a rare Haitian frog in order to establish his own academic legacy. Additionally, while Patterson has his own Columbus-like qualities, his encounter with Victor is perhaps more a mirror of Columbus’s encounter with Queen Isabella. Patterson, in his ability to command an audience with anyone in the field, is the monarch of Victor’s scientific world. Furthermore, driven by his desire for his own version of gain, Victor is similarly astute and similarly misguided in his reading of Haiti. The markers Victor is able to note represent reality as he chooses to see it rather than as it actually exists. On this point, Sofía Kearns connects the scientific reports that follow Victor’s personal observations to this kind of selective realism. She writes, “*El lenguaje científico, objetivo y distanciado de estos reportes refleja la actitud distanciada del protagonista norteamericano y de otros científicos de la misma nacionalidad respecto a*

la naturalize y la realidad haitiana.” “The scientific language, objective and distanced in those reports reflects the distanced attitude of the North American protagonist and of the other scientists of the same nationality with respect to nature and to Haitian realities” (119). The detached, seemingly authorless language of the reports reflects the kind of distancing both Victor and Columbus perform in relation to social or environmental circumstance on the island. In other words, under the guise of objectivity, Victor, like Columbus, sees only what he wants to see. And on the early part of his journey, that sight is limited solely to what Victor can extract from the island. Carmen Rivera Villegas similarly notes that scientists like Victor are rarely able to see beyond their own socialization (160). In fact, Victor is so removed from reality that, after his meeting with Patterson, when his wife Martha inquires about the potential for danger on his trip, her questions figure only into his desire to “get there first, get in the first shot, before anybody else” (7), ahead of anyone else in his scientific community. But her question also figures into the ongoing struggle for sexual dominance between Victor and his wife. Interestingly, in *Documents of West Indian History* (1963), Eric Williams also documents the “scientific certainty” that Columbus felt (xxxiv) before undertaking his mission. Yet, Columbus's knowledge--about the ease of the voyage and the preponderance of riches to be found (xxxiv)--was not only wrong, it was overly buoyed by a desire to be first, to “win the prize” as Williams puts it (xxxv), and Montero effectively mirrors this hubristic exigency in Victor.

Once in Haiti, Victor continues to suffer from this profound lack of sight—this profound inability to perceive the world as it actually is—as Thierry, Victor’s Haitian

guide and the other narrator of the novel, reveals important information about the dire state of affairs on the island. Victor notes:

Thierry was still waxing nostalgic about how well you could eat in Jérôme thirty or forty years ago, and I concluded that it was pretty ironic for anyone to prophesy that kind of death for me considering how much time I spent submerged in ponds and lagoons, drenched by downpours in swamps, crawling along riverbanks, my mouth full of mud and eyelids rimmed with mosquitoes. I said as much to Martha. (2)

For Victor, Thierry's documentation of the island's depleted resources is unimportant, sentimental yearning rather than a vital piece of data to be cataloged as fact. Moreover, the mere idea of such dire material circumstance is quickly subsumed by Victor's ill-placed notions about his own invincibility as he travels about the world.

In addition to the historical figure of Columbus, Victor is also paired with Thierry in the novel, and it is interesting to note the ways in which their narratives intersect. As one of Victor's mirrors, Thierry's narrative contributions reveal some of the reversals and inversions that occur in Montero's Haiti. For example, in stark contrast to the excessively fertile island that Columbus encountered, Victor lands on an island that has been completely changed since the time of first contact. Haiti has plunged from the intimidating and unparalleled heights of lushness in Columbus's time to the equally unparalleled depths of barrenness in Victor's, yet it is interesting to note that in Montero's world it is only through Thierry's eyes that Montero communicates the vision of this drastically altered landscape. Thierry declares:

At times I think, but keep it to myself, I think that one day a man like you will come here, someone who crosses the ocean to look for a couple of frogs and when I say frogs, I mean any creature, and he will find only a great hill of bones on the shore, a hill higher than the peak of Tête Boeuf.

Then he will say to himself, Haiti is finished, God Almighty, those bones are all that remain. (11)

Unlike the Western images of Haitian barrenness previously introduced, Montero's protagonist characterizes the island's ecology himself by connecting the continued depletion of its natural resources (like the frog) to the sort of historical pillaging that phrases like "crossing the ocean" bring to mind. For Riviera Villegas, another way to look at Thierry's narrative is as one that overlaps other narratives within the text and also overlaps historical narratives that allow Montero to establish a level of intertextuality or "borderless" travel wherein he or she not only moves between narratives but also between physical environments at different historical moments (160-162). In other words, through Thierry Montero is able to connect the enormous human suffering on the island to depletion of the island's resources by explorers, scientists, and profiteers that the ages have seen pass through the island. Though she doesn't focus specifically on Thierry, in "*Voces en Contrapunto: Dialogismo Interno en Tú, la oscuridad de Mayra Montero*," ("Voices in Counterpoint: Internal Dialogism in Mayra Montero's *You, Darkness*"), Michele Dávila Gonçlaves also argues for the importance of narrative voice in the novel. Gonçlaves contends that Montero's text focuses on a polyphony of discursive voices that represent, and ultimately shift, the binary oppositions of the Caribbean (31). When considered in relation to Deren, Gonçlaves's supposition produces a significant point of correspondence. Even though the concept of mirroring—pairings, reversals, inversions— noted thus far may often seem to reproduce the idea of binary discourse, Deren's language about mirroring seems to clarify this seeming contradiction. When further discussing the notion of a crossroads, Deren writes:

... [T]he cross-roads is the most important of all ritual figures. Where other cultures might conceive of the physical and metaphysical as, at best, a parallelism, a necessarily irreconcilable dualism, the Haitian peasant resolves the relationship in the figure of right angles. (35)

Deren also adds:

For the Haitian, then, it is the relationship of segments which is important. The Twins are not to be separated into competitive, conflicting dualism. In Voudoun one and one make three; two and two make five; for the end of the equation is the third and fifth part, respectively, the relationship which makes all the parts meaningful. (41)

Deren's alternate explanation of dualism, of one and one make three relationships, bears out the notion of polyphony as it exists for Thierry in Haitian society.

Interestingly enough, while embedded within Victor's narrative and the larger historical narrative of the island, Thierry is able to focus on the extent of the island's reversed fortunes, and perhaps comes closest to Montero's own ethical sensibilities. He is, in some ways, a representation of Papa Legba. In the Vodou tradition, Legba is not only the most powerful of deities, and guardian of all crossroads, he is also an intermediary between the *Gran Met* (or Supreme Being) and all other entities (Fere 963). In the context of the novel, Montero herself is the Gran Met. In "*La Habana en el Espejo*" ("Havana in the Mirror") Montero attempts to explain why she focuses so heavily on Haiti, rather than on her native Cuba, or Puerto Rico where she resides, in her writing. In it she declares her commitment to writing about the under-explored problems in the places around her, what she calls "the place we live in" (4). Montero, along with the other ecowomanist writers, is "[c]ommitted to the survival and wholeness of entire people..." (*In Search of xi*). And for Montero, that means placing herself and her work in Haiti, among the dispossessed and despoiled. Moreover, Montero's self-identified role as

witness to the problems around her is very similar to Thierry's key role as witness to the violence done to Haiti (Rivera Villegas 160), in which his testimony links environmental violence to scientific exploration and other historical contact moments. This view also emphasizes Montero's sense of herself as a "frustrated biologist" (qtd. in Kearns 118), as well as the larger sense of environmental consciousness that *In the Palm* represents (Kearns 118).

Simultaneous with its attention to the role of colonial exploration and economic exploitation in the historical development of contemporary Haiti's degraded environment and the role of polyphonic, or twinned, voice in demonstrating causation, *In the Palm* highlights an additional link between the environmental damage and the island's legacy of racism and prejudice. Although the island has undergone many changes in political rule and racial population¹⁸ since Columbus's initial encounter, the early years of colonial capitalism put into place particular paradigms of race and identity that also seem connected to the modern-day degradation of the people and the environment. When discussing the kinds of changes initiated by colonial exploration and rule in the broader Caribbean, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert writes in "'He of the Trees:' Nature, Environment, and Creole Religiosities in Caribbean Literature:"

¹⁸ After that original encounter, early Spanish observers reported one million Taino/Arawak in 1492. Bartolome de las Casas later wrote that there were between three and four million on Hispaniola. An official Spanish census counted 60,000 adults in 1509 to less than 11,000 in 1548. Part of Hispaniola was ceded to the French rule in 1697, and Haiti went from French to self-rule after the Haitian revolution in 1804, and since has undergone various internal political regimes that included the infamous Duvalier dictatorial regimes in 1957. (Rogozinski 28, 53)

The island has also undergone racial changes as well. The present-day Haitian side of the island had a demographic makeup of approximately 30,000 slaves and 5,000 whites between 1570 and 1673, which shifted to 434,429 slaves and 30,831 whites between 1750 and 1804, just before the Haitian independent state emerged. (Rogozinski 45, 165)

This change was both demographic and ecological. Thousands of African slaves were brought to the new world with the sole aim of making it possible to produce a luxury crop for the international market in plantations that required the complete transformation of the Caribbean's tropical landscape. The Caribbean sugar plantation grew at the expense of the dense and moist tropical forests that needed to be cleared to make way for the new profitable crop. This rapid deforestation led to soil depletion, landslides, erosion, and climactic changes that included significant decreases in the levels of moisture and rainfall (Grove 64-70). The resulting environmental degradation was exacerbated in many areas of the Caribbean by ungulate irruptions-the introduction of domestic grazing animals alien to the pre-encounter Caribbean-that transformed the cultural and social landscape. (184)

As Gonçlaves asserts, Victor can be seen as representing white, Western authority while Thierry can be seen as representing the "marginalized" African majority (33). Thierry's reference to a hill of bones (11) not only connotes the kind of ecological death brought about by deforestation, it also connotes the kind of cultural death and consumption that Mimi Sheller writes about in Chapter Five, "Eating Others: of Cannibals, Vampires, and Zombies," of *Consuming the Caribbean* when death itself becomes a part of a commodity system.

However, what Paravisini-Gerbert's link between the demographic and the ecological does not inherently suggest, that Montero's work touches on, is the psychologically systematic manner in which these changes in racial and environmental identity occur. This transformation is really a process of centralization that normalized and demystified the islands for colonists by placing them in opposition to the people, the culture, and the elements. In his *Log*, Columbus writes, "The wind remains contrary, and I am unable to depart. I placed a large cross at the entrance to the harbor, on a little rise the western point. This is a sign that Your Highness possesses this land as your own and

especially as an emblem of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, and in honor of Christianity” (132-33). In Montero’s world, Victor’s own “royal” charge emboldens his centralized sense of self and his, ultimately, disastrous hunt for the frog in the same way that planting a flag or a cross emboldened Columbus to initiate the often disastrous period of colonial rule. Because of the goals of his mission, Victor also initiates a process of centralization that places him in opposition to the island’s people, culture, and elements. This oppositional stance is more concretely represented in the interaction between the two narrators as Thierry plays the role of “island native” to Victor’s colonizer. However, Montero reorders their interaction in such a way that it critiques the original colonization while highlighting its modern consequence. When Victor meets Thierry for the first time, just as Columbus thought of the indigenous islanders’ good nature in the context of gold (*Libete* 21), Montero has Victor think of Thierry solely in terms of his search for the frog. Victor recalls:

Thierry looked too old, even sickly, somehow and I assumed he was lying when he said he was only fifty-six. His was the most wrinkled black face I had ever seen ... and the little hair he still had didn’t amount to more than a few clumps of kinky white scattered behind his ears and at the nape of his neck. Since he was missing some teeth, the tip of his tongue, an immensely pale tongue, protruded whenever he talked, and I concluded that in the field at midnight, setting out on the difficult treks of an expedition, this man would not be of much use (18-19)

Similar to the inverse/mirrored version Thierry gives of the Haitian landscape, Victor’s version of the Haitian worker/island inhabitant is one that also demonstrates the damage caused in the original colonial encounter. Victor has no concern for Thierry as a human being outside of Thierry’s physical usefulness is procuring the frog. Yet, even though Thierry’s diminished physical capacity is evident, Victor still expects him to perform his

physical function. Paired with language that includes negative racial coding, it is this ambivalent regard of Thierry that further emphasizes the kind of Othering that must take place at points of colonial “subjectification” (Bhabha 70-84). Later on in the novel, because Victor, blinded by his own search, refuses to hear or see the modern realities of Haiti as they exist outside of his own goals, he is severely beaten by the *macoutes* for not leaving the island. Thierry, having tried to warn Victor, visits the hospital and tries to care for him. Victor confesses, “Before going he left a good supply of ice where I could reach it, as well as the pills I was supposed to take in the afternoon. He walked out of the room, not making a sound, and I was reminded of Bengali servants in the movies, the ones who always end up stabbing their masters” (66). Though Victor believes in Thierry’s good will to the extent that he accepts Thierry’s aid, Victor, as Bhabha suggests when discussing the often-contradictory beliefs inherent in “discriminatory knowledges” (80), simultaneously positions himself as modern-day colonizer when he casts Thierry as a scheming, always dangerous servant.

Yet, returning to an earlier point in the novel, to the moment just after Victor’s initial physical assessment of Thierry, yields another link between the racial politics of the novel and the novel’s environmental politics. Victor remembers, “He [Thierry] was wearing a purple shirt that day, and it occurred to me that I could use it to show him the exact color of the frog I was looking for” (19). This moment is somewhat similar to the previous one in that Victor disregards Thierry’s personhood in thinking about him solely in terms of his search for the frog. However, there is a distinction. In this moment, with Thierry wearing the color of the frog, he and the creature are bound up together. Though one is merely a tool and the other an object of intellectual value, they become, for Victor,

essentially one and the same in his quest for gain. This might also suggest the linked fates of both humans and animals in a despoiled postcolonial environment in the Walker quote at the beginning of this chapter: “While the Earth is poisoned, everything it supports is poisoned. While the Earth is enslaved, none of us is free” (“Everything is a Human Being”).

Mirroring Religion, Gender and Environment

In *Marvelous Possessions* Stephen Greenblatt writes:

The Europeans who ventured to the New World in the first decades after Columbus’s discovery shared a complex, well-developed, and, above all, mobile technology of power: writing, navigational instruments, ships, warhorses, attack dogs, effective armor, and highly lethal weapons, including gunpowder. Their culture was characterized by immense confidence in its own centrality, by a political organization based on practices of command and submission, by a willingness to use coercive violence on both strangers and fellow countrymen, and by religious ideology centered on the endlessly proliferated representation of a tortured and murdered god of love... (9)

Much of this chapter’s discussion of exploratory contact and eventual colonization focuses on the type of physical violence detailed here by Greenblatt. Religious dominance is also a part of that conversation. Montero’s *In the Palm* provides an engaging space for investigation precisely because if it suggests a connection between economy and race in the making of the current environmental situation in Haiti, it also suggests a connection between religion and gender in the making of the island’s landscape. Though discussion of the mirroring principle has already positioned religion as a thread that runs through the entire chapter, it is important to outline the historical

trajectory of religion as it is reflected in the modern Haiti portrayed in the novel. In this effort, Columbus emerges again as a pivotal figure.

Though scholars like Hulme, Williams, Rogozinski, and others have made clear the economic motivation behind Columbus's colonial explorations, Ferguson also writes that Columbus "was increasingly obsessed by a sense of spiritual mission" (Ferguson 25). Ferguson attaches this religious component to Columbus's second voyage, but he later writes that because the Spanish crown did not see Columbus's expeditions as the kind of success they had hoped for—the kind of success upon which Columbus's fortunes and family name relied—it is also likely that this spiritual mission was an opportunity to regain the favor of the court (Ferguson 25). According to Greenblatt, Columbus's actions in the New World, and Haiti, were guided by religion from the beginning, though Greenblatt also seems to question the true sentiment behind such motivation. Greenblatt asks, "Why did Columbus, who was carrying a passport and royal letters, think to take possession of anything, if he actually believed that he had reached the outlying regions of the Indies?" (53) He answers the question when he asserts that "Columbus was neither a merchant nor a pilgrim: he was on a state-sponsored mission from a nation caught up in the enterprise of the *Reconquista*" (53). Whether Columbus truly saw religion as part of his spiritual destiny or simply a part of his job description is unclear. However, by the time he was ready to undertake his second voyage, he had written to both the Spanish Crown and to the Pope suggesting that at least part of the profits from the colonization be used in the reclamation of Jerusalem (Williams 7-8). It is also clear that in his will Columbus declared that upon his death his son should build a chapel on Hispaniola, the

island Columbus perceived to be his miraculous gift from the Holy Trinity, for the specific purpose of religious worship (Williams 13).

And even as Hispaniola, or colonial Haiti, changed hands between the Spanish and the French, Catholic religious mission remained an influential force in the island's development. The Catholic Church went so far as to independently interject itself into the policy-making and social development of the island even as countries like Spain tried to distance themselves from the Church's authority (Greenblatt 62). Other Catholic settlers on the island proclaimed, as scholars have noted, that the mining and harvesting of souls was just as important as mining and harvesting of silver, gold, sugar, and coffee. In *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (2006), Jackson and Weidman write:

St. Thomas Aquinas, in his *De Regimine Principum* (1266) followed Aristotle closely in arguing that some people were natural slaves, to be viewed as mere extensions of their master's will rather than possessing a will of their own. Moreover, enslaving non-Christians could be interpreted as a divine act, since this would mean bringing the word of God to the infidels. (5)

Though written centuries before Columbus landed on Hispaniola, writings such as this set the stage for religion to function as a tool of authority and dominance on the islands. According to Greenblatt, "With very few exceptions, Europeans felt powerfully superior to virtually all of the peoples they encountered... The sources of this sense of superiority are sometimes difficult to specify, through the Christians' conviction that they possessed an absolute and exclusive religious truth must have played a major part in virtually all encounters" (9). Through a historical lens, it is easy to see how flawed this colonio-religious logic was. If God's greatest gift to man is his will, his freedom to choose between right and wrong, how could a colonizer, even one on a spiritual mission, negate

the will of Amerindians and slaves by imposing their own? This spiritual quandary is perhaps best expressed by Greenblatt:

It is characteristic of Columbus's discourse that it yokes together actions, attitudes, or perceptions that would seem ethically incompatible, here seizing everything on the one hand and giving everything on the other. The two are clearly related in some way, but they do not directly impinge on one another, just as there is an unexpressed, unacknowledged relation between the fact that the natives do not understand his language and the fact that no one contradicts his proclamation. It would, I suppose, be possible to term his hypocrisy, but the term suggests a staging of moral attitudes that are not actually felt in the deep recesses of the heart, a theatrical self-consciousness, that seems to me quite alien to Columbus's ardent faith. I think rather that we are encountering an important aspect of Columbus's discourse economy, a characteristic rhetorical feature of what we may call his Christian imperialism (68-70)

This Christian imperialism served Columbus's discourse economy and his financial economy, but it also played a key role in contradictorily defining the Caribbean environment. Chapter One discusses in detail the ways in which the Caribbean was first defined as an Eden (Greenblatt 70; Grove 5; Sheller 46; Tiffin 202; Tuan 120) and this led to increasing amounts of anxiety and fear among colonists that they might repeat the original sin of the mythic garden by perverting Christian morals. Additionally, even in paradise, "[t]he founding action of Christian imperialism is a christening. Such a christening entails the cancellation of the native name—the erasure of the alien, perhaps demonic, identity—and hence a kind of making new; it is at once an exorcism, an appropriation, and a gift" (Greenblatt 83). So while Christian Imperialism included the "intent[ion] to *give* a great gift" religion, it simultaneously perverted that gift with the need to decimate the existing physical, human, and spiritual landscapes to be possessed so that they might be made right (Greenblatt 121). This spiritually-backed sense of

ownership, however, sets the colonists in complete opposition to the landscape. Upon reaching the new world, colonists not only altered the landscape with the introduction of alien flora and fauna, they also began to exhaust the islands' native resources and abuse its inhabitants. The Amerindian population was nearly eradicated through the introduction of disease, violence, forced labor in fields and mines, rape and consensual sexual intercourse. In *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World* (1995), Patricia Seed explains that despite the difference in identity among the major colonizing powers, they shared "a common technological and ecological platform—trans-Atlantic ships bearing crossbows, cannon, arquebuses, horses, siege warfare, and disease" (3). The priests who had accompanied Columbus on his expedition "soon died or left the colony, alienated by the in-fighting of settlers. In the violent frontier society of early Caribbean settlements, many priests fell prey to disease or disillusionment. Others were actively involved in the exploitation of indigenous labour" (Ferguson 38). Colonists had sinned, just as their religious forbearers had sinned when presented with paradise.

The Christian colony on Hispaniola that Columbus or the Church, or the Crown may have envisioned, a colony that would effectively marry worldly and spiritual concerns, did not emerge. Such a colony was not even possible since the type of work needed to turn a profit proved deadly to newly converted Amerindian workers. Soon, the capitalist goals of the colonies required the importation of unconverted slaves directly from Africa, and Hispaniola, that paragon of prosperity and paradise in the New World, became ground zero for an influx of Africans (Ferguson 102). This influx would also make Hispaniola ground zero in a spiritual struggle for power and identity.

The emergence of Vodou on the French side of the island would prove to be a protective and unifying force for Haitians not only in the physical struggle for independence, but also in the struggle for an identity outside that which was prescribed in a Christian imperialist society. As Joan Dayan writes in “Erzulie: A Women’s History of Haiti,” “For the majority of people, the folk or local religions not only gave collective strength, but preserved the histories ignored, denigrated, or exoticized by the standard, ‘imperial’ histories. It was the survival of these customs and gods that provided continuity for the dispossessed” (5). More important for this study, this religious autonomy that began in the colonial period provides a point of reflection between that historical period and Montero’s modern Haiti. Yazmin Torres also writes in “*Regresando a La Guinea: Historia, Religión y Mito en las Novelas Caribenas de Mayra Montero*,” (“Returning to Guinea: History, Religion, and Myth in the Caribbean Novels of Mayra Montero”) “*El refugio que las religions africanas ofrecieron a los negros en America no se limitó a la época colonial, sino que sue fuente de resistencia fisica y cultural se extiende hasta el presente*” (105) (“The refuge that African religions offered blacks in America isn’t limited to the colonial era, but that source of physical and cultural resistance extends to the present.”) That Montero privileges Vodou in her fictional world is also a comment, or a reclamation as Hart might suggest, on its value as a source of racial self-esteem and personal agency.

However, in *In the Palm of Darkness*, there is ambivalence in Montero’s presentation of Vodou as completely positive or empowering for the Haitian people or for the Haitian environment, especially during those moments when the text also seems to comment directly on the role of women. For example, beside the fact that Thierry is

guide to both Victor and to another amphibian hunter who preceded him, all three men are linked in their interactions with women, nature, and the spirit. By Thierry's account, the earlier scientist, Jaspur Wilbur, or Papa Crapaud as he is called, is a decent man who is like a father to Thierry as a young man. During his stay in Haiti, Papa Crapaud travels to Guadeloupe in search of various species of frogs and one especially massive toad. Thierry tells us, "Papa Crapaud was very proud of the catch he had brought from Guadeloupe. But above all, he was proud of the woman he had found over there" (68). Though Thierry dislikes the woman and wonders why Papa Crapaud has brought her to the island, he somehow knows without being told that "it was written that on the day Papa Crapaud walked off the boat in the place called Pointe-à-Pitre, she would be the first to come up to him and try to sell him a dried frog" (69). Even though Thierry tries to distinguish between the frogs and the woman, they are conflated when Ganesha is described as Papa Crapaud's greatest "catch." Becky Boling writes, "At the root of the ecological, economic, and political devastation is the spectacle of the death of life itself (Eros), and Montero represents this global destruction in gendered terms" (256). It is at this point where Thierry's seeming role as the novel's voice of wisdom is greatly complicated. Thierry continues his narration by painting a most disgusting portrait of Ganesha. There is even an entire chapter--named for the cow piss Ganesha eternally reeks of--dedicated to her supposed filthy habits, infidelities and emasculations.

When witnessing the concurrent destruction of the people and the environment, Thierry seems to take on the voice of wisdom. However, Montero disrupts any expectation that he will maintain that role in respect to women. In Gonçlaves's view there is:

... una voz feminine que ha sido obviada por la critica y la cual me propongo destacar en este trabajo. Esta voz feminine es la representante de una etna que ha sido mantenida en el silencio en el Caribe, la de la hindu Ganesha. Desde su nombre lleno de significados misticos hasta su abierta sexualidad, Ganesha representa la union de lo humano y lo espiritual, al igual que su homonimo divino. (32)

...a feminine voice that has been overlooked by critics and which I propose to highlight in this paper. This feminine voice is the representative of an ethnic group that has maintained its silence in the Caribbean, that of the hindu Ganesha. Since her name is full of mystic significance to its open sexuality, Ganesha represents the union of the human and the spiritual, like her divine namesake. (32)

Gonçlaves also argues that the textual purpose behind Thierry's hatred for Ganesha, and his shift in narrative role, underscores Montero's desire to highlight the complexities of discrimination and domination in her post-colonial Haiti. To look at ecology, race, colonial enterprise, or gender without looking at the ways they all interconnect makes any attempt at singular analysis incomplete. Montero's portrayal of Ganesha strongly hints at the destruction that can occur when all of Walker's "niggers" collide in one place: "But, in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world. It is perceived, ironically, as other, alien, evil, and threatening by those who find they cannot draw a healthful breath without its cooperation" ("Everything is a Human Being").

For Gonçlaves, Ganesha is a marginalized minority several times over: she is a woman, she is a recent immigrant, and she is neither African nor Western in her religious affiliation (36). And it is through her marginality that Montero focuses on gender identity and the inversions she wishes to highlight. In the time leading up to Papa Crapaud's death, Thierry explains that Ganesha:

...wasn't a very clean woman. My mother, who was, used to say that when a woman is a pig she always pulls the man down with her. I could

prove that with Ganesha, because Papa Crapaud stopped wearing ironed shirts, and when he took out his handkerchiefs, they were white handkerchiefs, it was disgusting to see the dried snot, the sweat stains, a whole week's filth. Ganesha was so dirty she used cow piss to wash the floor, so dirty the neighbors complained because they couldn't stand the stink of cow dung coming out of her house. (69)

Because of Ganesha's reluctance to perform her role as traditional homemaker, Papa Crapaud takes on those feminine traits and duties himself. In this light, even the names come to represent this reversal of gender power. Although women are linked to frogs throughout the novel, Papa Crapaud is the one whose name means "frog," while Ganesha's name is a variation of Ganesh, a prominent, male Hindu god. This ambivalent association with the frog not only mirrors Montero's sense of many gender distinctions as false, it also mirrors the fluidity of gender in the natural world.¹⁹

Ganesha also emerges as a figure of reversal and disruption in the descriptions of her sexuality. Thierry details that she "wasn't a faithful woman either... Sometimes Papa Crapaud came home unexpectedly and would let out a bellow, take the broom and swing it through the air, the man would move away and first chance they had they'd be back again, just like dogs running away and coming back behind a bitch in heat" (70). Since Papa Crapaud could not depend on Ganesha's fidelity, he has to relinquish his "civilized" decorum by acting as wildly as the "natives," and he has to relinquish his professional identity, that which acts as the conduit for his own form of colonial status and gain. Most interestingly, by relinquishing these traditional gender roles, Papa Crapaud provides an

¹⁹ Scientists have found that many frog species, like the *rana rugosa* of Japan, change gender after birth. Scientists speculate that this ability is triggered when the balance of sexes within the species becomes disproportionate. (Miura, I. I.)

opportunity for Thierry to claim some of his Western, masculine identity. Thierry says, “Little by little he [Papa Crapaud] stopped making field trips, he didn’t want to leave Ganesha alone anymore. He beat her a lot but she never came to her senses ... I was the one who looked for the frogs” (70). Not only does Thierry begin to look like the foreign scientist, he also comes to exert his sexual dominance in his rape of Ganesha. He “came up behind Ganesha and put [his] arms around her. She twisted and tried to run away, [he] caught her at the door” (71). Ultimately, Papa Crapaud loses his white male dominance, his ability to trade in scientific commodities, and his life. In a reenactment of the sort of rebellion the slaves perpetrated on the island hundreds of years before, Ganesha poisons him with a concoction made from the very creatures he has caught and studied. And in the time before he dies he asks Thierry, “Where’s a man’s dignity?” Then he answers his own question by grabbing his genitals and saying, “Here it is, Thierry, and here I have nothing, nothing” (71). Just before his death, Papa Crapaud asks Thierry to take him to the river where he used to catch frogs. After his passing, Thierry’s lament is “how far a man of his learning fell,” and he concludes, “[a] frog’s guts can’t enlighten a man. Frogs were his whole world, that’s why they betrayed him” (71). Thierry’s assessment of Papa Crapaud’s obsession with frogs suggests that his entire life was made up of obsessions and a need to dominate, and the image of a frog’s guts is a fitting symbol of the dissection enacted in the name of science, exploration, and exploitation of the environment.

Like his predecessor, Papa Crapaud, Victor’s life is also bound up with a dangerous intermingling of frogs and women. When Thierry begins to tell him about Papa Crapaud and some of their similarities Victor recalls:

My mother always said you had to look at life as if it were the suspicious start of a crime: tying up loose ends, finding clues, following the trail as coldly, as if it didn't even concern you...On the day I told her of my decision to study zoology, shortly before I started college, she fell silent and then ran to her studio. That night she gave me a present, a painting of a midwife toad (*Alytes obstetricans*), an enormous canvas she had kept for many years: She began to paint it when she learned she was pregnant and finished it on the day I was born. From then on she suspected that my life, my entire adult life, would be bound up with those creatures. (20-21)

However, as the pseudo-scientific reports between chapters confirms, all the frogs are dying. Though Thierry doesn't quite seem to understand what the connections between science, frog hunting, and women mean either, he nevertheless understands that it is, and has been, a destructive force on the island. Thierry believes that "since he hadn't been able to save Papa Crapaud's life, perhaps now, after so many years, he could save the life of another frog hunter" (74). By keeping Victor out of serious danger and encouraging him to leave the island, Thierry tries to help Victor piece together clues about the connection between the disappearances of various frog species and Victor's own destructive behaviors.

This, however, is not the primary way in which he tries to save Victor's life. Instead, Thierry tries to guide Victor through the minefield of decimated landscapes and dying species by sharing his spiritual teachings. When Papa Crapaud becomes ill, Thierry offers to teach him the Law of Water. Though the text does not suggest that it would have saved his physical life, if Papa Crapaud had listened, it may have allowed him to experience an afterlife with the *loas*. Thierry recognizes the same dangerous obsessions in Victor that Papa Crapaud has as well as their consequences, when he says, "A man repeats all his roads, he repeats them without realizing it, his illusion is that they're new"

(180). Perhaps having learned something from his time with Papa Crapaud, Thierry gives of his spiritual knowledge to Victor without taking, without any attempt at possession as Greenblatt might define it. But Victor and Papa Crapaud are like the same man in the novel, another set of twinned images, as they both represent a masculine, exploitative colonial presence in the islands. Victor says as much as just before his own death, "...I cared more about amphibians than anything else. And in that I was like Papa Crapaud: Frogs were my whole world...I resolved that when I went home, before I left for Adelaide, I'd settle my situation with Martha once and for all" (174).

About halfway through his journey through Haiti, Victor visits Emile Boukaka, a Haitian doctor and member of Thierry's religious sect who is very knowledgeable about amphibian populations. In her estimation, Sofia Kearns believes Boukaka and Thierry are another set of linked figures in that "[d]os personas en particular encarnan esta aproximacion mitica a la naturaleza" (119). ("both people in particular embody this approximation of the mythic and the natural" (119).) During the visit, Victor receives one major piece of information. Boukaka tells him "that Agwé Taroyo, the god of waters, has called the frogs down to the bottom. They say they have seen them leave: Freshwater animals diving into the sea, and the ones that don't have the time or strength to reach the meeting place are digging holes in the ground to hide, or letting themselves die along the way" (95). In response to Victor's incredulity he adds, "The great flight has begun ... You people invent excuses: acid rain, herbicides, deforestation. But the frogs are disappearing from places where none of that has happened" (96).

Unfortunately, Victor is unable to follow the clues about the frog and the great flight, because like Papa Crapaud he is also obsessed with a woman and lives under the

constant fear of emasculation. In fact, though he is in the middle of an expedition that has the potential to secure his professional future and faces daily threats of physical harm, a large part of Victor's narrative is taken up by his suspicion that his wife is a lesbian. For example, in the first few pages of the text he conflates her, and all other women, with the frog as he likens her sex with another woman to "imminent amplexus (the term used for sexual congress between frogs)," and it is an act that he claims to be able to recognize by the profundity of its odor (2). This conflation at once merges what Victor sees as the dangerous, dirty existence of female sexuality and/or lesbian sex with that of nature and both are described with detached scientific language. Even more telling is the proximity of the chapter entitled, "Barbara" to the one about Papa Crapaud's Ganesha. In fact, the chapter named after his wife's supposed lover immediately follows "Cow Piss." Near the end of the chapter Victor dismisses Thierry's attempt to teach him the Law of Water by saying, "My wife left me, Thierry. I don't want to talk about water. When do you think we'll be able to climb the mountain?" (78) After this seeming blow to his masculinity, the only thing Victor has left is the bit of power he might salvage in conquering a dangerous mountain climb to retrieve his specimen. But by this time, it's clear that Victor is near the end of his life; his eyes "had been burning" and "now they were on fire" (78), and this despite the fact that part of the Law of Water Thierry has tried to impart offers a path to healing: "Blessed Agwé Taroyo ... the water puts out the flame"(73).

Given the complicated nature of his role in the text, it is perhaps important to return to another facet of Thierry. He provides some contrast to the two scientists, Victor and Papa Crapaud. Though recognizable as the voice of wisdom and environmental ethics in many places, perhaps the voice of the *Gran Met*, there are moments, such as

those with Ganesh, where his character seems confounded by the enormous reversals and reflections present in Haitian life and history. However, closer examination of his life reveals that though flawed, and sometimes wavering in his philosophical position, he is, by and large, defined by those moments in his life, and in the text, that demonstrate a commitment to his family and community, a willingness to embrace the frail humanity of those who relentlessly chase wealth, and in some instances, a physical abhorrence of the domination and commodification of women.

For instance, the first time Thierry sees the *grenouille du sang* he is looking for a woman. He is already working for Papa Crapaud when a German man hires him to find his crazed wife on the Casetaches Hill. Thierry offers no concrete explanation for the German woman's condition except to say, "You can't imagine how many women go out of their minds as soon as they set foot in Haiti, decent women who come for a little sun and end up on the burros with twisted hooves that go up to the Citadelle" (25). His identification of women with the frog happens because it is while he is tracking her that he hears the "*glug-glug-glug*" of the frog's call for the first time. As he hunts the animal, preparing to capture it and drop it in alcohol for Papa Crapaud, Thierry considers letting it live so that it might "go to the *loas*, who are its natural masters, and quiet them by telling them how well [he] had treated it" (30). In "Silence, Voodoo, and Haiti in Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness*," Angel A. Rivera suggests that this act indicates that Thierry's "religion is intertwined with ecological preoccupations" (par. 18). It is possible that this is one of the reasons that Thierry is able to appreciate the Law of Water more fully than Papa Crapaud or Victor. Though he is devoted to Papa Crapaud and his quest for amphibian specimens, he is willing to look past that to respect the right to life even

the smallest creature possesses. This is the first major difference between Thierry and the American scientists. Though his tenuous indoctrination into a system of ecological commerce and possession has forced him (and the entire island) to recognize the power of capital, he would have to deny these stronger, spiritual instincts in order to complete his task.

Thierry eventually captures the woman and spends a few days with her. She senses that he is taking her back to her husband and Thierry knows she does not want to go. Regardless, he delivers her to the German who strikes her and throws her into the car “like a man throwing in a bundle” (37). Thierry silently collects his pay and later sits down to what should be a joyful family dinner. The family is laughing and joking and he recalls:

Finally everybody calmed down and Frou-Frou served the soup, I got a whiff of it and looked at my shoes I hadn't remembered until then that they were dirty. That was the signal for my guts to turn over, a tangle of worms came up into my mouth and I hardly had time to run out of the house and spit it onto the ground, with as much difficulty and grief as if I was spitting out my own heart. (38)

It seems as though Thierry's role in the German woman's capture, and the money he subsequently collects for that act, is incompatible with happy, loving family surrounding him. Thierry is sickened by it and his guilt over his participation in the German woman's abuse undermines his sense of order and stability. It is also telling that these feelings are strongest when he is still very young. It is not until he enters adulthood, and has to face the dilemmas of manhood, that his sense of self wavers as it does in his dealings with and perception of Ganesha.

Thierry's foray into manhood presents other dilemmas as well. Just before leaving home for Port-au-Prince, his love for his stepmother, his "heart's great secret" (102), is revealed. He says:

I remembered the knapsack she packed for me the night my father sent me to find the woman on Casetaches. When I came back from that mountain she had washed my clothes too, and cleaned my shoes all stained with blood, and mended my shirt, she washed it first and then she mended it, it was stiff with bitter sweat, the sweat of fear. I looked at Frou-Frou and for the first time saw what she had always been: a good woman. (100)

At this point, just as Thierry is beginning to take on the powers of quasi-Western manhood, he is also beginning to take on its consequences--a fear so pervasive that it literally comes through his pores. Frou-Frou is the one who relieves him of that fear by reminding him of the care associated with family that the repetitious mention of cleaning and mending represents. It is not until later, when he is well into an adult life that he callously discards her. He encounters her again after she has grown into an old woman. Thierry lies to his new woman, the mother of his children, and tells her that Frou-Frou is the "woman who raised [him] when [his] mother died. Blanche believed it because Frou-Frou didn't look like anything else, she was dry now, she had changed" (158). But even from these transgressions he is able to gain an understanding and change. He says to Victor, "A man repeats all his roads, he repeats them without realizing it, his illusion is that they're new. I have no more illusion, but I do have to walk my own steps, the few I have left, and you have to walk yours ..." (180-181). In the paragraph that directly follows this statement, Thierry brings up the people connected to his two major transgressions—Frou-Frou and Ganesha. He says:

When Frou-Frou died I went to Jêrême to kiss the earth where she rested...when the flowers that Carmelite was holding...began to lose their

petals, a wind came and stripped them. The petals fell into the grave and it was like somebody touching a finger to my forehead. I remembered Papa Crapaud's burial and the little cones of rose petals Ganesha gave us. The dead also repeat their roads. The invisible finger touched my brow again and I forgot about the smell of dung and the stink of piss that disgusted me so much in Ganesha. I only remembered her prayer, Ganesha was dead and her ghost came to whisper in my ear: 'You, darkness, enfolding the spirit of those who ignore your glory.' I raised my head and knew that at the hour of my death I too should say those words ... I will see everyone I've been waiting for, probably everyone who loved me, I will stretch out my arm to them and speak to them slowly so they'll understand: 'You, darkness ...'. Then they will show me the light. (181)

This is a pivotal moment in the novel for several reasons. First, Thierry has reached another transitional period in his search for, and maintenance of, his manhood. He no longer has any illusions about the things he has done in the life, his motivations for doing them, and, most importantly, the people who are most damaged by his actions. But instead of simply tipping the scale of power into the opposite direction, in which case he runs the risk of losing his male dominance, or rather abandoning one role for another, as Papa Crapaud does, Montero suggests that he is finally able to exceed those confines. He is able to come to this realization in life, and, therefore will be able to choose a road that is different to the one Papa Crapaud and Victor have taken. Their road is one that lacks enlightenment, and, at times, actually denies the existence of the divine.

In retrospect, it is clear that Montero has been leading up to this conclusion all along. In an early chapter of the novel, entitled "The Light of the World," Victor first contemplates Thierry as a person. While, as previously argued, he is unable to think of Thierry as separate from his own selfish concerns, he still has the opportunity to recognize the divinity, and the inherent morality in Thierry's stories and in his admonitions. At the very end of the chapter, after a frustrated Thierry has walked away

from Victor, Victor notes the he “began walking down the street through the crowd, his head high, inexplicably agile, even robust: The light of the world gave him that vitality. It had to be the light” (22).

Mirroring Ecowomanist Intention

Though it seems as if Victor has gone through his own transformation, his inability to follow the clues trails him even on his last moments before the boat carrying them away from the island sinks. He says, “Thierry sat looking at me and began a sad monologue, it was like a confession, he talked about the man he had stabbed to death and about his entire family. I realized that he too was a dying species, a trapped animal, a man who was too solitary” (178). Angel Rivera claims that in this moment, this “illuminative leap at the end of the novel when Victor realizes that Thierry is a special person surrounded by the violence in Haiti. In this moment Thierry’s initial animalization is reverted” (par 24). But it seems just the opposite. If the illuminative moment belongs to anyone, it belongs to Thierry. He anticipates the moment of his death and those he must confront and greet once he crosses over. “You, Darkness,” which happens to be the literal translation of the book’s original Spanish title, *Tu, la Oscuridad*, as well as the title of the chapter that deals with the death of Papa Crapaud at the hands of Ganesha, is not simply representative of the violence in Haiti. It represents the sort of violence that lives and breeds inside the individual human beings who constitute and perpetuate a larger colonial-capitalist enterprise—an enterprise that, as the novel shows, corrupts and despoils a person’s soul as easily as it corrupts and despoils that environment in which they live. And even though Victor has the last surviving *grenouille du sang* in his possession at the end of the

novel, though he has achieved his goal, he is no closer to resolving the issues of insecurity and emasculation that have plagued him throughout the entire text. He is not able to separate the accumulation of goods and power from the accumulation of fear and anxiety. Gonçlaves sees additional significance in the fact that it is Ganesha's voice that calls to him at the moment of death. She sees the call as a mediation between non-contradictory dualisms, like water and fire in Vodou (38).

It is ironic that in the end Victor thinks of *Thierry* as a dying species, when the brief scientific inquiries into the mysterious disappearance of frog species from all over the world underscores the danger and ignorance, largely coded in this text as colonial, in overlooking issues of extinction and pollution that have been reflected globally. Even though Montero has given readers a very specific view of life in Haiti, her

depiction of the particular (Haiti) and the global reiterates that all previous borders and limits have been and are transgressed. The island is not isolated, nor separate from other territories. Ostriches are being raised in Indiana, Indian women pray to Hindi goddesses in Haiti, a man from Vietnam works on a farm in the U.S..." (Boling 257).

Although the history of Haiti is in one respect one of violence and domination, Montero's work looks to other values and other ways of being for answers to the collective struggle for survival. She not only encourages readers to break free from identities that would support that violence of racism, poverty, sexism, and environmental degradation, but she encourages them to do so by establishing identities that are strong enough and secure enough to coexist and connect with the rest of the world. This is congruent with the values Walker establishes in her writing and the values that have emerged from an analysis of Montero's contemporaries—Goodison, Kincaid, Senior—other women writers attempting to understand and shape new pan-Caribbean landscapes.

CHAPTER THREE

Landscape, Love, and the Ethics of Choice in Dionne Brand's *Another Place, Not Here*

In the novel, then, the real and the possible coexist...

--Wolfgang Iser, "The Significance of Fictionalizing"

In her 2002 defense of Wolfgang Iser's reception aesthetics, Winifried Fluck writes, "The larger purpose in drawing attention to the role of the reader and the act of reading lay in an attempt to find a more adequate answer to why literature is still important" (254). Iser might argue, as he does in "The Significance of Fictionalizing" (1997) that an analysis of literature, and of its readers, is important because "[i]f a literary text does something to its readers, it also simultaneously tells us something about them. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, inclinations, and eventually our overall makeup" (1). Thus far, I have argued that there is a disposition, desire, and inclination present in contemporary Caribbean women's literature that can be characterized as ecowomanist. But I have approached this disposition largely from the perspective of writers. I have explored this thesis through an examination of their creative works, arguing that in the complicated process of negotiating personal and political identities, these writers have positioned themselves in direct opposition to racism, sexism, notions of religious superiority, *as well as* environmental degradation. Throughout Chapters One and Two, I have located this effort in their metaphoric and thematic privileging of environmental sustainability and an egalitarian connection to the land. Poets like Walker,

Senior, and Goodison imagine themselves as part of the landscape—as flowers that bloom at their own discretion. They imagine themselves as the steadfast caretakers of the land—in the burying of bones and the watering of petunias. Novelists like Montero use cautionary tales about death and misadventure to advocate for the conservation of natural resources. I have also proposed that one of the primary methodologies by which the writers achieve this is through an engagement with, and redress of, colonial violence. As the opening epigraph suggests, the project of locating these interconnected ethics within creative texts has yielded broader implications for real-world activism as it juxtaposes often flawed realities with imagined possibilities. However, by employing Iser’s theories of aesthetic reception, this chapter attempts to concretize its understanding of the reader’s role in this ecowomanist endeavor.

It is clear, though, that Iser’s earlier work on aesthetic response²⁰ as well as his later work on literary anthropology²¹ are seen by some as divorced from social and political contexts.²² Since the argument that this dissertation is building places alterity and various negotiations of alterity at the forefront of its investigation, the use of Iser might seem wholly incompatible with its goals. However, arguing for the relevance and continued usefulness of Iser’s theories, Gabriele Schwab explains this seeming gap in “Iser’s Aesthetics of Negativity” (2000), where she writes, “Iser’s relatively undifferentiated notion of alterity posits the Other as an empty category. In any direct interaction with literature, however, such an Other assumes an unavoidable concretion,

²⁰ *The Implied Reader* (1974) and *The Act of Reading* (1978)

²¹ *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1993) and *The Range of Interpretation* (2000)

²² In Fluck’s article, she also outlines much of the opposition to Iser’s work, noting specifically Elizabeth Freund’s book, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism*, as emblematic of its cultural studies arm.

imposing the effects of an often unconscious cultural cathexis on reading and interpretation” (83). For Schwab, Iser’s work becomes useful and *usable* for the same reason:

I am well aware that the high level of abstraction and aggregation Iser has chosen as his mode of theorizing deliberately avoids the level of concreteness and manifestation at which I pose these questions. At the same time, however, this mode of abstraction, which informs the architecture of Iser’s model, opens up a kind of blank space in Iser’s own theories, leaving room—if not more actively calling for—very different historically and culturally embedded theories of literature. (83)

In each of the texts that I have identified as ecowomanist, references to historical and cultural contexts are embedded and Othering is mediated by authorial design and the hope and possibility generated in creative production. And Iser’s absences, his “blank space[s]” provide just such an opening. In this space, readers find, as John Paul Riquelme notes in “Wolfgang Iser’s Aesthetic Politics” (2000), that even “[i]n his move from reader-response theory and criticism to the charting of a literary anthropology, Iser has maintained his focus on creative production, which he eventually presents as an imperative within culture” (8). This creative production is something that “generates a new perspective and mental object out of textual elements” (Riquelme 8). I believe that these possibilities, or textual elements lie within a text’s connection to and interaction with the reader—what Iser would refer to as an “implied reader” (xii *The Implied Reader*). In other words, if the work done by the writers under consideration might be characterized as activist in nature or reception, then assessing the role of the reader is a critical component in the bridge between the ethics that exist within their writing and the sort of ethics that *might exist* outside of the text (van Oort 1)—what Iser refers to as the

triadic relationship wherein the fictive and the imaginary help shape the actual or the real (van Oort 2).

In attempting to understand the role of the implied reader as a bridge between what is and, from an ecowomanist perspective, what might be, Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place, Not Here* presents itself as a particularly useful text. *In Another Place* tells the fragmented story of Elizete and Verlia, two women attempting to love one another in a post-colonial world awash with the violence of plantation economy, failed revolution, rampant sexual abuse, and an estrangement from nature. Moving primarily between Grenada and Canada, throughout the novel, both women struggle with, as Paul Huebener writes, "fractured or confused" connections to various homelands (615), as the fictive world of the novel replicates many of the forms of violence that ecowomanist texts attempt to negotiate. An analysis of *In Another Place* is also useful precisely because it is from the disjoints in the novel—Huebener's fragmentations, or fractures—that creative, and perhaps activist, possibilities emerge. The notion of black space is not only a way of thinking about how Iser's work creates a space for theorizing alterity. In its original conception, these black spaces are an important way of understanding the role reader's play in creating textual meaning. In *The Implied Reader* (1978), Iser argues that readers engage with the textual reproduction of societal norms through a series of negations that "impel[] the reader to seek a positive counterbalance elsewhere than in the world immediately familiar to him ... These, the readers of the novel, are then forced to take an active part in the composition of the novel's meaning, which revolves round a basic divergence from the familiar" (xii). And it is from these negations, as Gabriele Schwab

writes in “Iser’s Aesthetics of Negativity” (2000), that a “productive negativity” emerges (75). In Schwab’s interpretation of negation, she writes:

Aesthetic experience engages in a productive negativity, performing readings as an act of creation rather than reception. It is the silence in a literary work—the unsaid—that functions as an “enabling blank,” a productive textual energy that, in turn, becomes the determining force in the constitution of meaning. Silence, for Iser, also precludes that the text assumes absolute authority. (75)

However, the experience of the reader is not necessarily an individual one. While Iser’s ideal reader is not one that must come to a uniform understanding of a text, in an interaction with the writer’s text, he or she tends toward certain ideas. Texts are, according to Iser, the author’s “attempt to shape [its] interaction with readers” (Iser, quoted in Schwab 77). Fluck echoes this dimension of aesthetic reception by also explaining the role of blanks in mediating the space between the writer, the reader, and the values that emerge from their interaction:

Every text consists of segments that are determinate, and of blanks between them that are indeterminate. In order to establish consistency between these segments, the reader has to become active in providing links for that which is missing. A blank is thus not a mere gap, or an ideologically instructive omission. It is an intentional, often carefully crafted, suspension of relations in order to make us provide links for what is disconnected. The difference is significant: A mere gap allow readers to indulge in their own projections, a blank compels them to set up relations between their own imaginary constructs and the text. (258)

The fragmentation that appears in the narrative voice of *In Another Place* (a non-linear account bifurcated between a first and third-person account of the protagonists’ lives and time together) and setting (which shifts between pre and post-colonial time and space) are *enabling blanks*. This chapter argues that through this series of blanks, Brand attempts to shape the reader’s understanding of black female identity and the ways in which that

identity has been forcefully estranged from positive experiences with love, with the land, and, ultimately, with themselves. She does this by organizing the reader's experience of the text around a series of communicative choices wherein the reader must take the reality of violence (sexual, racial, environmental) replicated within the text and *do* something with it, *make* meaning from it in order to get at its ethical core. It is from this interaction that what I call an "ethics of choice" emerges.

Negotiating Colonial Choice

"Elizete, beckoned." With this simple phrase, a refrain that echoes throughout the text, *In Another Place, Not Here* begins. This first section of the novel is an account of Elizete's tumultuous childhood, where she is abandoned and subsequently adopted by an unnamed woman; of her battered adulthood, where she is the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of Isaac and another unnamed man; of her love and loss of Verlia, a woman she meets while working in a cane field and instantly loves; and of her various migrations, between Grenada and Canada, imagined spaces, and historical periods.

Though "Elizete, beckoned" is the title of the first section, the phrase also acts as the beginning of the novel's engagement with the reader and the beginning of its ethical and structural foregrounding of choice. This is because having read what amounts to the opening phrase of the novel, readers are already being presented with one of the text's enabling blanks. Because of this, before readers know anything else about Elizete, they already know that she is being called to something or someone, but the phrase is decidedly vague about which it is. If looked at outside of the context of the novel, even the word "beckon" itself seems to emphasize the role of choice as it relates to mobility. A "beckoning" acts as a median point between two people—there is someone who beckons

and someone who is beckoned—where, subsequently there is a decision to stay or to go, to respond to the call. In explaining the triadic relationship between the fictive, the imagined, and the real, Iser postulates that “[a] literary work is not a documentary record of something that exists or has existed; it brings into the world something that hitherto did not exist and that at best can be qualified as a virtual reality” (“Do I Write for an Audience” 311). This virtual reality he speaks of is the possible world coexisting with, and perhaps, shaping, the real world, and in Brand, the world being created, the possible, is shaped by an ecowomanist ethics. Though at this point nothing about location has been revealed, Elizete’s decision depends completely on her acceptance of one thing—one set of ideals or desires—and on her denial/refusal of another. Even thinking about beckoning in terms of pure physical movement, the choice to migrate, or not to migrate, is still an outgrowth of certain refusals. And such choices, like all choices, are at some level value-based. If there is any reader feeling about Elizete’s choice to go, for example, they will have derived from what they think the character should value as well. From the outset of the novel, Brand’s structure, which is marked by these kinds of blanks, indicates that to engage with the text and its characters will mean engaging with one’s own ethics, one’s own choices.

However, Brand guides the reader’s decision-making and imagined possibilities by linking Elizete’s life to a broader notion of colonial history. *In Another Place* documents Elizete’s life beginning with her adoption at the age of “big enough to boil water and not catch the house on fire” (17). When explaining the state of young Elizete’s world, a world in which basic survival seems to outweigh all else, the narrator digresses into an impromptu defense of Elizete’s situation. The narrator says, “Love was too

simple—just knowledge, immediately felt about the immediate place, but the girl burning the rice at the window needed history, something before this place, something that this place cut off. At the heart. And the woman with the bucket, well at the heart there was no bucket, and no woman either” (41). In just a few sentences the narrator outlines a primary dilemma of the character, the novel, and the Caribbean female identity: love, history, place. That the narrator recognizes the historical sacrifice of love, or any sort of dreamy-eyed longing, is significant, and this has been noted by critics of Brand’s work. In “Dionne Brand’s Poetics of Recognition: Reframing Sexual Rights” (2007), Greg A. Mullins writes about love’s role in the novel by connecting it to politics. He writes that the novel “offers an extended meditation on love’s relation to revolution ...” (1100). Later in the article he concludes that, “The architecture of Brand’s novel places erotic love between women in direct relation to the dreams and disillusion of the political struggle for social justice ...” (1107). Yet, this assessment of love neglects the kind that exists before one reaches the age of sexual maturity. The chronicle of Elizete’s young years seems to imply the importance of love in these early years and the result of love withheld, or even postponed. Consequently, there is a conflict in the narrator’s desire to make clear the harsh realities of life, such as the real threat of hunger implied in the remark about burning rice, and the joys of life, such as a connection to place and a connection to people like the woman with the bucket, the woman who is Elizete’s adopted mother. It is part of the contested space within Elizete, and the broader Caribbean female consciousness which the narrator represents, where the part of life, or identity, that dares to concern itself with things other than basic physical necessity has to battle for its very existence. In Chapter One, for Sammy Lou, the main character in Walker’s poem “Revolutionary

Petunias,” the consciousness that dares is evident in her seemingly ridiculous request that someone to water her petunias even as she is headed to the electric chair (lines 25-26). In Brand, the consciousness that dares is evident in that the narrator first mentions love as though it is a dangerous thing. It is almost as though love is being cited as the thing at the window, somewhere off in the distance and forever just beyond Elizete’s reach. The cruelty of this loveless situation, and the narrator’s rancor over it, are palpable.

Yet the actual danger here is in wanting love, and Brand sets this up as a consequence of history, something before that island place, as the girl-burning-rice passage places it in opposition to love. During the colonial era, women, and children like the young Elizete, did not have that luxury of choice as they were transported to new lands and bought and sold to the highest bidder, and it is a bitter pill to swallow. So instead, the third-person narrator again emphasizes the role of choice by directing the reader’s attention to the past, and the need for history (41). Though neither Elizete nor the women around her have had a hand in making the early decisions that would come to shape their lives, they are still the ones who deal with the consequent blunting of the senses. But this is not a situation that Brand intends her characters to live with. Beyond the imperative for historical and socio-economic redress that the novel seems to have, perhaps Brand also means readers to recognize that while it is an obviously reprehensible situation there is also emotional safety in decisions already made and choices already usurped. And to focus on this historical trajectory, to continually blunt the senses as the narrator suggests, alone keeps the characters from confronting the uncertainties of choice.

To approach this idea from a different angle, consider the ways that this blunting is not only linked to the history of colonialism but specifically to the colonial history of

landscape and place in the novel. Of this, Paul Huebener writes in “No Moon to Speak of:” Identity and Place in Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*” (2007), “Much of her work deals with the dependence of identity upon context: with the ways in which self-knowledge and well-being are inextricably tied to the relationships that people form with their human and nonhuman surroundings, and with the difficulties that arise when people are cut off from their homelands or come to know a new place” (615). Huebener’s sense of the interaction between the characters and their physical spaces suggests some aspects of an environmental ethics, acknowledging the dual injustice that has been done to *both* people and place. At the beginning of the girl-burning-rice passage, the narrator speaks of the place almost as if it has a will of its own as it “cut off” something young Elizete needs (41). If following the logic of the passage, and the voice of the narrator, Elizete should not only deny any sense of love or tenderness, but any positive connection to the landscape as well. Ultimately, this leads to nothingness—no bucket, no woman, no identity. This is part of the larger ecowomanist theme that arises from Brand’s structure. To look to the past and to address its historical inaccuracies is only a part of what needs to occur in this Caribbean woman’s search for wholeness and agency. But to linger there means to linger in nothingness. Marlene Goldman argues as much in “Mapping ‘The Door of No Return’” (2004), when she writes, “Although her texts turn to the past, on the whole they demonstrate the futility of adopting a nostalgic response to lost origins and unknown destination...” (par 5).

That the eclipse of the soul, the ability to engage with love in a functional way, is the direct outcome of this colonial past is most clearly evidenced by the story of Adela, Elizete’s surrogate ancestor. Adela’s life and her tragic story make up a large part of the

“Elizete, beckoned” section of the novel, and it is the clearest indictment of a colonial ethics of forced choice and the consequences that follow. More specifically, Adela’s life is the product of a warped, colonial rendering of mobility and place. With the brief soliloquy on the danger of love complete, the narrator refocuses the reader’s attention on the cost of this historical legacy. Of Adela and the other slaves, the narrator says:

They had not come here willingly looking for food or water or liking the way the place set off against the sky or even for hunger. They had not come because the hunting was good or the ground moist for planting. They had not come moving into the forest just after the rainy season. They had not come because they saw great cities foreshadowed in the horizon or rum shops sprawling with their dancing and laughter. Not because a shape overtook them in geometry or because after observing speeding clouds they coveted a new landfall. They had been taken. Plain. Hard. Rough. Swept up from thinking of the corn to be shucked, the rains coming or no rain coming at all for the season, that patch of high grass to clear. The mist gathering at their feet. The steam of baking. Poised over a well, the bag lowered, they had been plucked, or, caught in the misfortune of a wedding or a war, sold. (41)

The novel draws attention to what may not be readily apparent. Even though the laborious ways that slaves, indentured workers, and their collective descendants have been tied to the land are often portrayed as a negative, this is only because the colonial perversion of their mobility and choice has made it so. In other words, for people in the Caribbean—and in the broader colonial Diaspora—working the land has unduly become synonymous with the brutality of forced labor and denial of love and all things constituting the life of the soul. Yet, despite the consequence of such historical realities, a brief example of which readers get in the image of Elizete burning the rice, part of what Brand's novel does, in addition to highlighting those physical and psychological abuses, is to overturn these negative associations.

One of the ways that Brand does this is to rewrite part of this colonial record. In the passage explaining how and why Adela and the other slaves came to the island, a litany of what had not motivated the slaves' movement, Brand attempts to reconnect their severed relationship to the land. It is important to note that any analysis of these moments of reconnection, does not undermine Brand's parallel argument about the brutality of forced migration. As Brand writes, "they had been taken" (41). However, Huebener views passages such as this as evidence of the "strong sense of connection to her homeland" (616) that Adela has. However, he also views references to Africa as commentary about Adela's "relationship with the Caribbean [as] based on estrangement and loss" (616). However, since the process of choice involves the possibility of acceptance as well as refusal, it seems important for Brand to highlight the aspects of the land, and the slaves' relationship to the land, that existed before the perversion of forced colonial choice, and for her to divest, not linger in, this relationship of the influence of colonial ethics. Ultimately, it is not just the slaves' interactions with the land, difficult as they may have been, interactions that were a normal part of life before the colonial era, that are brutal and numbing. Rather, it is the subversion of their mobility and their agency that is "plain, hard, and rough" (41), and it is this subversion that has the refusals attached to it. This is underscored when, in a passage that follows the story of Adela's arrival on the island, readers learn that "[t]hey had surpassed the pettiness of their oppressors who measured origins speaking of a great patriarch and property marked out by violence, a rope, some iron; who measured time in the future only and who discarded memory like useless news ... It could not stanch the gushing ocean, it could not bandage the streaming land" (42-43). The idea that the slaves' relationship with the land and environment is not

an inherently negative or permanent one is furthered by the idea that the land too is a victim of this oppressive violence. It too is traumatized to such a degree that it needs mending. And, indeed, this sentiment, that both women and the environment have been oppressed by the same patriarchal, colonial source, is one that has continued to be theorized by ecofeminists such as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman,²³ and Vandana Shiva.²⁴ Women writers like Brand are explicit in making these connections, what could be termed ecowomanist connections, about women of color in the Caribbean. Such connections are significant not only in the development of a Caribbean female subjectivity but also in the survival of the region and the planet.

Another way that Brand tries to redress the colonial record is by drawing attention to the importance of retaining hope for the future of self-initiated physical and emotional mobility. In somewhat of a magical realist, or marvelous realist, if following the distinction Alejo Carpentier defines (Renk, “Magic that Battles Death” 103), treatment of the land, even as Adela is being taken to the island she is plotting a way to return. In fact, “[a]ll the way [t]here, Adela registering the stench of the ship ... memoriz[ing] the road to find she way out ...” (21). Although Adela could not possibly be in a position to know or trace a way back to her homeland, the desire for this sort of autonomous mobility is so strong that it results in the creation of an almost supernatural transmogrification of the land. Though it is beyond the realm of the rational or of the “normal” that a smell could solidify into a road that Adela might travel, it is nonetheless presented as a completely plausible possibility. Johanna X. K. Garvey observes that

²³ *Material Feminisms* (2008)

²⁴ Because of continued demand, Shiva’s 1989 book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* was reprinted by South End Press in 2010.

“...Brand does envision resistance for her Black female protagonists, most clearly through memories that empower and stories that trace back towards Africa, offering a means of (re)claiming colonized spaces” (489). However, the novel does not present the move away from such negative associations with the land as completely linear or progressive, and this theme of difficult, and at times contradictory, redress of colonial ethics, is woven throughout the novel. The idea of autonomous choice is not presented as a panacea, but there is a dignity in the process of choosing that is justification enough for continued yearning, dreaming, and hoping.

The characters in *In Another Place* engage in a constant struggle to re-imagine their relationship with the land and thus to amend their possibilities for mobility and agency. For example, once Adela is on the island and sees how difficult it will be to return to her homeland, whatever positive communion she might have with the new place is compromised. The narrator says that, “[w]hen she look at this place it remind her of nowhere for it is not a place that is easy to get out of and it don't look like any other place” (20-21). We also learn that she, “...begin to forget by forgetting the road” (22). This campaign of forgetting also includes her refusal to name the island, or form any permanent attachment to it. It is true, as Huebener writes, that “[n]aming is a vocalizing of belonging, as incorporation of the named into one's life story, a making of a particular connection...” (618). But the novel doesn't seem to bear out Huebener's subsequent idea that “Adela's unwillingness to name, then figures prominently in the lives of those whose connections have been severed” (618). Though Adela has been traumatized by the loss of her homeland, the connection has not been severed. In Adela's mind, the road home still exists, her memory of her birthplace still exists, and the names of her birthplace still exist.

It is the lack of mobility, a lack that translates into a lack of choice that perverts Adela's ability to love. Readers learn that more than that, "when she done calculate the heart of this place, that it could not yield to her grief" (18), and that in this new place she "feel something harder than stone and more evil than sense. Here" (Brand 22). First, though it seems as if Adela's refusal to name is a refusal and a rebuke of the physical place, it is not actually the landscape that is evil or hard as stone. And Brand makes this clear in her rendering of the woman who takes Elizete in—Adela's biological ancestor—a woman who, according to Huebener's analysis, would also suffer a similar estrangement from the land:

Whenever her hand wasn't in solid soil mashing it up and kneading it down her temper rose and her head ached. She pushed her hands in for the cool feel of other earth, for the black feel of it to surge in her arms and to quiet her. She did her planting not standing up but sitting down, solid and spread out, the dasheen root, the yam root between her legs and both arms plunged in the soil. This is how her yield was plenty, soaked in sweat, her dress heavy with provisions. All that temper, all that disagreeableness, kneading and tamping and burrowing, it was the smell like burnt bread and green crushed leaves that quieted her. The deeper she pushed, the richer, the more secret; mingling with the sweat of her arms, the fresh rush of must, the suck of black earth where she was going. Come evenings when she had to rise up, pull her hands from the soil, slow her sweat, the woman they'd left her with would be miserable and throwing words for Elizete and the spirits (Brand 34-35).

It seems that the only moments of peace and joy that Elizete's caretaker has come from her interactions with the land. So, if all of Adela's descendants are cursed with the same deadening of the spirit and hardness of feeling, as the text tells readers that they are (35), and as Huebener similarly asserts, it is also clear that the resultant hardening is of their emotional sensibilities and of their ability to form any meaningful connections with other people. On this latter point both Huebener (623) and John Corr are clear (Corr par 1). But

this emotional handicap comes from somewhere else, not the land. Adela is seemingly incapable of loving her children. The narrator says "[s]he spill and spill so and she mothered not a one. She only see their face as bad luck and grudge them the milk from her breast" (19). This blunting and destruction of natural affection, as Frederick Douglass calls it (*Narrative* 16), is the true evil, and the text seeks to correct the ill-begotten notion that it is the place itself, the land itself, that is the source of that physical or psychological trauma.

Although Brand's attempt to follow, and rewrite, the historical trajectory of colonialism is limited by linking Elizete to the tragic history of Adela, Brand is able to open up some areas of possibility. Even though Elizete is not related to her caretaker by blood, her adoption and subsequent identification with Adela's lineage allows her to regain a sense of agency and mobility for both herself and for Adela. That Elizete is the inheritor of Adela's story is clear. When considering whether or not to adopt an orphan, her caretaker thinks, "Now they send give she some little girl, not even blood but spitting image as she recall by heart. Adela" (35). And even as the young Elizete, abandoned or unable to be cared for by her own mother, stands outside her caretaker's door, Elizete stood as "if she'd been spun around and the world was upside-down. Just stood as if she'd lost her direction. The woman beckoned..." (44). The word "beckoned" shows up again; in this instance, the physical journey Elizete takes after she's lost her way, or her sense of self, is concretely linked to Adela's thwarted efforts to place herself in the world. Part of Elizete's beckoning, then, and the choices her character will eventually confront are linked to Adela. For instance, after she learns the story of Adela, Elizete is the one who

demonstrates her ability to redress the traumatic sense of movement, place, and emotion.

She says:

Nothing barren here, Adela, in my eyes everything full to fullness, everything yielding, the milk of yams, dasheen bursting blue flesh. Sometimes the green overwhelm me too Adela, it rise wet and infinite on both sides of me as a vault of bamboo and immortelle and teak. Adela, the samaan was my mother. She spread and wave and grow thicker. Is you I must thank for that. Where you see nowhere I must see everything. where you leave all that emptiness I must fill it up. Now I calculating. Though often and still I know the feeling what Adela feel when she reach, the purposelessness of recalling come big in my throat, for the place beautiful but at the same time you think how a place like this make so much unhappiness. But since then I make myself determined to love this and never to leave. (24-25)

Huebener writes that once Elizete “...begins to give names to the trees, plants, stones, and spaces around her, taking ownership of Adela's Nowhere and changing it into a home. And by filling up the emptiness around her, she effectively fill *herself* up with a sense of belonging” (618). Yet, this sense of hopefulness, momentary though it might be, occurs only after the two displaced lives have intersected. In other words, the two stories seem to depend on each other. To further emphasize the connection between Elizete and Adela and further emphasize the notion of the trajectories working in concert, Brand introduces the notion that Elizete actually is Adela:

Here, there was no belonging that was singular, no need to store up lineage or count it; all this blood was washed thick and thin, rinsed and rinsed and rubbed and licked and stained; all this blood gashed and running like rain, layered and drenched and sprinkled and beat upon day beds and cane grass. No belonging squared off by a fence, a post, or a gate. Not in blood, not here, here blood was long and not anything that ran only in the vein. Every stranger was looked over for signs and favour. If you came upon this place suddenly, curious gazes would search your face for family. Hmm, mouths would turn down in recognition; there was always something for someone, long dead or long gone, long lost, long time, in the faces: 'That one went away when?' 'She back now, oui,' 'She self.'

Away, not necessarily this earth but away; eyes that favoured a dead soul, ear; messages from the dead in the way a thumb was sucked, the way a head inclined, braid hanging; there was the way a baby leaned or turned her head, the way a newborn's eyes looked as if she'd been here already. (39)

However, what is interesting about this connection is that in Elizete's taking up of Adela's charge it is almost as though Elizete has to relive, and most importantly survive, all of Adela's traumas before she is able to make their story whole.

Negotiating Other Places

The first of Adela's traumas that the text attempts to negotiate is an alienation from the land. As previously mentioned, in her young life Elizete is orphaned, and this traumatic experience, makes the world seem as strange and foreboding a place as it does to Adela. Yet once Elizete connects to Adela's lineage of unnamed, unloved women, she recognizes the power in such connections, the power to create a sense of place, love, and ultimately, purpose (Corr par 1). More significantly, it is not until this connection and emotional placement happens that Elizete is able to see the physical landscape as a place worth naming. Additionally, once Elizete immerses herself in the emotional trauma that Adela endures over the notion of place, she is able to envision that emotional and spiritual darkness as a part of a larger, necessary sacrifice, a sacrifice that carves out a space for the awakening of the soul and the return of an emotional and ethical relationship to the land, as with her description of fullness: "Nothing barren here, Adela, in my eyes everything full to fullness ... (24).

That Elizete is able to do this at a young age, however, is not enough to heal their collective wounds. Beginning in her childhood, Elizete is haunted, as Adela is, by the image of "another place" and the fact that, "... everyone who was brought here left here

since Adela's time and left their thoughts in the air, unable to leave since leaving would suggest a destination and where they had to go was too far and without trace and without maps and there was something that needed to be settled and haunted too" (Brand 43-44).

Joanne Saul notes that this reference to the title of the work is an

intertextual reference to Brand's collection of poems, *No Language is Neutral*: 'In another place, not here a woman might touch something between beauty and nowhere, back there and here, might pass hand over hand her own trembling life' (34). This tension—between beauty and nowhere—forms the basis for much of Brand's writing. (60)

There are some notable differences, however, in the manifestation of their other places. Elizete is not consumed, as Adela was, by the places that came before, nor does she see them as a possible point of return. Instead, Elizete is taken up with new places where life might be somehow different and better.

Yet even as Elizete looks toward the promise of new spaces, she must still contend with the lingering ethics and consequence of colonial choice that is attached to current ones. When the woman who takes her in, the woman who for all her faults gives her food, clothing, and most important, the right to lay claim to Adela, lies dying, Elizete mostly thinks about:

... the pooled sun under the beds, the woman she'd been given to murmuring nothing, her fingers rooted in the lace like another place, a place she was already going to, part of her already there, dust in the sun's shafts, cracked, frizzled, fly light through her eyelashes, the thought that this would be over soon, when she woke up, if this was sleep but it wasn't and the woman who took her was lying in stiff white linen which she had ironed and sprinkled over with blessed water (26-27).

This image of another place emphasizes the degree of anxiety involved in being taken somewhere instead of choosing to go, more than the idea of not knowing where you are

going. What Saul cites from *No Language is Neutral* (1990) is different from “another place” here, and this perhaps represents the extent to which Brand, herself, is still negotiating the idea of what that means. It is not the newness that scares Elizete; it is, instead, the usurpation of choice. It is also interesting that this image of travel and of another place, the initial one that readers see, is an image of death. This anxiety, then, seems a reasonable reaction in young Elizete. It is the type of anxiety and despair that any ward might have at the prospect of being once again turned out into the world alone. However, the prevailing early image of this scene, most of which I have not reproduced, is hope, light, and transcendence (26). At this point, before Elizete embarks upon the process of negation, she is again able to imagine another life, a life of the soul that is inextricably bound up with natural images. Though the woman’s physical form is dying, there is a clear sense of another life from pooling sun, the rooted fingers, and blessed water.

At the same time though, Elizete is also in transition. So in anticipation of whatever change of place she will encounter, she also “tried to work out the geometry of the sandy paths up the wall where the wood was softened by the chewing of wood lice. She tried to trace them home; yet perhaps home was these paths, she thought, or their way of not being seen, waiting and listening” (32). Rather than resign herself to dust, Elizete is able to contemplate physical survival and a future of emotional depth the woman who takes her never knows because she hides herself away. Taken together, these places of fate and chance built upon the foundation of colonial ethics and forced choice are again divided by distinct trajectories. They are trajectories, or places, that in the case of Adela and her children, can leave one with a sense of absolute nothingness. They can

leave one with the “sagging in a stoke” (26), with “the smell of sickness in her nostrils” (27). Or, these are the trajectories of possibility, as in the case of young Elizete. She sees the historical consequence of choice that is embodied in the bitter life and pathetic death of her caretaker, but she chooses instead to see something different for herself, and by extension, imagine something different for her forbearers. This difference is bound up with all the inherent possibility of historical knowledge and future conscious choice.

Yet while Elizete’s life in hiding has certain metaphorical appeal, the reality of her actual life is quite miserable, and she survives long enough to eventually leave the island. This departure is part of the transition and consequent difficulties of negotiation that Elizete must undertake. Goldman writes about transition as a process of drifting:

In Brand's writing, the notion of drifting offers an alternative to the boundaries of home and the nation-state. Indeed, by emphasizing drifting she underscores the inadequacies of the nation-state, particularly its response to demands for social justice in a global era and in its long-standing practices of exclusion. Although claims to nationhood can be seen as contributing to projects of decolonization, Brand nevertheless promotes drifting as an equally legitimate resistant practice. (par 3)

Yet, when Elizete finally leaves the island for Canada, instead of finding the instant peace and reconciliation the novel seems to move toward, she is faced with the harrowing repetition of Adela’s own experience of the encounter:

Here. That smell so compelling that it made you deny your origins, beat back your family, see in their faces only envy of you, only maliciousness, the will to make you suffer like them, drag you down to their hopelessness. Then stiffening yourself against their camaraderie, you begin to speak with an accent to distinguish yourself, affect a tone with disdain in it, hold your behind in like the white girls in magazines, forget things like 'good morning,' go out rarely but imagine going out somewhere else, in a car perhaps, where the streets glide by and there are lights. Yes, but on this island I am living another life so needlessly, I am being killed,

I am being killed, I am wasted. That smell which after all was only impermanence, yours (64).

In facing this new reality, the transcendent outlook on life that young Elizete has, vanishes. Its dissipation, like Adela's, is due to an altered relationship with the landscape and with love, which the novel has already presented as connections that sustain both the physical and emotional life of the women in the novel. Given the negative impact on identity that can arise from a restricted mobility in the novel, it might be easy to imagine that the exercise of choice, as embodied in Elizete's journey to Canada, represents a significant change in her physical or emotional circumstance. This is not the case. Even after a physical change of place, the specter of *other places* continues to loom large in Elizete's life and in the mind of the reader. In fact, it looms so large that it seems to overshadow and subvert the chances Elizete has at happiness. For the reader, the oppressive nature of other places is evident in their literal proliferation on the page. It is mentioned in various forms (another place, other places, nowhere, here, etc.) to an almost obsessive degree. In this sense, Elizete understands what Adela feels and the true weight of historical choices one has not had the opportunity to make. Elizete's reaction to the city evidences this continued sense of disconnection regardless of place. Elizete thinks, "The apartments along the wide street towering out of cement-baked hills were stunning. Here, there were many rooms but *no place* to live. *No place* which begins to resemble you ..." (63). It is interesting to note how similar the phrase "no place" is to the Adela's first impressions of the island. Citing a similar moment in the text, Huebener writes, "The implication in the words, 'If it was there,' that the city is not there in front of her eyes, is reminiscent of Adela's unseeing relation to her surroundings" (620). And also like Adela,

Elizete spends the majority of her time thinking about the place she was before. The narrator tells us that "... further into the maze; she thought that she could smell the sea as she moved along the grid of pavements and alleys and houses all the same, brown bricked windows sealed forever" (53). And, finally, like Adela, she begins to empty herself of the very words to describe (or connect) to the place. Elizete thinks, "Intention. Intention is what she could not make out. She could not get her mind to recognize this place. Jesus, she was making so many mistakes not being here, in her mind. Only her body reacted—ran from the police, ate food when it had to, walked, walked and kept moving. What was this? A room, a station, a clearing, a road" (66). And later she thinks:

She would not come to know this place no matter how much she walked it, no matter if she set herself to knowing, she could not size it up. It resisted knowing, the words would not come. What could she call a place that could disappear or that did not exist without the help of people? What could she call a place set out so much to please and ease the legs, the heart, the next thought before you thought it; the next need until need was not a word worth saying? This city was imaginary that's all. That's all. (69-70)

Yet, even though Elizete comes to understand and feel much of Adela's despair over place, there are some particular differences. In Adela's relationship to the land, there is a distinction between what seems like an alienation from the landscape or ill feeling toward the land. Instead, Adela (and her generations) recognize not only a positive relationship with the land but also a sort of camaraderie in the ways that they both are abused and oppressed under a system of colonial (and postcolonial) ethics.

Ecocritical theorists like Michael Bennett have convincingly argued for the specific ways in which city landscapes contribute to the colonization process. Building upon the work of Trevor Jones and John Carter in "Manufacturing the Ghetto" (1999),

Bennett writes, “The element of enforcement, or policing, of ghetto borders in accord with the concept of the ghetto as an ‘internal colony’—a concept that makes a fundamental connection between the processes of international capital and domestic economic planning and public policy. In this context, Carter and Jones continue, ‘the ghetto may be interpreted as the ‘Third World within’ ...” (170). Canada’s cities, especially when thought of as the “third world within,” would seem neither refuge nor point of natural communion. While Elizete seems alienated from the landscape, she is not. Because the landscape (its weather, architecture, rhythm, etc.) is so different from the island, Elizete is disorientated and intimidated by it. But what the previous quote about the imaginary city demonstrates is that it is her lack of connection to people, not the place that is truly alienating. In fact, there are aspects of her new environment that Elizete actually enjoys. The narrator says, “...she loved the train. The going going of it, the squealing squealing belly of it. And the way no one could get off except where it stopped. Here she began to love whatever held everyone still, like heavy rain or snow storms or bus strikes” (67). In an analysis of Audre Lorde’s “city” poetry, ecocritic Kathleen Wallace writes, “Lorde renders her position here within the dynamic of choice: between flight and staying put, between the ‘good earth’ and the city’s ‘shitty stone,’ and between ‘loving trees’ and ‘loving women’”(8). Wallace also writes:

If [Lorde’s poetry] reads more as an ecological decision to remain committed to one’s home place, even if that place is an atypical environment—an urban area that can be hostile to people of color, women, homosexuals, and even trees. For Lorde, humans and culture are as natural as trees: The degradation of people and places is unnatural. (8)

Wallace's analysis of Lorde offers some insightful corollaries for an analysis of Brand. Elizete, like the speaker of Lorde's poems, is caught within a dynamic of choice. And Wallace's notion that the city can provide as much of the natural as "good earth" characterizes Elizete's position to some extent. The environments themselves are neither hostile nor good, yet they are both subject to abuses Elizete can identify with. And, indeed, in both places, Elizete finds some point of connection to the landscape. While Elizete remains caught in an ethics of choice, or the dynamic of choice Wallace presents, the land itself—be it island or northern city—exists outside of the ethics of choice, as it (whether it be grass, tree, wood, brick, or metal) is always something that is imposed upon. And this is what constitutes the major difference between Adela and Elizete's experience. Though she is very much connected to Adela's experience of place, Elizete recognizes that a relationship to the landscape cannot exist outside the context of a relationship with other people. If, like people, the landscape is a victim of colonial choice and consequence, any movement toward autonomy must similarly involve relationships with both people and the landscape.

However, while Elizete seems to recognize this on some level, again, this recognition does not happen with any linear progression. Elizete continues to wrestle with the prospect of reconciling people and place. The narrator says, "The thing was she had no one here. Her names would not do for this place ... This was a place she had no feeling for except the feeling of escape" (70-71). But within a few lines, Elizete decides, "She would take a chance on a place with no one she knew. All the places with someone, some relative, some known stranger, all those places had chewed her up so perhaps she had found emptiness enough to fill her up here" (Brand 71). Instead of merely filling up

Adela's empty spaces, Elizete is able to do as much for herself, and regardless of what happens to her as a result, this is an important moment for her and for the novel's exploration of Caribbean female identity.

Negotiating Love and Loss

The second trauma that the text attempts to negotiate is the historical negation of love and the diminished life of the soul under colonial rule and its aftermath. The text does this by returning to the moment of Elizete's departure from the island. While her departure is certainly facilitated by the early experience she has with the transcendental aspect of choice in scenes like burning the rice and the death of her caretaker, the impetus for her move to Canada is her initiation and total immersion in romantic love and sexual passion. In "Sexual Citizenship and Caribbean-Canadian Fiction: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," (1999) Heather Smyth centralizes the character's sexual orientation by connecting it to a utopian understanding of place. It is from those instances in which both Adela and Elizete refer to their environments as "no where" or "no place" that Smyth draws her utopian connection. Smyth first establishes the connection by pointing to the fact that in the original translation of Thomas Moore's work, "*ou-topos*, or utopia, means 'no place.'" For Smyth, the novel's constant references to no place suggests that part of the ethical project of Brand's novel is to highlight the specific displacement of Caribbean lesbians, writing that a "pattern for this sense of dispossession is set in the story of Adela" (13). Additionally, according to Smyth, Brand's repeated use of "no where" and "no place" also suggests "a dialectic that requires two mutual strategies: a utopic assertion of Caribbean lesbians' *belonging* in Caribbean space, through a connection between lesbian erotics and

Caribbean space; and an activist assertion that belonging is found through political activity, the attempt ultimately to create a social utopia" (15). Yet, there are important distinctions to be made between Smyth's understanding of the sort of activism prompted by the text and that which I suggest. The primary among these is the sort of "world" that is created by the text. Rather than an attempt at replacing the real world with utopic space, Brand's interaction with the reader is one that generates multiple realities. Iser writes:

In literary fictions, existing worlds are overstepped, and although they are individually still recognizable, they are set in a context that defamiliarizes them. Thus both lie and literature contain two worlds: the lie incorporates the truth and the purpose for which it must be concealed; literary fictions incorporate an identifiable reality that is subjected to an unforeseeable refashioning. And when we describe fictionalizing as an act of overstepping, we must bear in mind that the reality overstepped is not left behind: it remains present, thereby imbuing fiction with a duality that may be exploited for different purposes. ("The Significance of Fictionalizing"
1)

For Brand, the world of the possible, the world of activist interaction, must remain juxtaposed with her replication of the real world in order for any change in the reader (change in ideals or change in action) to occur.

This chapter's organizing concern with the dual trajectories of choice and consequence in Brand's novel echoes Smyth's notion of two mutual strategies in some ways. In the broadest sense, both arguments look at the ways that landscape, or place, and love have participated in both the dispossession and the reclamation of an autonomous Caribbean female identity. But ultimately, Smyth argues two things: 1) that whatever intellectual or artistic space is carved out acts as a legitimizing agent for queerness in the

Caribbean; 2) that these links, between the body, sexuality, and nature, are primarily an exercise in philosophy and metaphor. She writes,

In Another Place, Not Here asserts a sense of 'ownership' over Caribbean space for lesbian sexuality and articulates it through a connection between lesbian erotics and Caribbean images. But the novel also suggests that, as a result of the various forms of oppression its characters are subject to, no place is home for Verlia and Elizete, except perhaps the metaphorical home created through political struggle and commitment. (Smyth 12)

While this chapter's reading intersects with these ideas, it diverges from them in significant ways. First, although there is nothing in the text to suggest that Adela is lesbian, there also isn't anything to suggest that she is not. It seems a moot point. Regardless of her sexual orientation, readers do know that Adela is forced into a loveless heterosexual relationship that does nothing but further her alienation, through her own withdrawal from life on the island and through a sort of nihilism that she engenders in her descendants. In this sense, the pattern of dispossession Smyth writes about rings true so that by the time Elizete comes of age, there really is no place for her. We get as much from Elizete's description of her life. She says:

...[W]hen Verl come along I see my chance out of what ordinary, out of the plenty day when all it have for a woman to do is lie down and let a man beat against she body, and work cane and chop us she foot and make children and choke on the dryness in she chest and have only one road in and the same road out and know that she tied to the ground and can never lift up. (4)

Brand does not identify in either Adela or Elizete's story, the specifically lesbian space that Smyth discusses. An additional reading of Elizete's life (sexual and otherwise) seems to also focus on the idea of love, spirituality, and a connection to the sublime—regardless of orientation—as a way of counteracting this lack of agency. The passage demonstrates

that the two main sources of the dryness in Elizete's chest is an inability to direct her own mobility and her inability to explore love and sexuality on her own terms. The fact that she ends up discovering love and the life of the soul through a homosexual relationship remains rooted in this notion of ethical choice, or, her right to think, choose, decide, move, stay, love, and do whatever she pleases.

Secondly, given the amount of attention Brand pays to the environment and the women's relationship to the environment, Smyth's idea that the novel separates the women and their search for identity from the material realities of place or from the sort of spiritual heights that can occur only through direct connection to the physical landscape is one that I disagree with. Though the majority of my analysis has focused on Elizete, one example of the importance of physical landscape, is in the parallel story of Verlia's quest for environmental justice. This quest manifests her promotion of land rights on the plantation—Elizete even says at one point, "That was Verlia love, the people buried in the field" (84); her unequivocal belief in the solidarity between the people and the land against the tyranny of imperialism. Toward the end of her life, Verlia is shocked to think, "... it was as if the world divided, people were not joined to it but divided and what they did was inconsequential to the earth, the sky, the river, the air dense with its own business. Not even the earth sided with them and that in the end was unbearable" (116). Yet even though Verlia's notion that the landscape would come to her aid is mistaken, she still comes to understand the value of nature's detached constancy. Ultimately, she understands the inherent hope embodied by the foundational place of nature in the system of life just before she leaps of the cliff; she thinks, "Cicadas, bees, busy with their cartography, their sound like tender glass above, holding these few things, waiting to set

them down again, the simple geography of dirt and water, intact, the way only they knew it, holding the name of the place in their voices, screaming so that the war would pass, interminably pass” (117). Though this moment is marked by death and violence, as so much of the novel is, the world of human frailty and impermanence is linked to another world in which all violence shall pass.

Yet, to return Elizete, and to the novel’s focus on and equal promotion of an emotional connection to the land, a look at the novel’s treatment of love and sexuality, shows Brand’s clear emotional commitment to and dependence on the land. When Elizete first sees Verlia, Elizete is laboring under many difficult circumstances. She is working in a cane field in what appears to be a sharecropping system and living with a man who beats and further terrorizes her by holding her captive to the plantation grounds. At this point in her life, she is living through another reincarnation of Adela’s traumatic life story. Initially, Elizete relies on the land as a way of surviving the emotional onslaughts of her life. In discussing her abusive life with Isaiah—the man she has been *given* to—Elizete thinks:

I carried a mountain inside of me. The thought of him and his hardness cut at the red stone in me from sun-up to sundown. I went in the evenings after work to the sand quarry while he sleep. The salmon dank sides rise up around me and I was silent there. It was a place where I had peace, or I wouldn’t call it peace but calm, and I shoveled, the sweat drizzling from my body as I think of escaping him. (11)

Although she, like Adela, has been robbed of her right to choose a sexual partner, Elizete responds to it by turning to a physical relationship with the land (much like her caretaker’s relationship with the land) as a salve for her emotional scars and as a sort of elixir to shore up her remaining emotional reserves. In other words, if her relationship

with Isaiah cuts at the mountain in her, the sand she is able to physically chip away from the quarry builds that mountain back up.

Even after this, Elizete further strengthens the notion of an emotional and an aesthetic relationship to the land (a relationship that in many ways acts as an emotionally healthy, surrogate relationship) through the description of a dream she has:

I dream of running though, to Aruba or Maracaibo. I hear about these place. Yes, Maracaibo ... I imagine it as a place with thick and dense vine and alive like veins under my feet. I dream the vine, green and plum, blood running through it and me too running running, spilling blood. Vine like rope under my feet, vine strapping my legs and opening when I walk. Is like nowhere else. I destroying anything in my way. I want it to be peaceful there. The air behind me close thick as mist whenever I move and Maracaibo open rough and green and dense again. I dream I spit milk each time my mouth open. My stomach will swell and vines will burst out. I dream it is a place where a woman can live after she done take the neck of a man. Fearless. I dream my eyes, black and steady in my black face and never close. I will wear a black skirt, shapely like a wing and down to my toes. I will fly to Maracaibo in it and you will see nothing of me but my black eyes in my black face and m black skirt swirling over thick living vine. I dream of flying in my skirt to Maracaibo. I want to go to Maracaibo if it is the last thing I do. This black skirt will melt like soot if it get touched. And my face too. One day I will do it, for Isaiah don't know my mind in this. He too busy in his own mind now. He make his heart too hard to know anyone else. One day I will done calculate him.
(11-12)

This poetic monologue, which is characteristic of Brand's prose, epitomizes the level of connection—physical, emotional, spiritual, aesthetic—that Elizete has for the islands. Unlike Adela, or perhaps for Adela, she is again able to draw strength from the surrounding environment. Like Adela, this magical dreamscape allows Elizete exactly the same type of revenge on Isaiah that Adela meted out to the man she is given to, but there are distinct differences in Elizete's version that illustrate the negotiation at the heart of

the novel. For Elizete, the sort of vengeance she seeks does not have to come at the expense of her ability to maintain a clear sense of love and connection to the land and to other people. For example, whereas Adela's trauma leaves her unable to nurture anyone, including herself, Adela's re-imaginings are literally bursting with life. Instead of simply "spilling" children (an image much more akin to the description of a miscarriage than a live birth), Elizete's belly swells to fullness and bursts with vines that in their extreme fecundity enfold her, protect her, and provide her with a sense of peace. Finally, instead of rejecting love as a dead concept, this passage demonstrates Elizete's ability to recognize that the death of love comes from the conscious choices people like Isaiah make to harden their hearts. About this, Smyth writes, "... [I]n these early scenes, the novel invokes the Caribbean landscape for at least two purposes: it uses sensual imagery that firmly situates the women's love in Caribbean space; and it links Elizete's body to the landscape to provide a means of fantasizing her resistance" (Smyth 12). The love that Elizete has for Verlia is also a part of a broader renegotiation of the self that Elizete undergoes. It is a part of a broader sense of the sublime that allows Elizete the possibility of moving beyond the cycle of trauma in Adela's lineage. Corr makes a similar argument: "Though over-idealized by Verlia, Elizete's biogram of her place creates new coordinates for Verlia. By connecting with Elizete Verlia comes to a clearer understanding of her own mission in search of enlightened living" (par 16).

After Verlia's death, Elizete's move toward reconciling her story with Adela's story is threatened. She says, "Much later I myself get to understand when I look and see with my own eyes Verlia in flight, feel red explosion in my heart draining me of tenderness" (22). But even this trauma, which is perhaps the most devastating, Elizete

retains a sense of self in drawing on female, though not necessarily lesbian, love and connection. In one of the places where she lives in Canada, Elizete meets and is able to strike up a relationship with a woman named Jocelyn. Even though Elizete immediately recognizes the emotional and psychological damage Jocelyn has gone through and she identifies with it as she identifies with Adela's, Elizete is still trying to reconcile the loss of Verlia and the upheaval of migration—both of which seem to threaten her ability to choose connection rather than the alienation of spiritual death. Ultimately, though, Elizete decides, "If you had to resist friendship what the hell kind of place [is] this" (79). And this drive toward love, connection, and happiness not only sustains Elizete, it also sustains Jocelyn. In assessing the mutual benefit of their relationship, Elizete thinks, "Jocelyn, the memory of blood between her legs, walked to the window. Making a joke of it seemed bearable. The laughter would contain it better, though even laughter was unpredictable" (81). And the laughter, which here seems to represent the possibilities of the soul, is rather unpredictable. In fact, it seems continually under assault. This is evident in the fact that Elizete's life continues to be hard and unforgiving even after all of the emotional and spiritual work she has done to move past the trauma and subsequent despair of colonial ethics and forced choice. While living in Canada, she is raped again, and again the mountain within her begins to erode. This time the narrator tells us that "[w]hen he raped her she thought of sand, her face in the sand, the particles flying down her nostrils into her lungs; she thought of the quarry with sand so thick it caked off like brick. She felt her lungs fill up with sand. She felt her breath thicken, dense to sand" (91). But although this scene, like so many in the novel, is difficult to witness, it is still punctuated by the connections that Elizete makes. Right in the middle of this brutal

attack, Elizete calls out the names of women she meets in Canada (91). These names perform for Elizete in the same way that the names of the things (animals, plants, places) perform for Elizete on the island. Through them, Elizete is continually redeemed by her continuing effort to seek out meaningful relationships with the people and the things around her.

Though the novel ends with Verlia's story, and her suicidal flight, it is significant that Elizete is the one who actually survives. She survives because when all others succumb to a world of despair and disconnect in light of the choices made for them, Elizete forges on. She, unlike others, seems to be continually looking out the window at something sublime and transcendent glittering off in the distance. She, unlike others, does this through the loving connections she consciously creates with the people and places around her. In doing this, Brand not only forges a new lineage, a revised and redressed lineage of women for Elizete, her writing to the tradition of Caribbean female others does the same for all who would read her.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nature, Eroticism, and Communal Ethics in Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.

-- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

This entire study is built on the broader notion of environmental ethics that is expressed in these two quotes. Aldo Leopold's ethics are built upon an *abiding* commitment to the protection and maintenance of the planet (Leopold, Foreword, location 44, pars. 8-9). As of late, this has not seemed a difficult concept for people to understand or embrace. These "circle of life" talking points help individuals and communities sustain a positive vision of themselves while feeding the massive industry that has emerged around environmental awareness and conservation (Cramer). But to truly create the kind of community Leopold calls for, individuals must be willing to abandon the idea of themselves as stewards of the earth, an idea that in turn promotes a sense of ownership for a more egalitarian relationship (Leopold, Foreword, location 44, pars. 8-9). Pauline Melville's novel, *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, is interesting precisely because it explores this kind of philosophy: a philosophy that this work contends is discernible in the contemporary Caribbean women's literature discussed thus far and in ecowomanist texts generally.

It seems fitting that the final chapter of this dissertation should turn to Pauline Melville and the Amazonian region she writes about. First, Melville's own Amazonian heritage aside for a moment, the Amazon represents a significant component in a global move toward environmental sustainability. According to the Amazon Conservation Association (ACA), the Amazon is home to more than a third of the all species found on earth, countless medicines, and 20 percent of all fresh water (amazonconservation.org, par. 1). The UNEP's 2009 *Environmental Outlook in Amazonia* further contextualizes the Amazon's importance in the global ecosystem. It states:

Amazonia is home to a wide variety of species of flora and fauna and is an important area for endemisms, making it a genetic reserve of global importance for the development of humanity. For example, 107 species of amphibians were found in a single area of no more than 10 hectares in the Ecuadorian Yasuni forest, which makes it the most bio-diverse place on the planet for this group and one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. (16)

Yet even with the Amazon's enormous contribution to planetary resources and wellbeing, it has become the site of much environmental depredation. In 2003, Marie Woolf reported in *The Independent* that the Amazon rainforest was disappearing at a rate of 23 million acres per year, leaving only countries like Haiti with higher rates of deforestation (pars. 1, 5).²⁵

The Amazon is also an important point of exploration for this dissertation because of what it might reveal about the state of, and need for, environmental justice in the region. For example, despite the enormous industry built up around an over-extraction of resources in the Amazon, the 2009 UNEP report also states that "its inhabitants are found

²⁵ The 2009 UNEP report on the Amazon claims that by 2005 the level of deforestation was comparable to "two thirds of the land area of Peru or 94% of the land area of Venezuela" (16).

at a level of poverty far worse than the national averages” (16). When looking specifically at indigenous groups, this disproportionate burden is brought into even sharper focus. The UNEP report states:

The social consequences unleashed by the loss of biodiversity, frequently have long-term repercussions. Many indigenous communities see their traditional ways of life, their customs and the religious beliefs affected and their social institutions disrupted by the arrival of new forms or models of territorial occupation. For examples, indigenous villages in the Brazilian states of Amazonas and Rondonia have been invaded by farmers, ranchers, and gold miners, resulting in violent confrontations and expulsion of traditional populations from their lands. This has happened all over Brazilian Amazonia at different times. Not only does it lead to a cultural loss for the region (uses and customs) but also the loss of traditional wisdom on the use of local biodiversity (medicinal, agricultural or sustainable extraction activities). (209-210)

Besides the unequal distribution of wealth, agri-business in the Amazon has placed a tremendous amount of strain on indigenous populations’ ability to support their basic dietary needs as well as their ability to exist in some places. In the introduction to *Rain Forest Literatures*, Lucia Sá echoes this idea when she writes, “Nobody knows for sure how many native American lives were claimed by disease or assassination in the region during the first two centuries of invasion, but most historical accounts agree that they must amount to millions” (xiii). Though Sá writes about the historical disappearance of groups indigenous to the Amazon, such disappearances and major displacements continue into the present. At a conference on human rights and the environment, Melinda Janki,²⁶ an international lawyer specializing in issues of environmental justice, gave an

²⁶ Janki was also instrumental in drafting the Guyana’s Amerindian Act of 2005/2006, which provides: grants to communal land, leasing rights, intellectual property rights, environmental protections, mining and forestry oversight, and governance. Of the 96 titled Amerindian tribes in Guyana 91 have completed the process of demarcating their land, but as of 2009, only 17 groups have actually been granted titles. The Wapisiana of Melville’s text are not among the 17. (The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, Republic of Guyana).

example of the Wai Wai, one of the indigenous groups present in Melville's text. Since Melville's writing of the novel, the entire Wai Wai tribe has been displaced from its ancestral home because of "unprecedented flooding" that the Wai Wai elders have found "increasingly difficult to predict..." ("Indigenous Peoples [sic] Rights and the Environment: Issues and the Future" 3). These issues, the consequences of environmental use and the potential injustices therein, are all anticipated by Melville's novel.

Like the protagonists of *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, Melville is of mixed European and indigenous Amazonian ancestry. In addition to the characteristics of ecowomanism that Melville's novel displays, in the broader scope of this study, her presence represents a different perspective on Caribbean life, identity, and culture than that which has become most commonly represented as centered in the European-African-East Indian colonial experience. So while Chapter Three focuses on the ethics of choice as a parallel to environmental ethics, this chapter focuses in on communal ethics within the indigenous cultural context that Melville highlights. In all the works this dissertation has considered—by Walker, Goodison, Kincaid, Senior, Montero, and Brand—community and the womanist "commitment to the survival of whole peoples" (*In Search of xi*) has emerged as a characteristic or theme. Melville's novel also performs this kind of work and this chapter explores the commitment to community and environment that emerges.

The chapter accomplishes this by first exploring the role of voice in the novel and considering the role of the individual within the communal. The chapter then explores, through the text's Apollonian and Dionysian approach to nature, two particular

characters: Beatrice and Father Napier. Finally, the chapter considers the novel's exploration of environmental justice as social justice.

Community, Voice, and Individualism

In *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, readers find the generational story of an indigenous family, and larger community, struggling to adapt to the changes brought about by colonization while also struggling to maintain some semblance of their indigenous identity. One of the primary ways that the novel deals with this difficulty is by exploring the role of voice in the maintenance of identity within the community. Yet, ascertaining the importance of these identity politics in relation to the environment is difficult without first taking into consideration the way Melville positions herself as both a writer and a reader.

In her essay, "Wilson Harris: 'In the Forest of the Night,'" Melville attempts to outline the lessons she has gleaned from Wilson Harris's writing. In the course of doing so, she positions herself in relation to Wilson Harris not only as a fellow Guyanese but also as a Dionysian god of rapture, delivery and healing that she both admires and emulates (51). Though this brings up themes of the Dionysian that the subsequent sections of the chapter explore, the significant point to note here is her emulation of Harris's literary and social ideals. In "Magic that Battles Death: Pauline Melville's Marvellous Realism," Kathleen Renk also identifies Melville in relation to Harris as she remarks that Melville's work "draws on Harris's assumptions..." (104). While Renk goes on to explore Melville's inclusion of marvelous realism as an emulation of Harris, one of the thematic similarities that this chapter focuses on is both Melville and Harris's attention to the communal, but more specifically, to the communal voice as a link to the

environment. For example, in “Profiles of Myth and the New World” Harris writes, “I sense the collective or universal unconscious extending into voices that echo within the roots of nature as from the ancestral dead, from rivers, from rocks, from birds and other species, from the rhythm of landscapes, skylines, etc.” (Bundy 201). This quote highlights the fact that for Harris, there is no separating human beings from the rest of nature. Even the most inanimate parts of the environment, like rocks, are intertwined with his concept of the human soul to form a singular entity.

In *The Ventriloquist's Tale* there seems to be a similar understanding of the interaction between human communities and the environment. Melville's narrator recalls:

I went fishing in the lake of mud ... Poking around there, I dredged up from the bottom of the muddy lake a word. Yes, you heard right, a word, heavy like a stone and covered in moss. It made a ‘gluck’ sound as I recovered it from the dark mud that tried to suck it back. But there was no returning. I cradled it to my chest with a mixture of fierce excitement and possessiveness. I hosed it down. Cleansed it. Scraped the moss of centuries from it. Then I saw that on the word were carved other words, hieroglyphics, tiny rows of them, and they were in a language I could not understand. But I became aware of the noisy and voluble existence of words, and incessant chattering from the past, and as the babble grew louder, as the throng of words grew and approached along the forest trails, the savannah declaiming, some whispering, were joined, firstly by laughter and ribald whistles, then by rude farting sounds and finally by an unmistakable clattering that could only be the rattling dance of bones. (5)

Similar to Harris “sensing” (201) the dialogue between a human collective and the environment, there this is also a moment when Melville’s narrator/speaker becomes aware of this other world where the human and the natural, the sentient and the non-sentient, have been irreversibly integrated.²⁷ Interestingly though, nature seems to exert

²⁷ While Melville’s narrator remains unnamed throughout the text, the narrator seems, in many ways, an amalgamation of figures from various Amerindian creation myths. His discovery of the word stone, for example, is reminiscent of Makunaima of the Pemon culture, who is associated with transforming elements of both the human and spirit worlds into rocks. Of this, Lucia Sá writes, “Such transformations not only

some of its own thoughtful agency in both the Harris and Melville quotes. In both cases, there is a voice emanating from the natural world, and in both cases there is a human that comes to discern that speech, which initiates something closer to meaningful communication and interaction. Once it realizes its loss, for example, the mud in the Melville passage tries to reclaim the word that the narrator has taken from it: it “tried to suck it back” (5). The environment also becomes aware.

Moreover, both instances of communication/interaction seem to place the speakers, Harris and Melville’s narrators, in the midst of conversation that has clearly been going on for quite some time. Harris hears the ancestral dead (201) and Melville’s narrator’s word-stone is covered with the “moss of centuries” (5). Interestingly, in cases such as this both Melville and Harris actually seem to suggest that the *creation* of an eco-human community is a moot point, as one already exists. In “Incest and Ontology of Memory in Pauline Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*,” Pierre Francois similarly argues for the pre-existence of an eco-human community that most human beings have been estranged from. When considering the importance of the same “word-stone” passage in the overall function of Melville’s text he writes, “They [humans] have memory, which is the inner gateway to the lost language of beginnings and which yields an uninterrupted flow of meaningful, healing stories into the stream of everyday occurrences” (41). Using

explain rocks shaped like animals, humans, plants, or artifacts, but are also consistent with the idea that history, in the form of fossils, can be written in stone” (*Rain Forest Literatures* 12).

Both Harris and Melville’s understanding of the collective seems to coincide with Amerindian myth. For example, The narrator, in John Ogilvie’s 1940 transcription of Wapisiana myth, wherein Tuminikar, the creator, overlooks the world, “...people did no work, they played with children or the animals. They had a common language with all beasts, the birds and other forms of life, such as a few privileged people today still have” (“Creation Myths of the Wapisiana and Taruma” 65).

Harris's philosophy as a point of emulation and inspiration, the rest of Melville's text seems to consider how those on the periphery of this exchange, that is, those who are not able to discern the existence of this interaction and connection between human community and the environment, navigate this thin veil between the two.

In Melville, almost simultaneous to the narrator's discovery of the word-stone is the conflict between individual and communal voice, another one of the novel's primary themes. The excitement that the narrator feels upon discovering the word-stone manifests as a certain amount of possessiveness. The narrator says as much while clutching the stone (5). This discovery of something of great importance mirrors much Amazonian myth. Though there are many different versions, all of the myth that Sá analyzes, for example, begins with a discovery (usually of a food tree or tree of life) and the inevitable fallout from the hoarding of that discovery (a great flood or a great fire) (10-16). But while the text references Amazonian creation myth, it also departs from it in important ways. In the novel, the word-stone might be seen as representing the power of voice and, consequently, representation, and this is something that the narrator realizes he can use for himself. But this possessiveness only lasts as long as it takes for the narrator to also realize that he is not alone with the word. In "Patriarchal Colonialism' and Indigenism: Implications for Native Feminist Spirituality and Native Womanism," M.A. Jaimes Guerrero explains:

In a literal sense, *indigenism* means 'to be born of a place,' but for Native peoples, it also means 'to live in relationship with the place where one is born,' as in the sense of an 'indigenous homeland.' In this cultural context, an indigenous member has the responsibility to practice kinship roles in a reciprocal relationship with his or her bioregional habitat, and this is manifested through cultural beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies that

cherish biodiversity (that is, human culture in relationship to bioregion ...).
(67)

For Guerrero, a womanist reading of such a Melville scene would be reconcilable through indigenous definition in which the individual is not subsumed by the collective bioregion; he or she is merely accountable to it. More importantly, in the word-stone passage, this shift in ideal, the shift from the cradling of the word to his chest and his appreciation of the voices around him, is emphasized with the transitional word “but.” But for his awareness of his surroundings—other voices, other beings—the narrator would have the stone to himself. However, he would also be by himself. Ultimately, while the narrator remains a distinct voice, a distinct “I,” he is joined by a multiplicity of voices that constitute the character of the community as it represented in the text.

Parallel to the potential conflict between the self and the community is the potential conflict surrounding the notion of linguistic and cultural translation. That the Harris quote from “Profiles of Myth” says, “I hear” is important in that it seems to suggest that the connection between people and the landscape is not a readily apparent one. Though it exists, Harris suggests the connection is appreciable only to those who pay attention to it. Yet this becomes something that is problematized in Melville’s text as it means that readers must rely on the narrator to relate the goings-on of a world that they have not experienced. In “Alter/Natives: Myth, Translation and the Native Informant in Pauline Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*,” April Shemak writes, “Translation thus becomes a space where the native informant wields a certain amount of control over native representation. And yet, while native informants may have access to information that outsiders do not, this ‘inside’ information remains partial and there is always the potential for its corruption” (354). And Melville’s narrator is a *deliberately* unreliable

source. In the preface he also says, “We, in this part of the world, have a special veneration for the lie and all its consequences and ramifications. We treat the lie seriously, as a form of horticulture, to be tended and nurtured, all its little tendrils to be encouraged” (3). This “lying” narrator may simply be Macunaima the trickster (Sá 21). Regardless, it is precisely this questionable account that actually protects the integrity of the subsequent story. Decisive texts leave no room for change or addition, but Melville’s does. In other words, Melville’s narrator makes clear that not only is he a single component of the communal whole but also that he is one in whose hands readers cannot place a need for a whole, or definitive story. Beyond his veneration of the lie, there are voices emulating from the word-stone, for example, that he does not even understand though they help make up the communal voice. Furthermore, the ‘need to know’ that Shemak points out is thwarted before it can turn into deification of the “native,” especially when that deification might be based a single source and a single representation of indigenous cultural life. As Shemak further asserts:

In lieu of retelling myth as a kind of untainted, primordial origin story, Melville’s narrative informant suggests that these origins have themselves been despoiled; there is no claiming a primordial past...As a ventriloquist who merely repeats a story, the narrator’s tale loses any association with authenticity and nostalgic nativism” (357).

This enables Melville’s narrator and her characters to evade a fixed, unchanging, and thus, essential identity (Shemak 353-354, 357).

Nature, Sex, and Violence

If Wilson Harris provides Melville with much of the inspiration that she takes in writing this novel, it is interesting that she sees him as a Dionysian god (“In the Forests” 51).

This suggests Melville's inclusion of a Dionysian sensibility in the make-up of *The Ventriloquist's Tale*. In the book, *Sexual Personae*, Camille Paglia explains how she sees the Dionysian principle working in relation to its Apollonian counterpart:

My theory is this: Dionysus is identification, Apollo objectification. Dionysus is the empathic, the sympathetic emotion transporting us into other people, other places, other times. Apollo is the hard, cold separatism of western personality and categorical thought. Dionysus is energy, ecstasy, hysteria, promiscuity, emotionalism—heedless indiscriminateness of idea or practice. Apollo is obsessiveness, voyeurism, idolatry, fascism—frigidity and aggression of the eye, petrification of objects. Human imagination rolls through the world seeking cathexis. Here, there, everywhere, it invests itself in perishable things of the flesh, silk, marble, and metal, materializations of desire. Words themselves of the west makes into objects. Complete harmony is impossible. Our brains are split, and brain is split from body. The quarrel between Apollo and Dionysus is the quarrel between the higher cortex and the older limbic and reptilian brain. Art reflects on and resolves the eternal human dilemma of order versus energy. In the west, Apollo and Dionysus strive for victory. Apollo makes the boundary lines that are civilization but that lead to convention, constraint, oppression. Dionysus is energy unbound, mad, callous, destructive, wasteful. Apollo is law, history, tradition, the dignity and safety of custom and form. Dionysus is the new, exhilarating but rude, sweeping all away to begin again. Apollo is tyrant, Dionysus a vandal. (96-97)

While for Paglia, neither the Apollonian nor the Dionysian is without flaw, her primary interpretation seems to tend more toward favoring the former than the latter, with the latter's emphasis on nature, wholeness, and sexuality. However, Paglia sees the natural arm of the Dionysian as a destructive force to be guarded against. In the introduction to *Sexual Personae* she writes:

Society is an artificial construction, a defense against nature's power. Without society, we would be storm-tossed on the barbarous sea that is nature. Society is a system of inherited forms reducing our humiliating passivity to nature. We may alter these forms, slowly or suddenly, but no change in society will change nature. Human beings are not nature's favorites. We are merely one of a multitude of species upon which nature indiscriminately exerts its force. Nature has a master agenda we can only dimly know. (1)

What she hints at here, and later explicitly says, is that nature is destructive because it knows nothing of the arrogant human sense of self. Yet in the very instance that she seems to acknowledge this hubris, she bristles at any deviation from the notion of human supremacy. This contradiction is evident in the negative way she characterizes the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Using phrases such as “humiliating passivity” indicates that she sees the natural as a lesser (not less powerful but less *deserving* of power) force, one that without thought or reason would destroy the superior human life form. Moreover, all of the things implicitly more worthy of preservation/authority (society and more specifically organisms who follow reason) are characteristics of the Apollonian.

Interestingly enough, Paglia also connects both sexual expression and female liberation to nature and theorizes that they function as a similarly corrosive agent. She writes:

Sex is a far darker power than feminism has admitted. Behaviorist sex therapies believe guiltless, no-fault sex is possible. But sex has always been girt round with taboo, irrespective of culture. Sex is the point of contact between man and nature, where morality and good intentions fall to primitive urges. (3)

And a few lines down she continues, “My theory is that whenever sexual freedom is sought or achieved, sadomasochism will not be far behind. Romanticism always turns into decadence. Nature is a hard taskmaster. Perfect freedom would be to die by earth, air, water, and fire” (3). The purpose in citing Paglia is that her interpretation of Apollonian and Dionysian paradigms falls in line with what other first-world critics, Nietzsche most notably, have to say (2-4). In “Mutilated selves: Pauline Melville, Mario de Andrade, and the Troubling Hybrid,” Albert Braz points out this trend in writing,

“Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* is a self-consciously postcolonial text. As one reads the 1997 novel, one cannot help but notice how the author is writing back to a variety of metropolitan pundits, from Darwin and Freud to Levi-Strauss and, most explicitly, Evelyn Waugh” (17). With Melville’s stated admiration for a Dionysian sense of the natural that she recognizes in Harris's work, one might expect that *The Ventriloquist's Tale* is in dialogue with scholars such as these and Paglia. In other words, in the same way that Braz asserts that Melville’s work aims to reclaim aspects of Guyanese cultural life from the misrepresentations of Western “pundits,” the same might be said of her reclamation of Dionysian characteristics. These characteristics, after all, correspond to the tendency toward many of the Makunaiman features of her narrator (adaptability, restlessness, creativity, lustfulness, selfishness, gluttony (Sá 17-21) that also seem to permeate the development of other characters in the novel. Indeed, there is an openness about sexuality in the text that mirrors Melville’s admiration for Harris’s Dionysian sense of the natural world. However, while there is strong evidence that the text advocates for the Dionysian, it seems to do so by providing a venue for the continued struggle between the two classic positions to play out through two of the text’s primary characters: Beatrice and Father Napier respectively.

Though most of the Apollonian and Dionysian tension surrounds Beatrice and Father Napier, the influence of each paradigm can be seen elsewhere as well. In returning to another moment from the preface, the ventriloquist also reveals:

In my language, hunting means making love with the animals. The hunt is a courtship, a sexual act. It is all a matter of disguise and smell. Make yourself attractive to your prey. Paint yourself in the colours that arouse them. We know which scents attract which creature. We know which fish like to be tickled where. We know how to remove our own scent so that an

animal will not get wind of us. We rub ourselves with whatever scents will allure the prey. We present ourselves as a sexual partner. (7)

Here there is an example of sex as the point of contact between man and nature, as Paglia has suggested, and it is, in fact, grounded in the potential for violence. However, unlike Paglia's assertion, it is unlikely that this intersection is any precursor to the downfall of man (whether civilized man or not). The convergence of sex and violence seems more representative of the salvation of human kind and any sort of society they might build. The hunt is the only means by which humans can get the food they need to live, and the likening to sex simply mirrors the reproductive process. That Paglia abhors the kind of community where proximity to those gory necessities of life is not, or should not be, a comment on the community's primitivism. Her distaste for the sex/nature/violence confluence is born of her notion that 1) this connection is always one of domination and 2) that it leads to human criminality and depravity. Whether or not there is grave consequence for these actions the preface does not tell; there is simply the implicit prompt for readers to continue on.

The dual narratives of Beatrice and Father Napier also highlight the dually empowering and potentially disastrous effects of a Dionysian paradigm in the creation of a viable eco-human community. In a community where people reside in a steady stream of "slow fucking," Beatrice, Sonny's mother, stands out as an adolescent because she never "paired up with any of the boys although most girls of her age were doing so" (125). According to Francois, "From the very onset of puberty, it is clear, then, that she has somehow been elected by nature to enact a different scenario from that performed by other boys and girls" (45). In fact, as she remembers it, her sexual awakening "had not come about through human agency" (126). But although Beatrice does not couple in the

traditional way, it does not mean that she is not engaged in the community's custom of sexual exploration. In a sense, the environment establishes its role as an agent in the community by taking its place as Beatrice's lover. We learn that "[t]he heat was making her newly sprouted breasts tingle and the hotter the sun became, the more she became aware of an incandescent darkness at the bottom of her belly, between her legs, in a mysterious place that she had hardly been aware of before"(126). That her sexuality does not surface through any sort of human agency is important in navigating Melville's politics. By taking on the role of active agent, nature may be thought of as simply joining the chain of domination that Paglia suggests is inherent in any sexual encounter. However, nature has nothing to gain here. Neither does Beatrice. For her, it is simply a moment of awareness. Like Harris's speaker and Melville's narrator, this moment necessarily involves nature, but for Melville it also necessarily includes all the pleasure of sexuality divested of any struggles for power. In "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Audre Lorde speaks of the erotic as a "resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (53). She continues to assert that, "in order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives" (53). The "mystery" that Beatrice uncovers in the natural world is a potentially empowering force that marks her entrance into an eco-human community by affirming the legitimacy of her own sexual desire. In fact, Melville emphasizes this fact as she chronicles Beatrice's continued interaction with the environment as she

discovered that the intense colours of certain flowers had the same effect on her as the sun. Branching off on her own to look for bark, taking all the usual precautions to mark her trail, she came across some scarlet flowers under a ceiba tree. The shade from the huge trees prevented much plant life on the ground. But these flowers seemed to burn the air around them. She stared, fascinated. The flowers blazed like sores. She could not take her eyes off them. First came the familiar tingling in her nipples and then the other feeling started up in the bottom of her belly. She lay down on her back under the huge tree and began to play with herself, her hand diving between her legs like a duck's head ... Later, Beatrice discovered that the vivid, electric blue of jacaranda petals started her nipples tingling in the same way. Certain blossoms with a particular vibrating wavelength of colour affected her sexually like that (128-129)

It is shortly after this experience that her relationship with her brother Danny begins.

Beatrice and Danny's relationship is a complicated one. They are of mixed ancestry, half of which is a vanishing indigenous community, and they are also lovers. The genesis of the relationship, however, is also part of what makes it complicated for readers. It begins as the result of Danny's jealous rage over Beatrice's attraction to a black coastlander brought in as a worker by their father. The narrator reveals, "For some reason he could not understand, the sight of Beatrice twirling round with this black boy made Danny feel sick and miserable. He wanted to drag her away" (160). In "Uncouth Sounds" of *Resistance: Conradian Tropes and Hybrid Epistemologies in Pauline Melville's The Ventriloquist's Tale*," Veronique Bragard asserts that more important than the act of incest or rape is Melville's attempt to problematize the issue of colonization and indigenous identity. It is, as Bragard writes, "... an extreme metaphor for the refusal to mix ..." (416). Indeed, just after the coastlanders arrive, "[s]everal of the older men from the settlement grumbled privately and said that these intruders were too noisy around the place and frightened the fish" (159). With the other men's reaction to the coastlanders as a

precursor, it is possible that readers are meant to understand Danny's behavior as part of a communal impulse to protect their indigenous way of life.

However, the relationship is also begun by rape. After an evening dance where Beatrice and the young black coastlander, named Raymond, exchange flirtations, someone comes to Beatrice's room and begins to have sex with her. Elizabeth DeLoughrey interprets this moment as a violent projection of colonial frustration. She writes:

In other words, Danny's denial of his European paternity mirrors his rejection of the hybridity of colonialism, which is then displaced as endogamous sexual desire onto the body of his sister. While Beatrice later forgives his deception and continues the affair, Danny maintains his masculine privilege, magnified in incest because the relationship is concealed from the community and he has 'no in-laws to trouble' him (Melville 1997: 172). (Quantum 74-75)

Having been guided into sexual knowledge by the sun and flowers, Beatrice believes that she is willingly engaging in a sexual encounter. Without minimizing the occurrence or significance of the fact that Beatrice does not know it is Danny, she is nonetheless a confident, sexual force that is unapologetic in her sexual gratification. This confidence and sense of sexual authority is certainly what allows her to easily forgive her brother's transgression once it is discovered. Beyond any familial affinity she has for him, her decision highlights the fact that his violent sexual actions hold no power over her. She is not humiliated, nor is she cowed in this moment. Bragard also argues that Beatrice "challenges the traditional image of the conquered land as a prostrate female body penetrated by white men" (422). Whether this moment, when she forgives Danny and begins a relationship with him, marks her solidarity with the men of her village in

preserving their culture or whether it simply marks her unapologetic sexuality, it certainly evidences her conscious, internally-affirmed agency.

Later, as the relationship with her brother continues, “Beatrice had no qualms about visiting other villages because, at heart, she did not believe that they were doing anything wrong. Any partnership that felt so natural could not, in her eyes be bad ... And she believed that everybody would agree with her secretly, in their own heart of hearts” (200-01). Melville's attention to such controversial sexuality is perhaps an example of the erotic power Audre Lorde famously writes:

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, ‘It feels right to me,’ acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all or deepest knowledge. (56)

Beatrice’s knowledge, born of her pleasurable connection to the natural world is a transformative power, a deep knowledge that enables her to create a space within, and linking her to, several communities. Linking this notion of erotic power to environmental consciousness, ecofeminists Mari Mies and Vandana Shiva write:

If men and women begin to understand sexual intercourse as their caring and loving interaction with nature, of their own and of their partners...[s]uch a loving and caring relationship would lead to a new understanding of sexuality— not as a selfish, aggressive 'drive' but as the human capacity for love, relatedness to ourselves, to each other and, by implication, to the earth and all its inhabitants. (345)

Making the additional link to womanism, Guerrero writes, “Native Womanism also has an ecological perspective, because there is also a connection between the denigration and subordination of women and the corresponding degradation and subjugation of nature through acts of ecocide ...” (68). Beatrice is the representation of many of the

characteristics that have come to typify the ecowomanist leanings evidenced in the texts under study: a sexual identity validated by a personal sense of morality, gender role, communal value, and environmental ethics. She is, as Paglia might write, Dionysian identification, a principle which, for Melville, is also steeped in the Makunaiman. On the contrary, Father Napier, as we come to see, represents Apollonian objectification.

In Wilson Harris's "Profiles of Myth in the New World," he states:

All cultures are subject to the ravages of unjust convention which may take the form of stereotypical purities. Take incest. Incest has been countenanced at times as a royal privilege to preserve the purity of the ruling line. But incest is also a dread abuse of the weak in so-called ordinary families. (Bundy 204)

In *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, Melville, as if taking up Harris' point, challenges the notion that Beatrice and Danny's Wapisiana bloodline and cultural values are not ones that need to be preserved. Unlike generations of European royalty, their coupling comes across as monstrous in the Western mind of Father Napier—depraved and characteristic of such "native" peoples. In this sense, Dionysian identification is not what has not led to depravity or criminality, it is, rather, Apollonian objectification and hubris that sees depravity in all situations among all peoples it (perhaps subconsciously) considers lesser. Sá's assessment of both historical and contemporary challenges facing indigenous groups similarly argues, "In addition to physical violence and expropriation of land, rain forest people were (and continue to be) subject to constant attacks on their culture by religious and secular institutions and individuals convinced of their own cultural and moral superiority" (xiii). Father Napier is the primary representation of such supposed cultural and moral superiority but even McKinnon, the couple's Scottish father who has apparently completely adapted to Wapisiana culture and lifestyle, is severely taken aback

when Beatrice and Danny's relationship is revealed. The narrator says that "[p]art of the shock also came in realizing that he did not know his own boundaries. He thought he was an open-minded man, a free-thinker, not restricted by conventional morality, but the news shocked and revolted him" (209). In this moment of realization McKinnon also knows that he will "leave the savannahs, that he d[oes] not belong, however much of his life had been spent there" (210). Despite the years he has spent in the savannah and the extensive kinship unit he has developed among the Wapisiana McKinnon's moral outrage is enough that he is ready, willing, and able to abandon this community, his wives and his children.

Through the characters of both McKinnon and Father Napier, but particularly the latter, the reader witnesses a kind of shame-faced notion of sexuality that is not only antithetical to community, but also to the safeguarding of the environment. On Father Napier's journey to "rescue" Beatrice and Danny from their mortal sin he sees a young Wai-Wai man that he is forcefully drawn to. He notices:

[t]he boy's hair was long, flowing and jet black. To the priest's eye he seemed so handsome that he thought immediately that the boy should be a model for a portrait of Christ. That night he wrote in his diary: "I have never seen a boy or girl so exquisitely beautiful. ... Like apparitions from a story-book." (188)

Unable to come to terms with his homosexual desire for the young man, Father Napier attempts first to translate it into a kind of religious rapture and then into the form of a fantasy text that is perhaps more amenable to his appetites. This notion is underscored later during the young man's reenactment of the indigenous incest myth:

Father Napier tried to exert an iron will over his erection as he gazed at the young story-teller. He tried to quench it. He prayed. He imagined his whole body cased in metal. He imagined Christ's image blazing in the heavens and as he turned his head away, he ejaculated uncontrollably and

lay staring at the damp thatch, filled with misery, shame and pleasure.
(193)

It is interesting that Father Napier tries to exert “iron” will over his body. The Apollonian, more so than the Dionysian, is associated with iron and, as Paglia writes, “the hard and cold separation of western personality” (96). Yet when Father Napier is confronted with his own sexuality, the Apollonian position which is “intellectually detached from the earth...,” yet “never separate from earthly power” (“Beyond the Straits” Hulme 51), fails him. And not only does it fail him, it shames him. Unlike Beatrice, who with her Dionysian association feels no shame and is able to form meaningful connections with both people and the environment, Father Napier castigates himself for his physical pleasure while he, moreover, physically and mentally dislocates himself from the Wai-Wai community. On this occasion, he turns his head away and later the narrator informs us that, “[t]he proximity of so many people made him uncomfortable” (189).

With the aid of Beatrice’s intuitive sense, her “deep knowledge,” she recognizes Father Napier as part of the threat to her personal sense of sexual right that is heavily informed by her connection to her natural environment and human community. Just before Father Napier apprehends Beatrice and Danny, just “[b]efore she could see him clearly, Beatrice could smell him. The soaking-wet cloth of his black soutane exuded a damp, gaseous aura like the smell of rotting casaba or a secreted compost heap. To Beatrice the stench was overwhelming” (221). His stink forewarns Beatrice and the reader of the putrescent ideals being spread across the land. Paglia associates the Dionysian with destruction because of its lack of restraint, yet we see Melville turning this notion on its head. The notion of destruction/rot as associated with Father Napier

recurs when he shoots a tapir on his way back to the couple's home village. "[H]e aimed at where he guessed the tapir's shoulder might be and fired. The men waded over the creek and gave chase but despite the trail of blood, they never caught it. Three weeks later, Father Napier arrived triumphantly back in the savannahs" (223-4). Father Napier does not shoot the tapir in defense nor for sustenance, he shoots it merely for sport or perhaps out of the frustration he feels among this "unruly" environment and people and their impolitic sexual pleasure. Here is the real violence in the sex/nature intersection. Father Napier does not even have the hunter's ethic to mercifully end the tapir's life in one blow. He happily leaves the wounded animal, allowing its suffering to continue. This assault on the environment intensifies the pleasure he feels in his capture of Beatrice and Danny. Interestingly, the tapir appears in much Amazonian creation myth a sacred figure. In her article, ethnohistorian Anja Nygren documents the pointed efforts of indigenous populations to reclaim their cultural identities in the aftermath of colonialism. She argues that many groups have attempted this reclamation by repurposing their mythology. For example, in the article she cites the retelling of the creation story by the Brisbris of Costa Rica. In it, God makes the Indians from corn and all white people from "the same soil [the corn came from], the body of the tapir, iriria, and made a person. From this person come all the white people. They come from the same earth" (41). This retelling further emphasizes the kind of damage done by Father Napier. By assaulting the tapir, he assaults a symbol of life that even he is beholden to.

But Father Napier is not the only one who disapproves of Beatrice and Danny's relationship. The Wapisiana are not overjoyed at the thought of their union. The narrator relates that "[b]y midday when it was quite clear that the monstrous episode [an eclipse

that harbingers the incestuous relationship between a brother and sister] was over and the sun had fully recovered, the community at Waronawa came to, rather shamefaced as if they had all been on a temporary drinking spree” (207-8). However, even though Beatrice and Danny are unique in the level of their sexual freedom and their relationship, the incestuous act, is not an act that threatens the stability of their community. The incest that they play out is a foundational part of their cultural myth, and is a mythic tale that links other tribes, like the Wai-Wai, to the Wapisiana in acknowledgement of even larger communities. In fact, it is because of their reenactment of myth—Beatrice’s connection to the environment, her sexual relationship with Danny, and her consequent conflict with Father Napier—that the narrator decides to tell their tale at all, thus enacting some measure of cultural preservation. Whether or not the community will eventually succumb to the various disasters presented in the text, their consciousness, the “I,” “you,” and “we” undoubtedly lives on. Beatrice’s eventual exile from the community is rather the result of something quite different. The narrator also reveals that “[w]hereas people had tolerated, although not particularly liked, her relationship with Danny, when they began to suspect her of being a *kanaima*, they were appalled and attitudes towards her changed altogether” (266). A *kanaima*, or vengeful presence, is a greater threat to community stability than incest, and for this transgression against their communal space Beatrice is exiled to the “ice coffin” of Montreal from which she is never to return.

Danny, on the other hand, (though he is the object of Beatrice’s undivided attention) evidences the disastrous effects of an estrangement from one’s sexuality and environment. Much like Father Napier, Danny comes to identify with the Apollonian more than the Dionysian. Just as Beatrice’s perception of their first sexual encounter is

quite telling of her identification, so too is Danny's. Danny is fully aware that he is performing a violent sexual act on his sister. Unlike Beatrice's domination-free introduction to sexuality, Danny's is inextricably tied to domination and violence. Even when Beatrice knowingly and willingly gives herself to Danny, he is overrun by fears of *vagina dentata*. We learn that "Danny could feel her contracting around him. He felt as if he were being swallowed. As if she were drinking him down. And he ejaculated into a black pit" (169). His sexual experience, which seems devoid of the kind of pleasure Beatrice has, is a continuous play of power, which he also inherently views it as an attempt to emasculate him, to rob him of his patriarchal power.

Danny's feelings of emasculation are also intimately tied to his estrangement from the Wapisiana people and environment, an estrangement prompted by Father Napier. When he first arrives in the village, Father Napier is appalled that McKinnon, a white man, has not attempted to educate, read "civilize," his own children. Partly because of Father Napier's incessant prodding, the children are eventually sent to religious schools in Georgetown where Danny is changed, spoiled for community life by Western teachings and morality. At one point after his return to savannahs he attempts to ingratiate himself to Father Napier by saying, "Fancy ... even after all of your teaching, these Indians are still superstitious" (246). Beatrice notes Danny's alienation from the group, and she comments to herself, "When it pleased him, Danny spoke as if he were not one himself" (246). Danny's eagerness to adopt Father Napier's Western attitudes not only separates him from his community, but it also contributes to Beatrice's forced departure. With Father Napier as his guide, Danny breaks off his relationship with Beatrice and quickly marries a Brazilian woman. Beatrice is willing to accept his

marriage and still continue their relationship, but Danny refuses to have any further sexual contact with her, regardless of the fact that by that point they already have a child together. As retribution for his intervention, Beatrice tries to kill Father Napier, and for this act she is labeled a *kanaima*.

After Beatrice's exile, Danny's desertion of the community and his own estrangement from the landscape is displayed in his physical body. Readers learn that "Danny's figure was no longer lean. Physically, he had burgeoned into a much heavier man than the slim youth who had obsessed his sister. His eyes had more or less disappeared, sunk into fleshy cheeks. Parakari and rum drinking had filled him out and his weight emphasized and increasingly coarse cruelty" (283). In his dilapidated state Danny tries to maintain a connection to the environment. This connection, however, is not one that is forged out of respect or ethics; rather, it is forged out of a desire for personal gratification. "When he disappeared, he would go into the forest on his own and erect a rough bush-house. There he relaxed and felt more alive. He could see and smell better. No one troubled him about clothes for the children, the failure of cassava crops or medicine for his wife" (284). Danny's sense of vitality comes not from his communion with nature, it comes from his shirking of familial/community responsibility. Though Beatrice's offense against the community is great, Danny's crime is against both the human and natural worlds that support his very existence. When thinking back on Danny and Beatrice's story as an old woman, their sister Wifreda can only think of Danny in this state of ruination. She says, "There it was again, the picture of Danny on his death-bed ... telling lies with his last breath ... Minutes later Danny died. Within hours his body stank so much they had to take it out of the house and the funeral was conducted with his body

on a table outside by the river” (86). Like the stench that precedes Father Napier’s traipse through the savannah, Danny’s unusually pronounced stench also acts as a kind of warning to others as it marks him for his crimes.

But even with Father Napier’s influence on the village, McKinnon’s desertion of his family and adopted community, Beatrice’s banishment, and Danny’s heinous life and death, the novel suggests that the community has been damaged, but not mortally wounded. It is in the second tale of a younger McKinnon, Chofy, whose struggle with the Apollonian makes his sexual desire even more disastrous than Danny’s, that the novel takes on a definitively somber tone. In a characterization that is eerily reminiscent of Danny, we learn of Chofy:

He belonged in the savannahs. His existence was tied into the landscape and the seasons, rainy or dry. Like many others, he resented the increasing number of alien coastlanders and Brazilians who were invading the region to settle there. But recently he had felt a small worm of dissatisfaction with his own life. It gnawed away just under his rib-cage. It made him want to get away. Usually, when he had that sort of feeling, he took off into the bush for a while. But this time the restlessness made him feel like striking out for somewhere new, even though it was accompanied by a warning reminder, somewhere at the bottom of his stomach, that any change was the beginning of disintegration. (14-15)

His wife, Marietta, notices his odd behavior: “[o]nce, he hurriedly shut a drawer when she came into the room, as if he were hiding something from her”(18). When Marietta revisits the drawer she discovers a photograph that features, “millionaire Claus von Bülow and his wife attending a movie première in New York. Mrs. von Bülow wore a low-cut, clinging, shimmering, white evening dress” (18). Chofy’s not-so-cleverly-hidden desire for an elite world of power and money that is accented by a sexually available white woman is cause for (his) discontent not because he realizes that this world has been

sustained by generations of poor laborers quite similar to himself, but because his position as native and other precludes his participation in that world.

When his languishing leads him to neglect his family's crops, he is forced to take a job in Georgetown where he meets a white, British researcher and intellectual named Rosa. In their first meeting Chofy proclaims his love for her. The reader is informed that, "Besides the smell of coffee and bakes, which made him hungry, he could smell something else sweet and unfamiliar that intoxicated him" (40). Later, the image of sex, imperial domination, and "the hunt," previously described in the prologue, returns even more powerfully:

He would stand gazing at her until she spotted him and smiled. It gave him the same feeling of alert excitement as when he had tracked a labba or a deer in the bush and the animal just continued foraging for food without realizing he was there. It put him at an advantage in the hunt. (329)

Other than its first mention in the prologue, this is the only other time that the text makes an explicit connection between sex, nature, and violence. This instance, however, is an inverted version of the preface. While the preface's intersection of these Dionysian elements brings to mind the life cycle, this encounter does not. The reader's awareness of Chofy's family and the obligations that have brought him to Georgetown divest this moment of any life. There is nothing positive that can come from this union, and Chofy knows it. His sexual excitement is fed by selfishness and an objectification of Rosa. Although Rosa herself has come to Guyana to research people like Chofy and their relation to and possible impact on Evelyn Waugh (a kind of parallel critique on the colonization of literary criticism (Bragard 418)), she is also Chofy's opportunity to participate in a system of excess and indulgence that he is excluded from.

Though Chofy gains some reprieve from his socio-political frustration in sex with Rosa, it comes with a heavy price:

The only thing he did not tell her was that he was married with a child of his own. He excised Marietta and Bla-Bla out of the story, hoping against hope that something would turn up to resolve the impossible. He did not think of the future and felt no guilt, just a terror that Rosa would find out and that everything would be finished between them. (302)

To maintain his new-found position, Chofy must abandon his family. In fact, for Chofy to have the life he fantasizes about with Rosa he must forfeit his entire community. Neither he nor Rosa imagines establishing a home among the Wapisiana. And it is Chofy's cousin, Tenga, who expresses the foreboding of disintegration that Chofy feels earlier.

When Chofy brings Rosa to Jonestown, Tenga says:

'They're the worst. It's like a zoo here. People come and stare at this village because it's the nearest to Georgetown. We smile and give them gifts, little pieces of craft and so. We who don't have shit, find ourselves giving things to these people. We don't show them what grows fastest here—the children's part of the burial ground'... We Amerindian people are fools, you know. We've been colonised twice. First by the Europeans and then by the coastlanders. I don't know which is worse. Big companies come to mine gold or cut timber. Scholars come and worm their way into our communities, studying us and grabbing our knowledge for their own benefit. Aid agencies come and interfere with us. Tourists stare at us. Politicians crawl round us at election times... Amerindians have no chance in this country.' 'I don't agree,' said Chofy earnestly, his eyes glazed with the rum. 'I think we have to mix. Otherwise we have no future. We must get educated.' Tenga poured more liquor. 'Let them get educated our way.' Chofy raised his glass to his lips. 'We can't go backwards. Guyana has to develop.' 'I'm not Guyanese. I'm Wapisiana. How's Marietta?' he asked suddenly. 'She's doing fine. And Bla-Bla too. He's out all day. Comes back at night like a bird.' (53-55)

In response, Chofy asserts that the Wapisiana need to "mix." Tenga continues, "'You say we should mix ... What to do? We're destroyed if we mix. And we're destroyed if we don't'" (55). In the course of their heated discussion Tenga also inquires about Marietta and Bla-Bla. And while his speech seems to confirm that the future of the community is

rather bleak, his simultaneous attention to the idea of mixing, consumptive intellectualism and Chofy's sorely neglected family serve as an indictment of Chofy's communal abandonment and his complicity in the disintegration of their lives.

In addition to his rejection of community through his indiscretion and his desire to align himself with the Apollonian, Chofy also inadvertently "gives up" the community to the American oil company. Through the narrator we learn that "[i]n deference to Rosa's clear-headed rationalism, Chofy suppressed his own superstitious fear. He had been brought up either not to reveal his name or not to explain its meaning" (301-2). Yet he does reveal both his name and its meaning to Rosa who, in turn, reveals it to another European researcher named Wormoal, who, in turn, reveals it to the American executives. In their first and last meeting Wormoal says to Chofy, "'Ah. I've been wanting to meet you ... The Wapisiana with the Wai-Wai name. It means 'explosion of waters', doesn't it?' He touched Chofy lightly on the arm. The touch reminded Chofy of the light fingering of the pickpockets in Stabroek market" (307). As the "American executives from Hawk Oil relax[] in easy chairs, drinking beer and gazing out over the city as if it belonged to them" (309), he is indeed pickpocketed as they "steal" Chofy's name and erroneously use it to refer to the seismic explosions being performed throughout the territory. In Bragard's Conradian reading of the text, this is another example of the ways the Wapisiana continue to be consumed by colonialism. She claims:

First, in reiterating Conrad's famous tale of greed and civilizing mission as 'cautionary advice on the vanishing Amerindian civilization' (Bonnic 17), she unveils new forms of imperialism: academic, ideology, cultural imperialism, global aid, consumerism and leisure, plundering the natural landscape. (415)

Melville's cautionary tale, while underscoring these "new forms of imperialism," also seems to link each permutation with the continuous assault on nature and the eco-human community.

Survival, Justice, and the Eco-human Community

The Ventriloquist's Tale performs several tasks in its quest to represent the ethics and responsibilities of an eco-human community: 1) it postulates the pre-existence of such a community, 2) it illustrates the interaction of Apollonian and Dionysian sensibilities in the connection to and maintenance of such a community, 3) it considers need for and exaction of social justice in defense of such a community. Paglia writes, "Dionysus liberates by destroying. He is not pleasure but pleasure-pain, the tormenting bondage of our life in the body. Dionysian orgy ended in mutilation and dismemberment" (94). But in the text, it is not the Dionysian that is associated with destruction or pain. In Father Napier's attempt to bring civilization to the community, he brings about his own destruction. For trying to impose his Western mores on her relationship with Danny, Beatrice poisons Father Napier, and in his drugged state he is marked by very specific symptoms: he is plagued by thoughts of fire and other natural disasters. First, we learn that "[t]he priest's progress through the savannahs had been marked by beacons, blazes, burning timbers, fires, flames and furnaces. Of the twenty-two missions he had founded in his fourteen-year ministry, he had burned sixteen to the ground" (250). Paglia refers to religion as the greatest tool civilized man has in defense against the ravages of nature (1), yet it is these very monuments that Father Napier destroys. As his illness progresses:

He was in a furnace ... Every so often a tremendous roaring engulfed him on all sides, as if the sun had turned into a jaguar on the attack ...

However hard he tried to pray and keep the image of Christ before him, the stories told to him by the boys always surfaced in his mind: the sun dressing the jaguar in yellow to represent him on earth; the sun disguised as a red macaw; the sun selecting a brown wife from those offered by the water sprit because the white one and the black one both melted. The jaguar sun roared and slashed at this skin again. Out of nowhere came a voice. 'It come like the sun trying to burn up the world.'...The sun hammered relentlessly down on the figure of the stark-naked priest picking his way slowly across the savannahs. (256-57)

Fire turns to the sun, and the sun turns to many other manner of animal. In Amazonian myth, such great fires mark the beginning of great transformations (Sá 11). And it seems that for the Wapisiana community it is the beginning of an era of expulsion for self-appointed cultural and moral authorities and their conspirators. In the end, Father Napier is the one left subject to his worst fears. He is the one left wandering in naked depravity. Like Danny, whose body putrefies at an accelerated state, this is natural retribution at its most vicious.

But this sense of justice illustrated in the text through a privileging of the Dionysian, is not a cure all. One of the texts many subplots involves the very real denigration of land—whether by pollution, corporate exploitation, or conflicts over land rights. This is something that Melville does not attempt to easily resolve. In Chofy's story, as the era of globalization is ushered in, there are greater consequences for the community when Chofy pines for a Western life. His betrayal also leads to the destruction the one remaining force of indigenous unity and social justice: his son, Bla-Bla. Like Beatrice before him:

Despite being Wapisiana, Bla-Bla felt oddly linked to them [other Amerindians], as if they all shared the same hardships, as if some sort of fate bound them together. Nobody spoke. There was a sense of defeat in the air as the sun slid towards the west. He walked on towards home. From an early age, Bla-Bla had puzzled over how he could make things better for his own people. He sensed injustice in the way they were treated

and it troubled him. Sometimes in his hammock at nights, he imagined building defences around the village to keep intruders away. He planned battles and attacks. (318)

Indeed, when Bla-Bla witnesses the Hawk Oil invasion and their subsequent unwillingness to help foster a sense of civility between the cultures, he recruits some other boys and they take it upon themselves to protect their people and the land they inhabit. We learn that “[t]he boys looked for stones, flat and sharp enough for digging. They worked like demons until their hair shone with sweat” (319). Though this scene, wherein they set a trap that disables a Hawk Oil truck, provides a small ray of hope for the future of the community, it is punctuated by a metaphoric natural battle, “Overhead, a tiny but persistent washi bird attacked a much bigger chicken hawk on the wing to try and get feathers for its nest”(319). The obvious symbolism here is that the larger, stronger, predatory hawk (Hawk Oil) will in all likelihood prevail over the small washi bird (the Amerindian people). According to Bragard:

The death of Chofy's son, caused directly by the company, points at new forms of imperialism which, despite their non-settlement and tolerant attitude, are as destructive as their former counterparts because they still disregard the fact that the Amerindian culture is 'tied into the landscape'. (418)

In fact, Bla-Bla is so determined to maintain some semblance of community and enthusiastic over the prospect of his father’s return to the village that he runs right into an explosion that the American oilers have dubbed “Chofoye” (Chofy’s full name), believing that his father has finally returned home. When Chofy sees his son’s small, broken body he is convinced that “[t]he expression on Bla-Bla’s face was a sneer of accusation. It seemed to accuse him of many things: of abandoning his family, deserting

his son, of not being able to keep the land safe for his children. With shock, he felt that he had lost not only a child but a whole continent” (345).

The end of the text recapitulates a sense of “a certain tragic consciousness” that Melville and the ventriloquist both speak out of. Chofy returns to the village, he and Marietta bury Bla-Bla, and the couple remains together. Marietta tells Chofy’s aunt Wifreda that she has been dreaming of eggs and Wifreda replies, “That is life coming back after all your problems ... Fertility and growth. Food too. It means hope and coming back to life” (352). In the last sentence before the epilogue, however, Marietta questions this line of thinking, saying, “Yes ... Or maybe I was just thinking about eggs” (352). Though the text seems committed to an ecowomanist sensibility that places a great deal of attention to the interconnections between women, community and nature, it seems equally committed to or plagued by its own tragic consciousness about the possibility of retaining an ethical connection to this eco-human community.

Moreover, if the final portion of *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* is ambivalent about the fate of the Wapisiana, Wai-Wai, and other Amerindians, the epilogue is even more so. In the epilogue the ventriloquist adds to the tale of the village, noting the time that a “Cosmetics Queen” came to the village and “set about organizing a Brazil-nut plantation” (356). As the narrator tells it,

The pay was good as she had promised. But it turned out that no one had time to mend their huts or plant their farms. Then it turned out that those who planted the nuts were paid less than those who harvested the nuts and those who harvested them were paid less than those who pounded them for hair-oil. Fights broke out as the wives of the harvesters left their husbands for the pounders. Turmoil ensued. Cries of ‘I goin’ break she blasted leg’ resounded through the forest. Heads bounced off rocks. Teeth sank into buttocks. Arrows thwacked into arms and legs. The village collapsed. We all headed for another part of the forest. (356)

The implication is that, because of the same imperial forces that brought about their initial colonization and devastated the indigenous population, the village featured in the text has come to ruin.

Whether or not the fact the ruined village reestablishes itself in another part of the forest in a positive turn of events is debatable. The structure of the text seems to suggest that the Wapisiana and other Amerindians and the land they inhabit will continue to be inundated by imperial forces that because of their lack of ethical concern and respect for the environment will have destructive impact on all that the land supports. What little guarantee of preservation the Amerindians have comes from the mythological narrator in his relation of the tale. As the ventriloquist exits the novel he leaves not with the revelation of his name, or anything that may prove a threat to his community, but with the promise of another tale and another opportunity for readers, real-world people like Melinda Janki, to take up where the ethical work of the text leaves off.

CONCLUSION

When we love the earth, we are able to love ourselves more fully.

—bell hooks, “Touching the Earth”

In 1982, residents of Warren County, North Carolina became the first African American community to organize a national protest against toxic disposal practices in the U.S., and for their efforts, more than 400 citizens of that community were jailed (*Dumping in Dixie*, locations 526 and 556, pars. 31 and 38). Those days and nights in Warren County mark the earliest days of the environmental justice movement in the U.S. wherein proponents of environmental sustainability began to link racism, and socio-economic exploitation to questions about who should bear the burden of waste in the nation (*Dumping in Dixie*, Chapter Two, locations 418-618). For me, perhaps the most interesting part of an analysis of this historical moment is that it was largely the women, most of whom were on the lower end of the county’s \$6,984 per capita income, who, with their children beside them, lay their bodies across the road so that trucks full of toxic waste would not be dumped in their neighborhoods (*Dumping in Dixie*, location 538, par. 34). That particular protest was unsuccessful. The trucks did get through.

But as a result, the movement that had started in Warren County spread and the role of women within that movement did not go unnoticed. Soon scholars like Noel Sturgeon began chronicling the role of women within the environmental justice movement and analyzing gender as it intersects with broader constructions of nature. In *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action* (1997),

Sturgeon quotes Giovanna di Chiro in an attempt to understand the impetus for the activism of women of color and working-class women with regard to the environment:

“Although most of the women in the environmental justice movement will, to some degree, assert that they are acting on behalf of the well-being of their children, their identity as simply ‘mothers’ is by no means always the central focus of their activism.” Rather, she [di Chiro] argues, women in the environmental justice movement see their activism as a defense of community survival, not just the survival of their own individual children, and in the course of their activism, ‘they break down traditional constructions of gender, race, and class and construct new empowered identities and political agencies. (emphasis Sturgeon 183-4)

Through statements such as these, I began to see the environmental justice movement, as evidenced by the Warren county incident and as described by di Chiro, as a womanist undertaking, with its commitment to the “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Walker, *In Search* xii). But moreover, I began to think that a more precise assessment of this kind of activism would be to look at it as an ecowomanist undertaking because it inherently connects the abuses of money, race, gender, and social justice to the poisoning of the physical spaces we live in.

In an effort to further understand the historical relationship between African Americans and the environment, my Master’s thesis, *Ecowomanism: A Beginning* (2002), examined African American literature as a cultural repository of these interactions and the feelings they produced within this larger community. In that project I found that the historical relationship between African Americans and the environment (particularly the environment of the South) was complicated and often contradictory. On the one hand, a review of literature by writers such as Langston Hughes, Anna Julia Cooper, and Toni

Morrison²⁸ revealed how biologically determinist theories of race disengaged African Americans from social, educational, and creative pursuits and how—despite deliberate attempts to invalidate racist arguments—those same negative frameworks were often reproduced by African American writers themselves (Navarrete 10). Additionally, for many African American writers, nature emerged as a hostile place. It was the site of forced labor and gruesome lynchings, images that pervade early African American literature and activist writing²⁹ and also appear in more contemporary works like *Beloved*. However, a review of the literature also found that nature, especially for African American women writers and theorists, could be a source of communal connection, psychic regeneration, and social justice. As one of the proponents of an undeniable historical connection between blacks and a hostile natural environment, in “Touching the Earth,” cultural critic and black feminist bell hooks asserts that, as evidenced by generations of pre-Great Migration African Americans, recognizing and affirming a natural connection foregrounds the struggle for black self-empowerment and is tantamount in the exploration of black identity formation and affirmation (2).

²⁸ See Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1921),” Ana Julia Cooper’s “One Phase of American Literature” (1892), and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) for further example of this contradiction between empowering engagements of natural imagery and natural imagery that reinscribe racist/sexist ideologies.

²⁹ A brief list of the works by African American writers and cultural critics where lynching appears in graphic detail include: William Wells Brown’s *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853); Ida B. Wells Barnett’s *A Red Record* (1895); Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow Tradition* (1901); Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s *The Lynching of Jube Benson* (1904); Sutton Griggs’s *The Hindered Hand, or The Reign of the Repressionist* (1905); and Angelina Weld Grimke’s *Rachel* (1916).

As that project concluded, I began thinking more about environmental justice in relation to colonialism rather than strictly in relation to race. In the introduction to the third edition of *Dumping in Dixie*, Robert Bullard identifies a similar link as he refers to African American communities in the South as part of the Third World (Introduction, location 82, par. 9, emphasis mine). I wanted to know whether or not Caribbean communities experienced a similar relationship with the environment, whether or not those relationships were complicated in similar ways, and whether or not women writers were articulating nature and the potential for natural interaction, in similar ways. My early research suggested that they were, and, as a result, this current project was launched with the specific intention to explore historical representations of nature and of the Caribbean environment as they are interpreted and invoked in contemporary women's writings across the region. The project also intended to explore the possibility of cross-pollination—between African American and Caribbean creative explorations of the environment and between the Environmental Justice movement in the U.S. and environmental activism and ethics in the Caribbean. I hypothesized that this methodological approach—both cross-cultural and transhistorical in nature—reveals characteristics of a particular ethics in literature, which I call an ecowomanist ethics. I use Alice Walker's writing, including her definition of womanism outlined in her seminal text *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), as a prototype for theorizing ecowomanist writing in the greater Caribbean, establishing its characteristics, themes, and prevalent metaphors.

When this project began, there were very few full-length works that explored connections between literature and environment in the Caribbean. At the time, Elizabeth

DeLoughrey, Renne Gosson, and George Handley's edited collection, *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (2005), was the only one in existence. In its early stages, this project attempted to fill that void. However, in the years between the publication of *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* and the completion of this project, several other collections have joined in the conversation. Yet, none focus on the specific role of post-colonial women in the way this collection attempts to. For its part, this project suggests that the work of Caribbean women asks a set of important questions in an interconnected way. While focusing on creative texts that engage different regions, religious affiliations, and ethnic identities in the Caribbean, each of these chapters asks similar questions about the historical production of both physical and metaphoric space in relation to identity:

1. How are these historical productions negotiated in creative productions?
2. How are the outcomes of these negotiations brought to bear on activist movements?

Each chapter yields interesting answers and additional questions. Chapter One finds that as it is invoked by contemporary women writers, the image of the garden disengages negative stereotypes about women of color. Alice Walker's use of petunias is a primary example. Particular flowers, like the rose, are also used by Caribbean women writers as a means of interrogating colonial identity. However, because real gardens tend to be cultivated and cared for, and not generally targets of PCB dumping, how much of a link exists between garden imagery and environmental activism? Though Jonathan Skinner argues that creative engagements with nature and environment merely refract *pre-existing* activism or, at the very least, activist inclinations, this connection requires further investigation.

While Chapter One leaves open questions about the connection between creative theorization and physical activism, Chapter Two closes some of those gaps. In its use of the frogs as an image, Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness* effectively links the devaluation of women and Vodou to the denigration of the Haitian environment. Moreover, it does so by suggesting that this devaluation is linked to a steady depletion of the island's physical resources. However, whatever conclusions may be drawn from a historical analysis of Haiti and any contemporary literary text is necessarily a work in progress. Even before the 2010 earthquake, Haiti was the poorest and most environmentally disadvantaged place in the Caribbean. After the earthquake, it continues to be in flux. Recent outbreaks of cholera, the proliferation of tent cities, reports of increased sexual assault, a generation of tent babies, and the destruction of much of the country's infrastructure it will inevitably emerge in forthcoming literature and will require further analysis.

Like Chapter Two, Chapter Three suggests provides a more tangible framework for building a bridge between creative expression and activism in exploration of response aesthetics, and particularly of the narrator's communicative interaction with the reader. However, I would like to further investigate the specific role of narrative voice as part of a larger activist voice in ecowomanist literature. Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) for example, begins with the narrator proclaiming, "By setting this story down, I ... am placing trust in the power of the printed word to reach many people" (3). Interestingly, not only does the word "bloom," a word Walker uses with great significance, returns again in Mootoo's title, the narrator's proclamation about what effect the printed word should have reaches the reader on a page adorned with various

insects one might find in a garden. There are crickets perched on the corners of pages as though the pages are leaves, there are washed out dragonflies just beneath the typed text, there are ladybugs at the end of sentences, acting as the text's own unique form of punctuation. This is interesting because it opens up even further questions about the textuality of printed language and the environment and whether or not it represents more radical egalitarianism between human culture and the natural environment.

While it doesn't provide fully articulated answers about the notion of radical egalitarianism, Chapter Four does find an interesting commentary on the viability of an eco-human community modeled after indigenous cultural values. It, like Chapter One, also raises questions about literature's ability to deal with rapid climate change and issues of ongoing environmental and social justice. Yet, despite these questions, looking at the literature as it exists is an important and *useful* project. In the history of colonialism, the printed word has proved to be of great importance. In many cases, restricting access to books and the ability to write was a primary means of restricting concerted movements for freedom and equality. For women writer's in the Caribbean, writing has similarly come to represent the ability to affect change, not just within one's own circumstance, but within entire groups of people hoping to reconcile the recurring traumas of slavery, colonialism, and, now, environmental crisis. In looking to this specific literary movement, we find that, like Mootoo's narrator, they are "placing trust in the power of the printed word" and simply asking us readers to do the same.

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