

Carnival Anthropocene: Myth and Cultural Memory in Monique Roffey's Archipelago

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Abstract

This essay examines the role of myth in and as cultural memory through a reading of the novel, *Archipelago* (2013), by the Trinidadian-British author Monique Roffey. Against conceptions of the Anthropocene as a break from the past—a break that repeats the myth of modernity—I argue that Roffey's use of cultural memory offers a carnivalesque relation to the world in response to the narrative's account of climate change trauma. Drawing on Bakhtin's classic study of the carnival as an occasion for contestation and renewal, as well as Cheryl Lousely's call for a "carnavalesque ecocriticism," this essay expands on the recent ecocritical turn to the field of Memory Studies (Buell; Goodbody; Kennedy) to illustrate the way literature mediates between mythic and historical relations to the natural world. As literary expressions, the carnivalesque and the grotesque evoke myth and play in order to expose and transform the social myths which govern relations and administrate difference. Since literature acts as both a producer and reflector of cultural memory, this essay seeks to highlight the literary potential of myth for connecting past traumas to affirmational modes of political engagement.

Keywords: Climate change, cultural memory, Carnival, Caribbean, Anthropocene, Monique Roffey.

Resumen

Este ensayo examina el papel del mito en y como memoria cultural analizando la novela *Archipelago* (2013), escrita por la autora trinitense-británica Monique Roffey. Frente a la idea del Antropoceno como una ruptura con el pasado—una ruptura que repite el mito de la modernidad—este trabajo argumenta que el uso de la memoria cultural de Roffey ofrece una relación carnavalesca con el mundo en respuesta al trauma del cambio climático detallado en la novela. Basando mi argumento en la teoría clásica de Bakhtin sobre el carnaval como una ocasión para la contestación y la renovación, así como la llamada de Cheryl Lousely por una "ecocrítica carnavalesca," este ensayo amplía el reciente giro de la ecocrítica hacia el campo de los estudios de memoria (Buell; Goodbody; Kennedy) para ilustrar cómo la literatura media entre las relaciones míticas e históricas con el mundo natural. Como expresiones literarias, lo carnavalesco y lo grotesco evocan el mito y el juego para revelar y transformar los mitos sociales que gobiernan las relaciones y gestionan la diferencia. Ya que la literatura actúa tanto como productora y como espejo de la memoria cultural, este ensayo busca destacar el potencial literario del mito para conectar traumas del pasado con modos de compromiso político más afirmativos.

Palabras clave: Cambio climático, memoria cultural, Carnaval, Caribe, Antropoceno, Monique Roffey.

Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.

Mikhail Bakhtin (10)

The era of intensified climate change poses a challenge for cultural memory in that material archives are often made possible by the very infrastructures putting planetary ecosystems at risk (Craps et al. 10; LeMenager 104). At the same time, climate change threatens to disrupt connections to place and history. The Anthropocene, while nominally a geological periodization, increasingly appears as a cultural narrative: a “theodicy” that justifies present suffering on the altar of a deified *anthropos* to come, promised by ecomodernists whose professional-managerial class ontology of the world resembles a logistics network (Hamilton 234). Rather than calling attention to the various and uneven material attachments in the world from the biological to the economic, this narrative announces the accelerated fungibility of relations. Within postcolonial contexts, such calls for a break or rupture with the past can serve to repress historical injustices. Moreover, they can erase resilient dimensions of traditional knowledge capable of responding to climate change or informing a critique of neoliberal “slow violence” at multiple scales (Nixon 2). Rather than despair, ecocritic Kate Rigby argues that “narrative fiction might contribute to the material-discursive praxis of learning more skillfully to ‘dance’ with the increasingly unruly elements of our disastrously anthropogenic environment” (11). But what would this narrative dance with shared vulnerability look like? To step out of the accelerating temporality of global extraction, financial accumulation, and climate disruption, is to risk accusations of depoliticization, of falling out of history into myth. Mythical thought is what the Enlightenment was supposed to abolish, but mythical elements may also provide narrative and aesthetic means for attending to the world’s materiality in ways that both acknowledge painful continuities *and* recognize possibilities for transformation.

In this essay, I argue that myth is an important dimension of cultural memory in the Anthropocene, as illustrated in the novel *Archipelago* (2013) by Trinidadian-British author Monique Roffey. In a contemporary realist setting, this novel employs mythical elements and narrative structures to offer an alternative to the familiar story of anthropogenic environmental change as a linear accumulation of loss or foreclosure of a future. Roffey’s exploration of myth, specifically the cyclical time of the Carnival and her reformulation of the epic, tells—in the words of the main character—a “story of the still emerging Caribbean” (Roffey 203). The recent ecocritical turn toward memory studies leaves open the role of myth in the formation of environmental memory (Buell 31; Goodbody 55; Kennedy 268). Likewise, it offers an opportunity for greater investigation into the role that texts play in mediating memory of the environment across cultures (Craps et al. 1). To write “Carnival Anthropocene,” paratactically placing the terms side by side, is to draw out both the risks and possibilities for narratively refashioning cultural memory in a dangerous time.

Archipelago is the story of a middle-class, Trinidadian family recovering from the loss of their infant son and house in a catastrophic flood during a tropical storm, one of many that have afflicted the country in recent years. In order to restore a sense of meaning in his life, the main character, Gavin Weald, takes his daughter Océan and their dog Suzy on a voyage to the Galapagos Islands in his small boat. On the way, the characters travel as much through the environmental and colonial history of the

Caribbean as they do their personal history, both of which are now linked through climate change. The wave that struck their home has left his wife, Claire, in a catatonic state of shock, while Océan suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and screams whenever it rains. Unable to confront what has occurred or to properly mourn, Gavin develops stress-induced psoriasis, an autoimmune condition triggered by environmental stress that causes his skin to peel. That “the flood flipped a switch inside him,” and that “his body is sloughing himself from himself,” can be read as an outward symptom of his internal dissociation (77). As the “sensitive processor of worldly experience,” the “history of the skin” is also environmental history; it is the membrane through which “experiences deposit sediments in our bodily memory” (Berardi 59). Roffey’s decision to emphasize the flesh as a material and affective membrane rather than as a primary signifier of ascriptive identity emphasizes environmental frames of injustice. For instance, Gavin’s ambiguous racialization is made visible in different contexts, such as when he travels outside Trinidad he worries people see him as a dark-featured kidnapper of his fair-skinned daughter. However, when his house is destroyed by the flood he sees himself as a white man receiving the media attention while poorer and darker Trinidadians are ignored. Through their “weathering” and involuntary memory, this multi-ethnic family is marked as a new class, subject to the visible and invisible permeations of climate change and environmental risk (Neimanis and Walker 563).

Archipelago sits between Roffey’s recognizably political novels, *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* (2011), and *House of Ashes* (2014), yet it is no less urgent. What makes climate change difficult politically also makes it difficult for narrative. As an unevenly distributed process, it is hard to link predictable effects to the motives and intentions of identifiable agents. However, the risk is disproportionately felt by the people who are most precariously situated in the global economy. As Rob Nixon argues, the slow violence of climate change is, not unlike Gavin’s psoriasis, “driven inward, somatized into cellular dramas of mutation, into unobserved special effects” (6). Yet in recent years, the intensification of tropical storms has led to catastrophic flooding and erosion in Trinidad, which has wiped out neighborhoods and weakened infrastructure. One such flood destroyed the house of Roffey’s brother and inspired the novel. She describes her brother as someone who lives a conventional life, “and around him the banking systems are failing, the ecological system is failing, his way of doing it is no longer dependable, it’s not working anymore” (Harris 76). The implication is that climate change is a social condition that is already being endured rather than a future to be avoided. *Archipelago* is not just the story of a particular family; it is the story of an encounter with environmental history of the Caribbean through literature.

The postcolonial ecocritic Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues that island writers are unable to separate “natural history” from the “diasporas of plants and peoples” that populate the Caribbean (“Island Ecologies” 300). In contrast to the “white settler production of nature writing” that understands the natural world as a *refuge* from society, she suggests that island writers “refuse to depict the natural world in terms that erase the relationship between landscape and power” (300). The living traces of colonial

history are inscribed in the landscape and embodied in the memories of its inhabitants. Following the poet Kamau Brathwaite (1983), DeLoughrey proposes *tidalectics* as an oceanic mode of dialectical becoming that is multi-directional and non-teleological (*Routes and Roots* 2). It is produced through the ebbs and flows of colonization, capital, tourism, cruise liners, oil rigs, non-native species, consumer media, and unpredictable weather. What is so catastrophic about *Archipelago's* flood for the characters is precisely that it seems to lack a connection to history and a clear relation to power. It comes as a large "brown wave" that de-differentiates objects and their relations to orders of meaning and significance. In this way, literature can function as connective tissue in societies whose cultural memory is disrupted by modernization and climate change.

In the era of oil, Stephanie LeMenager observes that "the petroleum infrastructure has become embodied memory and habitus for modern humans" (104). Given this, ecological narratives must perform a double task of fashioning memory and desire beyond the collective experience of petrocultural modernity without fully breaking from that experience in a way that denies the suffering it has caused, nor the myriad individual pleasures that it provides—including the experience of freedom as personal mobility and limitless consumption. To mediate this distinction scholars in the field of memory studies differentiate between "communicative" and "cultural memory" (Erll 28). Whereas communicative memory is limited to experience of generations currently living, cultural memory reaches further back into events and figures—myths and religious narratives—that continue to shape the "secular" present in profound ways (29). As the "transformation of the past into foundational history, that is, into myth," Jan Assmann contends that cultural memory not only generates the structures through which present is interpreted, in the strong sense it coincides with the consciousness of historical becoming (Erll 32). Roffey's turn to the "deep" figures of cultural memory as a way to reframe "surface" events expresses the urgent need to connect immediate experience with the longer time of anthropogenic environmental history.

Epic Circuits and Historical Trauma

Despite its critique of the oil industry, *Archipelago* won the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, sponsored by the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago, at the annual Bocas Lit Fest. Previous winners include Derek Walcott, and like Walcott, Roffey narrates the "still emerging Caribbean" through the canonical texts of western humanism. Her conscious evocation of Homer and Melville simultaneously reframes the literary traditions of the western *anthropos* by re-inscribing them through the cultural and environmental memory of the Caribbean. First, there is the role of the epic as the founding narrative of a community told through an Odyssean journey to feel at home again in a world that has become uncannily threatening. The characters interpret their voyage explicitly through Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, albeit from the critical perspective of Starbuck. For cultural memory theorist Astrid Erll, "literary afterlives" like these provide genealogies that establish material continuity between traumatic pasts and the present through mythic figures (3). As such, Gavin and his daughter are

“literary afterlives” of Ahab’s suicidal enterprise who are instead “saved” by a mythical white whale, a ghostly figure from an earlier moment of the oil economy that resurfaces amidst the oil infrastructure that surrounds them.

Archipelago’s main character Gavin Weald is a new Odysseus, one whose porous vulnerability stands in contrast to the classical body of the bounded individual. He is introduced as a burping, sloppy, comically depressed middle-aged man who falls asleep standing while peeing at work. After the flood, his psoriasis is a manifestation of failed efforts at putting up barriers, an example of what Cheryl Lousely describes as “patriarchal illusions of domestic ‘security’ as ecological self-containment” (121). Gavin’s condition clears up as he learns that he cannot recover from the trauma by cutting off himself and his family from the world. Through him, Roffey illustrates the exhaustion of the Homeric model. Odysseus is the classic figure of cunning; his subjectivity is formed through sacrificial acts of self-preservation in the process of overcoming an objectified, naturalized, world of dangerous others. Horkheimer and Adorno not only see in Odysseus the prototypical bourgeois subject, whose self-denial enables the present accumulations of wealth at the cost of planetary fungibility, but see Odysseus as prefiguring the “heroes of all true novels after him,” in that “he achieves his estrangement from nature by abandoning himself to nature, trying his strength against it” (38). However, Gavin’s encounters with nonhumans are moments of shared animal vulnerability rather than obstacles for the hero to sacrificially outwit. The novel begins as his failed efforts at self-protection are proving unsustainable. Indeed, estrangement from nature is his chronic condition, and he must learn how to properly abandon himself so as to repair the relations that have been severed.

In his 1953 book *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*, Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James identifies a similar critique in Melville’s epic. Reading the whaling ship a precursor to the Fordist factory and corporate liberalism of the Cold War, James finds in *Moby-Dick* a new vision of society that anticipates the crises of the century that was to come (96). “Nature is not a background to men’s activity or something to be conquered and used,” James writes, “It is a part of man, at every turn physically, intellectually and emotionally, and man is a part of it” (93). Through labor, the modern economy turns humans against nature and their own subjectivity, an alienating process that becomes more abstract in the “immaterial” era of hyper-finance and extraction. “If man does not integrate his daily life with his natural surroundings and his technical achievements,” James continues, “they will turn on him and destroy him” (93). This integration also entails rewriting memory so as to avoid instrumental uses of the past. Reflecting on his own relation to history, James argues that a certain kind of liberation from the past would be an “irreparable” and “grievous loss.” He does not wish to relate to his past as a tragedy, nor can he imagine a future in which this past has been excluded. James rejects the modern myth of escaping the bounds of history, yet also admits that he cannot “deny that there are memories, and West Indian ones, that I may wish to be liberated from” (*Beyond a Boundary* 59). By taking up Melville’s epic, Roffey is intervening in the same historical trajectory that Melville warned against, which now necessarily includes his own set of

characters as mythic figures through which metaphysical conflicts between society and the natural world are made legible.

The struggle to imbue collective suffering with meaning is as old as the epic itself, but *Archipelago* restages it in the context of climate change. Gavin is troubled most by the fact that “the flood had no meaning, no order; it was a catastrophe to him and meant nothing to nature” (244). However, the meaningless and the miraculous stand side by side, paratactically inviting the reader to join the characters in the act of establishing historical and environmental linkages of meaning. Contingency arrives also in the saving form of miraculous beings. Gavin writes a fragment of a Rumi poem “Zero Circle” that he has “committed to memory” in the ship’s logbook: “So let us rather not be sure of anything,” it reads, “Beside ourselves and only that, so / Miraculous beings come running to help” (78). They encounter a myriad of species which restore their wonder in a nature that “makes odd creatures, some which can seem quite *unnatural*” (75). This extends to wounded animals. “The twitching stumps” of a still-living turtle whose fins had been cut off “suggest the use of radar, a sonar call, as though the severed flesh is searching for the lost parts of itself” (167). When the albino whale surfaces, it is a miraculous confirmation of Gavin and Océan’s reverse *Moby-Dick* narrative, that theirs is a voyage to *recover* what has been severed. The whale sings to them with its “sonar moaning” across the gaps of material and narrative history (318). As whale harvesting was the first iteration of the oil industry in the Americas, Roffey poses the question of what it means to be observed and “studied” by this figure from the industrial and literary past (318). To encounter “oil” as a subjective being, to be viewed by this mythical living memory, suggests a different way of relating to nature and contingency. Yes, the past could have been otherwise and so the present might be redeemed. More importantly, however, this experience of seeing oneself *be seen* by this whale dislocates a vision of history grounded in the hero’s consciousness and reframes it within the immanent horizon of this mythical whale, a horizon which contains all later developments of the oil industry as well as the storms that has wrecked their lives. This return is a re-surfacing, a repetition as an emergence from the depths, that can be read as a tidalectical movement which narratively decouples memory from its anthropocentric infrastructure.

The recurring temporalities in *Archipelago* can be read as an effect of the flood trauma, as a repetition of past colonial exploitation in the present, and finally as a utopian desire for reconciling history and nature by the individual as part of the community. The encounter with the whale is an example of a mythic form M.H. Abrams identifies as the “circuitous journey,” in which the end of the journey is imagined “as ‘a ‘return’ to the beginning, but at a higher level” (qtd. in Coupe 64). “Each man’ will not only be ‘rejoined with other men,’” Laurence Coupe writes, “but also ‘reunited to a nature which is no longer dead and alien but has been resurrected and has assumed a companionable, because a human form’” (64). The circuitous journey is a mythic structure that post-Romantic culture and criticism inherit from medieval and classical sources. Trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra describes it as a “speculative dialectics” where “wholeness is broken through alienation and suffering that is transcended in a

higher, greater wholeness” (95). Translating this romantic myth into a political framework, Walter Benjamin argues that the present is full of pasts through which reunified moments might enable the “leap” out of chronological time into the “messianic time” of revolution (261). The mythic return of the white whale and the repetition of the flood are both redemptive occurrences that reconnect living time with such repressed or excluded elements of history.

What is unspeakable for the main character builds as a formal absence in the narrative itself. For one hundred pages there is no indication that the family had an infant son who drowned in the flood. It is Océan who finally broaches the subject to confirm the reason for their voyage (100). Gavin's continuous flashbacks to the moments before the flood are a symptom of his inability to confront the trauma, and a desire for protection that results in emotional dissociation, physically manifesting in his psoriasis. Meanwhile, his wife Claire experiences “a falling inwards,” becoming catatonic and nearly comatose since the flood (108). “She grew up with threats of hurricane, the bombing lashing rains, a lifetime of rainy seasons,” Gavin thinks, “Rain like that comes every year in Trinidad” (119). Yet when the familiar and comforting turns destructive, what is lost is not limited to people and property. One's very sense of trust in the world, confirmed by memory, is lost. Gavin's response to losing his child and house is to build “a stronger wall around it,” reflecting his use of memory as a kind of autoimmune condition (177). As Gavin tracks their journey at night on the ship, “memories haunt him” and his spatial calculations quickly give way to temporal ones (44). “Since the flood,” we are told, “one of his recurring fantasies is to track back to the days before it, remembering what they'd been eating, talking about, [and] who had visited them.” Because “the flood hit a week before Christmas Day,” “his favorite thing is to let himself be in that time just before his old life ended” (44). This circuitous orientation to time illustrates a struggle between involuntary and voluntary memory.

In his study of Proust, Gilles Deleuze argues that involuntary memory is based on “the resemblance between two sensations, between two moments,” that create “a strict *identity* of a quality common to the two sensations or of a sensation common to the two moments, the present and the past” (59). Océan begins screaming, for instance, whenever it rains. Each subsequent storm is not merely a reminder of the flood, but in some sense, *is* the flood. Another involuntary memory is the color pink, a reminder of the pink house that was their home. When they discover an abandoned pink house on the beach near Los Roques, Océan “squeals in delight” yet Gavin flashes back to their dog Suzy being washed away. All he can think about is how even in this “small secluded world,” this pink house “isn't safe either” from the waves (103). When they come across ruins of “the infamous slave huts of Bonaire,” their pink color establishes a connection between two histories (126). Explaining to Océan that the small houses were made by “black people from Africa” who were “forced to work here against their will,” he describes slavery of the salt industry. With no other frame of reference, Océan says it “feels funny in here,” “You know, funny. Like... Mummy” (128). Océan links the memory of the place with her mother's trauma while Gavin understands it historically. “The place is haunted no ass by the ghosts of these enslaved people, the sorrow here is evident.

This is a place of trauma," he thinks. "There are many such places like this in the Caribbean, spots where someone massacred someone else, or where slaves were housed, where the horror still resides in stones, in walls" (129). The material remains of the slave huts exposes a shared vulnerability of domestic space that throws into relief Gavin's atomized response to the communal trauma of the flood.

Where involuntary memory can become a circuit that mires people in trauma, voluntary memory can become a strategy to overcome this repetition. Staying with Deleuze, "*voluntary* memory proceeds from an actual present to a present that 'has been,' to something that was present and is no longer;" in other words, "it recomposes [the past] with different *presents*" (57). For example, as the characters reach the Galapagos islands an earthquake levels the Fukushima reactor in Japan and sends a tsunami wave across the Pacific. Moving to high ground, they are able to overcome their traumatic relation to the wave. Understanding that the wave is still "Nature" and, in the broadest sense, shares an identity with the wave that killed a member of their family, they recognize its difference through an act of voluntary memory. The second wave neither erases nor undoes the damage of the first. In fact, given the scale of damage and loss of life in Japan, this second wave is arguably much worse. But for the characters, the second wave enables them to recognize the plurality of a world in which both waves are present, as part of nature, yet neither necessarily negate the miraculous. Rather than mastering nature, the second wave enables Gavin to master the way he relates to nature. "I thought I was separate," Gavin tells Claire after the tsunami. "Me *against* the world. I wanted to escape that house, everything. But really, I'm part of it all, the earth, the sea. I can't get away" (356). The voluntary memory exhibited by the characters is a gesture of affirmation that recognizes how attachments to the natural world, whether negative or positive, constitute environmental subjects.

The environmental figure that destroys his relations to family, community, and the natural world, returns as the embodiment of reconciliation. In the novel's final passages, the mythical "brown wave" is transfigured into lines of Carnival celebrants: "the rain dances down from the night sky and turns every person into a slippery wet brown statue" (357). Gavin looks to the sky and locates himself by way of the Southern Cross constellation, and remembers it passing above him each year, linking this moment in an extended duration of exuberance. "He is Bacchus, he is Dionysus, he is a drunken sailor man, a wild man, a lover man;" according to the free indirect speech, "he is home, back, a person from this particular island, lush and green and fertile, Trinidad, the end link in the chain of this long and dazzling archipelago" (357). This communal reunification is an ecstatic alignment of multiple scales of memory within a cyclical rhythm. Instead of a sense of completion or fulfillment *after* history, as in theodicy, Roffey depicts "jubilation" *within* history through the suspension of ordinary time (356). In "greeting the sweet, sweet rain," the celebrants are not only welcoming the return of the familiar, but also the rains that are to come (358). It is an expression of love for a world even though it contains pain, injustice, and climate change. This "future orientation" has always defined the utopian dimension of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 33).

However, the close of the novel on Carnival celebrations may be read by some as a depoliticizing escape from history into myth. Édouard Glissant, for instance, refers to “Carnival time” as the “ritual exception” in the Caribbean plantation system (64). Yet, he observes that “within this universe of domination and oppression, of silent or professed dehumanization, forms of humanity stubbornly persisted” (65). In the current era of globalization, leftist critics have recognized the carnivalesque as both a description of postmodern capitalism (e.g. Slavoj Žižek) and a description of the protests against it (e.g. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri). How one feels about the carnivalesque generally depends on one’s conception of politics. Social change can be understood as a decision that transcendently cuts history, separating unfree past from emancipated present, or instead as an immanent becoming which emerges out of diverse forms of practice. Both conceptions lend themselves to mythic figurations. *Archipelago* follows the latter. As the narration explains, “an entire people don’t recover from torture in just a few centuries [...] recovery takes time; it is the story of the still emerging Caribbean” (203). Readers should thus not mistake the carnival as Roffey’s prescription for the climate crisis, but consider *Archipelago* itself as a political narrative act. The carnival and its grotesque aesthetic are a mythical response that enables the recovery and refiguration of relations between society and the environment through the derangement of nature and culture.

Anthropocene Grotesque

Bakhtin famously describes the carnivalesque as “bodily participation in the potentiality of another world” (48). This is not a world that is wholly other, but rather one that is recomposed out of the elements of the existent, allowing participants to affirm experiences and histories that have been repressed. The carnival, as political theorist Andrew Robinson argues, is “expressive rather than instrumental” (“Carnival Against Capital”). In what follows, I develop *Archipelago*’s carnivalesque expression through the aesthetic of the grotesque. For Lousley, the carnival is a site where “physical environments and environmental subjectivities are made and remade” (122). Rather than imposing normative distinctions on places and people, these sites expose “the normal environment as a tenuous construct that suppresses and denies an ecological world of relational flows of energy and desire—a comic, vibrant, grotesque world of porous bodies and identities” (121). “On an affective level,” Robinson writes, this “creates a particular intense feeling of immanence and unity—of being part of a historically immortal and uninterrupted process of becoming” (“Carnival Against Capital”). Roffey’s kaleidoscopic passages of creatures, cultures, and histories, produce this feeling of connection. The grotesque recombines that which has been excluded from official memory, bringing to life previously passive landscapes and creatures whose names bear the history of colonialism, while the grotesque bodies of characters transform the image of the heroic through their entanglements.

Océan is a compelling grotesque figure. The child character allows Roffey to introduce imaginative and unexpected associations whenever events are questions in the novel’s internal discourse. Often, Océan opens Gavin up to experience carnivalesque

moments on their journey. For instance, while snorkeling in Bonaire among the wildly colorful, angelic, and brain-like underwater beings, he witnesses “a crowd of neon fish, blue tangs, together against the red waving hair,” who “look like a section of a carnival band as they move together in a harmonious water-dance, part of something, but uniquely startling to the eye” (114). “The sight and emotion don’t match,” yet his mix of nostalgia and grief turns to joy when he sees his daughter transformed by the aquatic procession:

Her skin has turned jellyfish white and her arms hang downwards, limp in the turquoise water; her legs are spread, her yellow fins are wild and angle-poised. Her face is split by the mask; her eyes are far apart. He has never seen his daughter like this. Suspended in salt sea, hypnotized, breathing like a fish. She has gone somewhere else; she is like a creature of the sea... This is what he came all this way for, to show her this fairy land... she isn't scared; she's out of herself (115).

Suspended moments like this disrupt even the time-consciousness of their journey. Visual elements of the carnival—the mask, the human-animal hybrid, the mythical location—are all present. The experience of being otherwise among other beings is a therapeutic moment of generative association in which the characters playfully re-establish relations with the world that has injured them. Mythic metamorphosis through the carnivalesque transforms the world’s threatening excesses into a participation in the miraculous. The characters recover through this grotesque remaking of bodies and environments.

The grotesque also functions as critique when the characters encounter the postcolonial ecologies of species and waste. Gavin’s effort to reach the Galapagos stems from his desire for the ideal island, which has been immunized from anthropogenic change and saved from history. Following the trauma of the flood, his desire for what Emerson calls an “original relation to the universe” partakes in the colonial imagination of islands as remote, isolated, outposts secured by geographic distance (3). As DeLoughrey argues, 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). Because of this, Gavin “goes funny on the inside” when the Galapagos is used as a metaphor to describe the impact of domesticated and non-native species introduced on other islands (92). In Venezuela’s Los Roques National Park, for instance, they are saddened by the “toothpaste caps and shampoo bottle caps and plastic bottles” that have combined with seaweed, broken coral, and netting, in a field of “marine debris” (96). The presence of a pink inhaler, “a private thing,” hits home for Gavin. His sense of public and private is disrupted by the circulation of these objects outside the normal frameworks of human intention. Nevertheless, he considers the place “a small miracle, secluded from the world,” even though its protected status is made possible by “Chavez and all his oil” (95). “Oil has killed more creatures in the sea and on land over the last two or three decades than any other single substance,” he thinks, “Oil and sea don’t mix; oil does not dissolve” (95). Oil’s inability to dissolve, to melt, or to combine with the watery natures of the Caribbean is what makes it *materially* unassimilable, and thus *metaphorically* incompatible with any desirable future social-ecological relationship.

Anthropocene discourse sometimes affirms the “monstrous” side of the grotesque as it attempts to correct modern distinctions that have upheld practices of externalizing waste and displacing responsibility (Latour, “Love your Monsters”). Yet this separation is not universal. Karl Marx associates this separation with the modern bourgeois subject for whom Nature (space) is a backdrop for human (time) becoming. In the *Grundrisse*, he writes that “It is not the *unity* of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature [...] which requires explanation, or is the result of a historic process, but rather the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence” (489). As an aesthetic, the grotesque recombines that which has been separated, corrupting purity with hybridity. For instance, Caribbean writers have often gone “against the convention of falsely legitimizing landscape scenery,” having instead “conceived of landscape as basically implicated in a story, in which it too was a vivid character” (Glissant 71). The colonial system of agriculture produces an understanding that the environment is not a neutral agent in social relationships. Likewise, the image of the island as a tropical paradise, immunized from historical change, is a myth that upholds the post-industrial tourist economy.

When they encounter the Sea Empress cruise liner and its wealthy white Americans who are “voyeurs” and “not travelers” like themselves, Gavin observes that “the working people return to saying yessuh and to whoring for the Yankee dollar” (109). The town turns itself into a spectacle, while locals refashion garbage to sell tourists “dolls made of recycled plastic Coke bottles filled with sand” (109). The sight fills him with revulsion, as it brings back memories and histories of racial and colonial hierarchy. Océan, on the other hand, says that “it looks beautiful.” Her naive wonder at the Sea Empress enables Gavin to see it as “a grotesque and a spectacle in its own right,” and simultaneously “one of the wonders of the Caribbean” (110). Océan’s perspective offers a glimpse of the creative potential of what is often called “generational amnesia,” in that she encounters the world of beings for the first time without a pre-established interpretive frame. This movement from revulsion at injustice, injury, and pollution, to an aesthetic appreciation of contradiction, hybridity, and the miraculous, is made possible by the grotesque. The transformation of waste (excluded, worthless/worldless objects) into nourishment (sources of income) by the locals is evidence of a resilient and affirmational cunning.

Archipelago's environments expose a contradiction in the way landscapes are mythically naturalized and remembered. The postcolonial Caribbean ecologies enable characters to question the division between past and present waves of species. For instance, those brought by earlier colonization generate a sense of novelty and wonder while contemporary incursions of nonnative species produce a sense of dread. “Tall candle cactus, prickly pear cactus and wild donkeys brought by the Spanish five hundred years ago” populate the coast of Bonaire alongside “wild goats” and “lizards.” The latter are “like conquistadors with their spiked helmets and pewter body armour which... reflects the colours of the rainbow” (122). A local guide identifies a litany of species, composing “a vast poetry” of surreal names that bear the memory of those who assigned

them: “tiger groupers, honeycomb cowfish, French angelfish, midnight parrotfish, white spotted filefish, Spanish hogfish, trumpetfish, sand divers, West Indian sea eggs, Christmas tree worms, sea cucumbers” (115). This feeling is shattered when it comes to newly arrived lionfish. While lionfish originate in the Pacific, “six of these fish escaped from a broken tank in Florida during Hurricane Andrew, in 1992.” Because “Caribbean fish do not register lionfish as predators” they “moved south down the Antilles chain” like “an unstoppable invasion” (117). Gavin likens this to “hearing the news of a far-away grand-scale death; like how he felt when he heard of the Twin Towers, when he heard about Srebrenica, an unfathomable genocide in another world” (118). This passage illustrates how cultural memory may integrate anthropogenic ecological history, yet that same memory also risks an equally mythical naturalization. By virtue of the passage of time, certain species become constitutive of both the imagined and actual environment. The older invasion becomes easier to accept than the new.

Once something passes from the realm of communicative memory to the mythic realm of cultural memory its problematic status dissipates and it becomes constitutive of the place. A similar contradiction exists in architecture:

[W]hy does he accept the earlier invasion of the Dutch, the fancy buildings, the wild donkeys brought by the Spanish, and yet he minds the twentieth-century invaders, those who brought the casinos and Taco Bell? Because Americans are also New World—and they haven't built grand cities like the Spanish, the British or the Dutch. They haven't brought people, trees, plants, animals, languages. America is still young and has arrived in modern style, in recent decades. America has colonized invisibly, via cable and satellite TV (175).

This “invisible colonization” describes control over the means of communication and visibility itself. Aleida Assmann refers to these as “transnational memories” as a way to describe the transnational production and reception of cultural memory, as well as the “multidirectional memory” of the Black Atlantic and Holocaust diaspora (550). Such memories, she writes, “conceptualize new forms of belonging, solidarity, and cultural identification in a world characterized by streams of migration and the lingering impact of traumatic and entangled pasts” (546). *Archipelago* lastly interrogates the production and erasure of cultural memory by news companies of the global north that often create mythic (de-historicized) images of environmental disasters and nameless victims on the periphery of globalization—or at least the periphery of global attention. Akin to the images of the American Dust Bowl and displacements of the Great Depression, which depicted migration and hardship as acts of God despite the activist intentions of artists, the lack of context offers a distorted mirror (Fender 4). In Cartagena, Gavin and Océan watch CNN coverage of “something about floods in the countryside,” registering “images of crowds standing huddled, rain-soaked, houses broken and bobbing in water.” “Trinidad, Venezuela, the rains in Aruba,” he thinks, “these floods are here in Colombia, too; they're everywhere” (227). To say that they are everywhere is to depersonalize the experience, to generalize it to the point where it becomes part of the background condition.

While media networks help produce and shape the transnational memory, they obscure regional frictions, such as the racial, national, and class inequalities that shape the contours of climate change. Gavin's own experience is excluded from first-world narratives, but he encounters it transmitted back to him by way of regional disasters. While watching flood coverage of Venezuela, Gavin unexpectedly sympathizes with president Hugo Chavez and the impatience he expresses toward international reporters: "When *his* home was flooded a year ago in Trinidad, scores of people lost their homes; it didn't even make a line of international news because the north doesn't care about floods in the southern hemisphere" (70). By focusing on national "father-leaders so common in the Caribbean" this media coverage reminds Gavin of his own desperate attempts to protect his family (69). This sympathetic identification raises the question as to whether, like the ubiquitous leasing of Dutch extraction and refinery infrastructure by the Venezuelan national oil industry, Gavin may also be complicit in the family's inability to recover (142). Just as the sense of abandonment leads to reactionary efforts at private (or nationalist) securitization, so the self-abandonment of carnival might express a shared expression of trust, hope, and resilience, in the face of adversity.

Roffey's novel illustrates how new environmental relationships in the Anthropocene will not be created out of thin air but out of the myriad other narratives, texts, images, materials, and *myths* that compose the everyday lives of people. In the Anthropocene, the carnival represents a "rejection of that which is finished and completed" and holds open the potential for differing relations in the world (Bakhtin 37). By rejecting the "narrow and artificial optimism" of the latest round of capitalist modernization, as well as the apocalypticism of those whose *ressentiment* binds them to existing arrangements, a carnivalesque ecocritical imagination recognizes that "moments of death and revival, of change and renewal [have] always led to a festive perception of the world," *in spite of* what has been lost (9). The mythic references and grotesque figures of carnivalesque environments allow for generative derangements and associations that renew the past in the present. Contrasted with the communicative memory of the media, literary works are capable of constructing new genealogies of the present in ways that make "the process of construction observable" (Erl 151). *Archipelago* draws on the material and literary sources of this cultural memory to bring submerged Caribbean experiences to the surface. While it depicts the contested workings of individual and transnational memory, narrative fiction can also serve as an archive of cultural memory for future generations, and strengthen resilient forms of engagement in the vulnerable present.

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