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Shipwrecked Narratives
Literature and the Blue Humanities

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ABSTRACT

Through the intersection of different disciplines such as social sciences, environmental studies and literary studies, the blue humanities aim to critically examine the relationship between man and water bodies, promoting a disanthropocentric perspective. One of the most significant events is the experience of shipwreck, a traumatic experience in which humanity loses control over the environment and is reminded of its vulnerability in the face of natural forces. In his seminal work, *Shipwrecked Modernity*, Steve Mentz delves into this concept, proposing a shift in perspective from the traditional anthropocentric approach of literary analysis. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy examines the ship as a metaphorical vessel, focusing on its role during the Middle Passage and in the creation of African diaspora. In the thesis, a theoretical outline of this stream of study is provided, drawing on the works of Steve Mentz, Margaret Cohen, and Paul Gilroy. Through their studies, the topic of shipwreck and its capacity to describe our contemporaneity will be explored. The thesis culminates with the in depth analysis of two novels: George Lamming's *Water with Berries*, published in 1971, and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*, published in 1997. The aim of this thesis is to present a critical framework of the blue humanities and explore contemporary novels through the perspectives proposed by Steve Mentz and Paul Gilroy. Their critical examination will highlight how the concept of shipwreck and the metaphor of the ship crosses diverse historical periods and can thus stimulate a reflection on the Anthropocene era and its consequences.

INTRODUCTION

“The Blue humanities comprises a current of scholarly and artistic discourses that foreground human relationships with water in all its forms” (Mentz, 2023, p. 38). The Blue Humanities emerged as a stream of study at the beginning of the 21st century, with an initial focus on Atlantic, Mediterranean and Caribbean regions. However, in the 2020s scholars are widening its scope to include global, post-colonial and Indigenous narratives, promoting a more inclusive approach. “The core intellectual challenge of the blue humanities explores how water functions in and across multiple scales” (Mentz, 2023, p. 15). Water systems are deeply entangled with each other: the small, local movement of the rivers are connected to the vast movement of the oceans. Water can assume many and heterogeneous forms, liquid, vapour, solid, saltwater, fresh water, and the shifts between them are difficult to comprehend. One of the aims of the Blue Humanities lies in these interpretative challenges, engaging with the complexity and fluidity of this element:

The burden of the blue humanities follows water’s sinuous trails wherever they flow and traces their dampness in our environments and memories. Writing, thinking, and creative work that flies the flag of the blue humanities responds to water’s paradoxes in many modes, from poetry to literary criticism to history, environmental writing, and religious scholarship. (Mentz, 2023, p. 15)

The literary field is but one of the many modes and perspectives that fall under the umbrella of the blue humanities studies, which research bodies of water from a variety of perspectives, including sociocultural, historical, ethical and other dimensions. The core focus is the analysis of the broader social implications. In the early years of the 21st century, blue humanities scholars predominantly oriented their search towards a Wester-centric perspective of the sea, with minimal consideration given to other bodies of water or alternative critical viewpoints. The initial approaches in this domain centred on the ecological dimension. Blue humanities academics “entertain the propositions that the main problems and insecurities in aquatic ecosystems are ineluctably social and cultural; that the political system mired within the capitalist logic are responsible for the damage inflicted on the planet’s major waterways; and that the possibilities for any hopeful change are socially and culturally situated” (Oppermann, 2023, p.1). Since the perceptions and notions of bodies of water are socially developed, as some scholars assert, changing the behaviour towards them demands a change in the way people think about them. Therefore, the blue humanities suggests an in-depth analysis of human

interactions with water from different socio-cultural perspectives and presents analytical frameworks and critical ways for examining these interactions.

Since the dawn of Western literature, man has been sailing (Cohen, 2010, p.1). Odysseus explores an unknown sea beyond his control, populated by monsters and gods surpassing his physical capabilities. In order to survive, the hero must use his intellect and experience, improving his own technologies and drawing on his practical skills. His descendants, the protagonists of sea adventure novels, face storms, shipwrecks, sea monsters, cannibals and pirates, overcoming these innumerable perils thanks to their knowledge. There is nothing abstract about their metis. These stories explore a specific aspect of modern consciousness: ability. “This aspect is a capacity: a distinctively modern form of practical reason, which is the philosophical term for the intelligence distinguishing people who excel in the arts of action” (Cohen, 2010, p.2). The concept of practical reason encapsulates a distinct form of intelligence, one that encompasses various dimensions of the human existence, ranging from sensory perception to rational thought. Throughout the experience of life at sea, shipwreck serves as a pivotal moment in which marine knowledge, practical intelligence and resistance are probed.

During colonial expansion, literature portrayed the ocean as a multifaceted entity, serving both as a conduit for trade and an obstacle. However, this depiction is not impartial; it frequently reflects imperial ideologies, portraying the ocean as an empty space to be conquered by European powers, while marginalising the perspective of colonised communities. From a postcolonial literary interpretation the ocean is also a medium of violence, slavery, and displacement, establishing it as site of trauma rather than economic exchange. This dual nature of the ocean reaches contemporary realities, as stated by Mentz who captures present ecological and societal crisis through the term ‘Naufragocene’. “Inside the catastrophe, bodies feel disorder on their skin. (...) The sudden shock and pressure of immersion fractures ships, systems, and alliances. Human history has been enduring these disasters for a long time. Shipwreck, I submit, names the experience of multiple temporalities as clearly as anything” (Mentz, 2015, p.xii). Nonetheless, traditional sea adventures narratives persist, focusing on the seafaring hero who, through technical knowledge and experience, is able to contend with the forces of sea. However, these heroes must be critically re-evaluated. Their representation within the imperial literature was commonly racialized and denied to colonised subjects. “Each age conjures a heroic name, an idea of agency, epic or tragic, progressive or destructive, that powers historical change. (...) I offer representative figures, showing how each conception of time associates itself with certain human narratives and ideas of agency and change” (Mentz, 2015, p.xiv). Exploring narrative representations of shipwrecks, metaphorical as well as

physical ones, not only sheds light on contemporary society but also invites a postcolonial critique, enabling a critical analysis of our time.

It is necessary to articulate the structure and research scope of this dissertation with clarity, in light of the transdisciplinary and recent nature of the blue humanities as a stream of study. The present thesis is structured into four main chapters, with each one contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of literary studies primarily framed through the lens of the blue humanities. Particular attention is given to the phenomenon of shipwrecks, both their ecological and symbolical dimensions, and the analysis is influenced by postcolonial critique.

The initial chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the state-of-the-art in the blue humanities as applied to literary studies. Drawing mainly on the works of Mentz, Gillis, and Oppermann, it establishes the theoretical framework. In order to ground this frame in concrete literary analysis, selected examples are presented, including Sylvia Plath's *Full Fathom Five* and Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Exploring these poems reveals how ocean's imagery influenced modern and contemporary literature.

The second chapter, devoted exclusively to theory, presents an overview of contributions made by three major scholars: Margaret Cohen, Steve Mentz, and Paul Gilroy. In *The Novel and the Sea*, Cohen explores conventional works of seafaring literature from the colonial era, including *Robinson Crusoe*, demonstrating the central role of maritime literature in the development of the novel as a genre. In contrast, Mentz's *Shipwrecked Modernity* offers a philosophical and ecological reading of shipwreck as a cultural motif that encompasses the tensions of modernity. In his work, *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy introduces a postcolonial framework, interpreting the Atlantic Ocean as both a site of suffering under colonial regimes, and as a medium of cultural connections across African diasporas.

The third and fourth chapters are devoted to the literary analysis of two contemporary novels: *Water with Berries* by George Lamming, and *Feeding the Ghosts* by Fred D'Aguiar. In *Water with Berries*, the Barbadian author introduces a new perspective to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, centred around Teeton, a young painter from the Caribbean island of San Cristobal, who resides in London but yearns to return to his homeland to liberate it from colonial domination. While the ocean surfaces subtly as a theme, the postcolonial motifs remain continually present throughout the novel. The reading relies upon the theoretical framework established, particularly Gilroy's concept of diaspora and Mentz's notion of composture, with the intention to explore the topics of exile and identity.

Fred D'Aguiar *Feeding the Ghosts* offers a fictionalized account of the *Zong*'s massacre, portraying the horrors and traumas of the Middle Passage through the perspective of Mintah, a young African captive who survives the atrocities. The novel offers a valuable opportunity to examine the

ocean as a site of historical violence and memory, engaging with Mentz's analysis of shipwreck and Gilroy's interpretation of the slave ship as a symbolic vessel.

The final chapter of the thesis offers a comprehensive synthesis of the key concepts explored throughout the study. The core argument is reaffirmed, maintaining the assertion that contemporary issues may be critically examined through the intersecting frameworks of postcolonial studies and the Blue Humanities, consolidating findings from both the theoretical and literary analysis. Recognising the extensive and complex nature of the subject under discussion, the chapter delineates pathways for future researches.

CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Foundations

The scholarly practice of blue humanities has come to receive increased attention at the beginning of the 21st century, although many of the influential texts for scholars of this subject go back as far as Homer's *Odyssey*. At the beginning of the 2000s, various articles and works focusing on ocean-related criticism emerged. The term 'blue humanities' first appeared in Steve Mentz's article *Toward a Blue Cultural Studies* in 2009, in which he proposed that the new approach of maritime studies should be termed 'blue cultural studies'. Different terms have been proposed over the past few years to refer to this stream of knowledge, such as 'critical ocean studies', 'humanist oceanic studies', 'hydro-criticism' and 'blue ecocriticism' (Oppermann, 2023, p.1). As this is a relatively young stream of studies, the frontiers of research continue to change and evolve. Steve Mentz, who focuses on a literary approach, defines blue humanities in his article as a new way of thinking about humankind in relationship with the ocean, rather than in isolation from it. In order to return to the ocean, its own materiality and subjectivity, scholars work towards changing the anthropocentric framework with which usually ones relate to it. This shift in perspective entails an innovative reading of Western, and non-Western, literature:

This new maritime perspective does not view the oceans simply as bodies to be crossed, but as subjects in themselves. Reconsidering the ocean as ocean can open up new analytical frames for scholars of early modern English literature, including a newly dynamic, and disorderly, sense of ecological relationships and a different way of articulating multicultural connections in the early modern global world. (Mentz, 2009, p.1)

Søren Frank, professor of Danish and Nordic literature, analyses the historical development of literature and the seas:

First, despite their terrestrial starting point, human history and culture, including literature are profoundly entangled with the watery world. For eons, the oceans have connected countries and continents, provided food and other material resources for humans, spawned the cultural imagination of humanity. (...) The history of the planet and the history of literatures across epochs and languages include both the nonhuman and the aquatic. (Frank, 2022, p.12)

Despite the idea that human beings are essentially terrestrial, and their culture and literature are profoundly tied to the land, the sea has soaked every aspect of human existence. The most influential narratives that shape Western cultural history have the sea as their object and subject. Odysseus, Aeneid, Noah are some of the seafaring heroes at the dawn of Mediterranean literature. Ocean historian John R. Gillis outlined the development of this stream of study in 2013, stating: “The emergence of the blue humanities is a belated recognition of the close relationship between modern western culture and the sea”.

The 2010s marked the emergence of the blue humanities as a major scholarly discourse. This development was evident in the many different clusters and special issues dedicated to the subject in the academic journals of the period. These publications contain more than ninety separate essays, which explore the topic from different perspective and approaches. A literary perspective is analysed; however, that is just one of the many approaches investigated by the scholars. Water, as an historical subject, is perceived as a medium or an obstacle to human evolution, due to the geocentric standpoint usually adopted to analyse it. The sea, in Western-centric history, is viewed as a medium for trading goods and conquering land. Scholars, such as John R. Gillis, are now considering the central role of water and how it has affected human history, emphasizing the always changing relationship between humans and aquatic environments:

The journey to the shore was not the last but the first resort of humankind. For too long it has been believed that humans gave up hunting only when those animals became extinct. Now it seems safe to say that people settled on the coasts not for what the interiors lacked but because of the abundance that the seashore provided. It was there that they developed the first sedentary communities and learned to communicate and trade with one another—in other words, to attain a civilized existence. (Gillis, 2012, p.28)

The fundamental issue is to challenge the prevailing assumption that seas are just another exploitable resource, separate from the human realm. “Only recently has underwater archaeology challenged assumptions based on terrestrial excavations, showing the extent to which humankind has been semiaquatic, foraging not just in freshwater but also, perhaps more important, at the edge of the sea” (Gillis, 2012, p.14). The aim of the blue humanities is to demonstrate how human activities and the bodies of water are inextricably linked, “emphasizing [their] coextensivity” (Oppermann, 2023, p.3). In this context, the multifaceted nature of the ocean is recognised, studying it both as an international political agent and as a symbol, related to social dynamics and cultural influences. Through the study and understanding of the interactions between humankind and water, and their

evolution, the blue humanities seek to promote new modes of living with water. “The blue humanities has, therefore, induced new ways of interacting and thinking with water, and different narrative strategies to represent the contemporary urgencies about human-water relations” (Oppermann, 2023, p.4). Re-interpreting our relationship with it requires a certain degree of imagination and attention to the expressive potential of water bodies, what Oppermann defines ‘poetics of water’. This new mode of interpretation has altered human tendency to objectify the seas and our relationship with all which is nonhuman or more-than-human. Despite the recognition of the ocean and the seas as political objects throughout history, this current of study attempts to radically revise the geocentric and anthropocentric perspectives that characterize academic studies. Due to this reason, the blue humanities dismiss factors that have been central to traditional analysis of what it means to be human. There is a propensity to maintain anthropocentric characteristic while analysing the human-nature relationship, as Nature is perceived to be an environment that is proper to man. The blue humanities shift the focus to the ocean, a nonhuman environment in which the human subject has to strip himself of his anthropocentric characteristic in order to immerse in it. “Blue discourses also reject traditional conception of the human, (...) unther[ing] their literary analysis from terrestrial narratives that center traditional categories such as nation, race, and language” (Mentz, 2023, p.19). In this new approach, not only human categories are abandoned, but so is everything related to the terrestrial, which has been the main focus of the ecocritical studies. According to Mentz, “[i]t poses a blue counterchallenge to the obsessively green visions of ecocriticism. It puts water where land used to be. It is animated by the effort to craft new vocabularies and critical methods that enables a richer connection between human and water in all its forms” (Mentz, 2023, p.24).

The blue humanities stream coexists with other areas of research that deal with the relationship between human and Nature, with the nonhuman or more-than-human, and that reconsider human history from a different perspective than the common Eurocentric one.

The blue humanities are part of what is commonly referred as Environmental Humanities. One key aspect of this study is to shift the focus from a green to a blue ecocriticism. Ecocriticism studies literature and ecology from an interdisciplinary perspective, focusing on the relationship between humankind and terrestrial environment. Through the analysis of literary and artistic works, it seeks to highlight our interconnectedness with Nature and raise collective environmental awareness. Similar to the blue humanities, ecocriticism addresses the issues of climate change, pollution and environmental crisis caused by human activities. A paradigm for ecocritical storytelling could be represented by *Flow*, Best Animated Feature Film at the Oscar 2025. The protagonist, a cat, moves

within a post-human environment, in which the traces of our passage on Earth are still evident. The movie deals with several sensitive topics, such as grief and abandonment, analysing them as more-than-human feelings, universal emotions, immersing the viewer in an interspecies dynamic. In the film, water and its inhabitants take centre stage, speaking to the viewer about the consequences of climate change and the effect of rising sea levels without explicitly mentioning it. Despite the many similarities between these two branches of the environmental discourse, there are also abysmal divergences. Conventionally, ecocriticism, due to its emphasis on land, addresses stable and somehow predictable environments. Whereas, the blue humanities emphasize the unpredictability of the seas and the unstable nature of the ocean. Moreover, ecocriticism is usually bound to an anthropocentric characteristic, while blue ecocriticism challenges the nation-state thinking, due to the borderless nature of the ocean.

Among the theoretical approaches that challenge anthropocentrism, posthumanism is distinguished by its philosophical richness and heterogeneity. This thesis engages critically with posthumanist ideas, limiting the discussion to concepts that directly contribute to the study at hand. Specific attention is placed on *The Shape of Water*, Guillermo del Toro's movie that won Best Picture at the 2018 Oscars. Elisa, a mute woman, falls in love with a humanoid-looking amphibian creature, who is held captive in the military compound in which the woman works. The relationship between them overcomes the medium of language, consolidating through gestures and actions that can be interpreted beyond the realm of humankind. The interconnection between blue humanities and post-humanism in this movie is clearly depicted in the finale. After the creature resuscitates Elisa, the woman is transformed in an amphibian creature herself, finally being able to live with her beloved. Overcoming her human condition, due to the intervention of a more-than-human creature, enables her to live in an environment previously precluded to her kind. The film challenges the notion that emotions as solely human, expanding the scope of emotional experience and its potential.

The modern relations between humankind at the ocean have been reshaped during the colonial era; hence, this topic is the subject of reflection through postcolonial literature. Ocean-focused commentary is deeply related to it, particularly Black Atlantic and postcolonial Caribbean studies. An interesting example of the intersectionality between these two areas of study is Jean Rhys's 1966 novel *The Wide Sargasso Sea*. In her work, Rhys rewrites and contextualises the life of the character Bertha, the madwoman in the attic of Brönte's *Jane Eyre*, from a postcolonial and feminist perspective. Antoinette, the novel's protagonist, is uprooted from her life in Jamaica and transported by Rochester to England, where she is imprisoned in the attic of Thornfield. The arduous and impervious sea voyage from the Caribbean island to Europe reflects on the ambiguous nature of the ocean as a place that both connects and exiles, brings one closer and alienates.

The ocean and bodies of water allow us to analyse and interpret our relationship with nature, with human beings themselves, and with what is more-than-human. Scholars of the blue humanities often emphasise the ocean's quality of not forgetting. Thanks to this characteristic, it is possible to reflect on human history and the historical period in which we live today, freeing ourselves from our anthropocentrism. As Mentz states: “[t]o engage with the blue means to step outside our familiar land-bound concerns. Sometimes that is a welcome change, and at other times, it can feel catastrophic” (Mentz, 2023, p.25).

The Ocean as Metaphor

Metaphors have always been one of the most active forces in different languages, not only to enrich the semantic message but also to charge it with expressive power. At present, metaphors permeate everyday life, allowing for an understanding of the environments by relating different semantic fields. Metaphors relating to terrestrial scapes emphasise how the land is culturally associated with stability, predictability, consistency; sudden shifts are the exception, not the norm. One may just think about words such as 'roots', 'foundation', or idioms such as 'having one's feet on the ground', 'being grounded', which refer to the steadiness of an individual. These metaphors and idioms associate individual success with that which is secured, that which is unchanging; after all, a happy person has a 'stable life'.

In contrast, the sea and all aquatic environments are the realm of change, movement and fluidity. While the land is compared to what is secure, the depths of the ocean have been compared to the pits of the human mind, the unpredictability of the sea to luck. A multifaceted protagonist, the ocean lends itself to the representation of all the nuances of human life. Since the dawn of Western literature, the sea has been portrayed as a place of chaos and disorder. Although a means of sustenance and conquest, the sea is a symbol of anarchy, inhabited by monsters and fraught with danger. In both Greek mythology and the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is through the sea that the divine demonstrates its power. This role attributed to the sea, and later to the ocean, stems from its indomitable nature and speaks to one of human's oldest fears, that of not being in control of the environment. Similarly, in modern and contemporary thought, the ocean symbolises instability and unpredictability. This perception is mirrored in language, where a term like “drifting” evokes a sense of uncertainty. Yet this undesirability stems from the cultural relationship with the sea, a relationship that the blue humanities aim to change. A reinterpretation of the aquatic environments not as obstacle, but as a means to a different perspective a productive conceptual shift can be obtained. The blue humanities current aims to rethink the “so called binary view of the ocean, [as] a long western tradition, as these narratives represent the ocean in terms of the sublime that is simultaneously ‘mystery’ as well as a site for conquest” (Oppermann, 2023, p.7). Precisely because the human-ocean relationship is a socio-cultural one, language being a fundamental medium, change requires a shift in language and socio-cultural paradigm. However, it was not blue humanities scholars who first highlighted the growing interconnectedness between our contemporary world and bodies of water, but an Anglo-Polish sociologist and philosopher, Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*, first published in 1999, analyses postmodernity through the metaphors of liquidity and solidity. According to Bauman, “[t]he solids whose turn has come to be thrown into the melting pot and

which are in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity, are the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions” (Bauman, 2000, p.6). Throughout his book, he discusses the modern liquidity of social relationships, highlighting the claimed impossibility of being solid in a period when nothing is guaranteed. “To put it in a nutshell: the ‘long-term’ mentality amounted to an expectation born from experience (...). That situation has changed now, and the crucial ingredient of the multi-sided change is the new ‘short-term’ mentality which came to replace the ‘long-term’ one” (Bauman, 2000, p.31). These watery relations, short-termed and constantly changing, undoubtedly have an impact on many people in different social spheres, from family and marriage, from the workplace to political activism. This text serves as a critical approach in the oceanic and water-related thought. Beyond possibly describing our contemporaneity, the many blue humanities scholars treat water as a source of imagination. According to Gillis, “we have come to know the sea as much through the humanities as through science” (Mentz, 2023, p.6). The more the ocean and water bodies recede from everyday life, the more it occupies a core position in cultural imagination. Mentz deepens this relationship between ocean and narrative imagination, making them even more inextricable, when he argues “[d]ifferent narratives become legible through depictions of liquid salt water and fresh water, gaseous vapour, and solid ice. The globe-embracing ocean of stories contains and constrains the circulation of literary narratives, texts, cultures, and traditions” (Mentz, 2023, p.5).

The following sections explore some of the characteristics attributed to the sea and how they have been used in literary metaphors in different historical periods to talk not only about the ocean, but also about what it means to be human.

The ocean is a vast, foreign, and uncontrollable entity, above human domination. Its grandeur makes it unknowable, both metaphorically and practically. The incomprehensible therefore becomes an aspect of this expansive body of water, of which human are but one aspect of it. The ocean's sheer power reminds one that the human is insignificant in comparison. The sea allows man to experience both pleasure and fear at the same time thanks to its grandeur and inscrutability. Edmund Burke, an Irish philosopher, discussed the meaning and the effect of the sublime in his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (1757). He compares the Beautiful, something well formed and aesthetically pleasing, to the Sublime, something which has the power to compel and overwhelm someone. The Sublime and its contemplation elevate the man from its condition. Discussing the interconnectedness of the Sublime and Nature, Burke states:

The passion caused by the great and Sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment, and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear, being an apprehension of pain or death, operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too. (...) Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime. (Burke, 1757, pp.40-41)

As Cohen noted, oceans were considered the theatres of “sublime terror”, distant from Mary Shelley’s mountains in which the sublime could raise one toward God. The English essayist and politician, Joseph Addison, wrote in *The Spectator*:

Of all objects that I have ever seen, there is none which affects my imagination so much as the sea or the ocean. I cannot see the heavings of this prodigious bulk of waters, even in a calm, without a very pleasing astonishment; but when it is worked up in a tempest, so that the horizon on every side is nothing but foaming billows and floating mountains, it is impossible to describe the agreeable horror that rises from such prospect. (Cohen, 2010, p.113)

The ocean sublimity, an everlasting characteristic, is here coupled with the terror of mortal danger due to the perils of ocean storms. However, while observing the sublimity of a terrestrial environment, the terror elevates the human mind toward the divine; terror at sea almost seems to plunge the human mind into a hell populated by monsters and metaphorical figures. As noted by Cohen: “Thus, John Dennis, writing in 1704, emphasizes the distinctive sublime emotion of ‘enthusiastic terror’ accompanying scenes of ‘thunder, tempests, raging seas, inundations, torrents’, along with witchcraft, monsters, earthquakes and other extraordinary physical occurrences” (Cohen, 2010, p.113). This sea of terrors is clearly depicted in Coleridge’s ballad *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The poem, published in 1798, is an example of a romantic depiction of the sublime. The old sailor recounts to a wedding guest his misfortunes at sea, and the young man, though bewildered by the story and by the old man himself, cannot help but listen. The young man seems almost bewitched by this figure, captivated by the sailor’s “glittering eyes” (Coleridge, 1798, v.3). Although the setting of the old man’s story is realistic, with references to existing geographical locations, however generic, the events narrated are entirely fantastic. The sailor’s calamities begin when he decides to kill an albatross, seemingly without malice. His act condemns the crew, who perish after an encounter with the figures of Death and Life-in-Death, who spare only the sailor, leaving him feeling responsible for the deaths’ other members of the crew. After an encounter with a hermit, the

man realises that his only path to grace is to tell his story to everyone he meets. The young man repeatedly tries to distance himself from the old man, expressing his terror, caused by the sailor's appearance, but, although it frightens him, he is at the same time fascinated by him. He "cannot choose but hear" (Coleridge, 1798, v.18). The atmosphere of the poem is dreamlike, out of time. As well as the sailor appearance, the feeling of terror is caused by his descriptions, whose words seem to extend the time spent at sea: "Day after day, day after day, / We stuck, nor breath nor motion; / As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean" (Coleridge, 1798, v.115-8) and "Alone, alone, all, all alone / Alone on a wide wide sea!" (Coleridge, 1798, v.234-5). The sublime, embodied by the sailor, is also found in the descriptions of the sea. As well as being the scene of supernatural and horrific events, the sea itself takes on demonic connotation in the sailor's description:

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
 That ever this should be!
 Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
 Upon the slimy sea.
 About, about, in reel and rout
 The death-fires danced at night;
 The water, like a witch's oils,
 Burnt green, and blue and white. (Coleridge, 1798, v.123-130)

As well as, "I looked upon the rotting sea, / And drew my eyes away; / I looked upon the rotting deck, / And there the dead men lay." (Coleridge, 1798, v.241-244) Various interpretations have been given to this complex and eerie poem. Clearly, it focuses on the theme of expiation of punishment, leading to a religious interpretation that sees the killing of the albatross as a possible sin against God and his creatures. This interpretation is supported by the sailor's own journey to atone for his sins and return to the grace of the Lord, which is not yet complete as the old man is forced to tell his story to everyone he meets in order to expiate his pain. Other interpretations, such as Grow's, compare the figure of the sailor to Coleridge himself. Reading the ballad, the figure of the old, bony mariner is almost reminiscent of a martyr sentenced to an excessive punishment for the crime he actually committed. He seems to have spent his whole life in search of the truth, incessantly recounting the events that have happened to him in order to understand their meaning. "By showing how extraordinary complex the phenomena and noumena of our universe are, Coleridge could exculpate himself for not completing the vast projects which he set for himself" (Grow, 1973, p.28). The description of the ocean, both dashed by storm and motionless during the long days of waveless sea,

are of particular interest to grasp the typical literary descriptions of the sublime sea during Romanticism. The old sailor and his crew have no control over the tides; realising their craft is unable to govern the ocean, they have to rely on fate. The sailor's eyes as he gazes upon the sea are filled with terror, yet he cannot help but be drawn to the sublime in the face of its immensity and power.

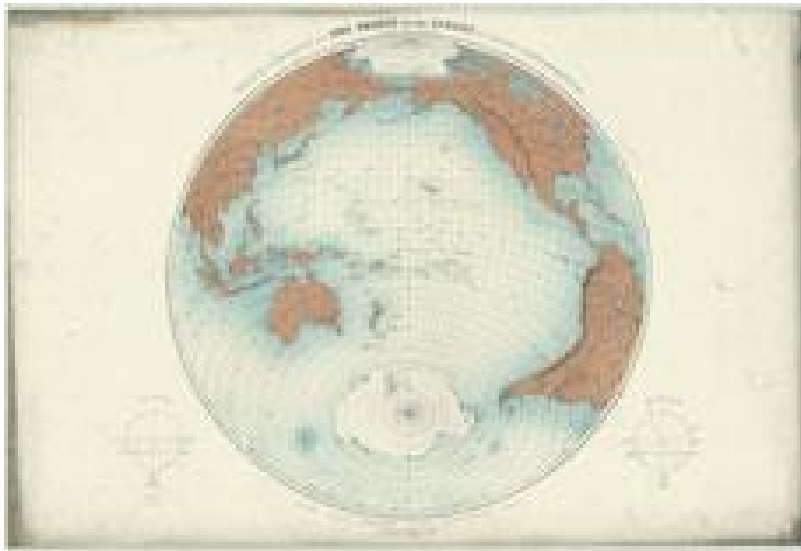


Figure 1 Geometrical Projections of Two Thirds of the Sphere (Pacific Ocean Central)

The ocean's vastness serves as a source of metaphors and fuel for writers' imagination. However, it is arduous to imagine the immense size of these bodies of water, which collectively amount to approximately to the 70% of all Earth's surface. A useful instrument to grasp this vastness might be the Pacific Ocean's map drawn by the War Office of the British Empire in

1862. As Mentz highlights, the map demonstrates not only the immensity but also the supposed emptiness of this waterscape. Although there are several islands disseminated throughout the Pacific, for the navigators and captains of the British Empire "the Pacific core was vacant. Empire was a terrestrial concern" (Mentz, 2023, p.39). European sailors did not consider these waters as a source of life, as a place inhabited by millions of creatures and traversed by many lives, but as a medium, a route for global trade. "[T]he oceans are the carriers of global affairs, and thus the natural media of unrestricted capital flow" (Mentz, 2023, p.39). During the era of global expansion, terrestrial as well as economic, the middle class emerged. As it grew more fundamental, it sought to be portrayed across different literary medium. "The sea was moreover a frontier of war and capitalism, as well as of contemporary literature" (Cohen, 2010, p.63). A fundamental novel of this representation was *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1719), a novel that profoundly influenced English and maritime literature. Ian Watt, in *Rise of the Novel*, provides a thoroughly examination of the character of Robinson from a sociological and political standpoint. Watt considers Crusoe a *homo economicus*, an entrepreneur, driven by economic reward, "Defoe sets back the economic clock, and takes his hero to a primitive environment, where labour can be presented as varied and inspiring, and where there is an absolute equivalence between individual effort and individual reward" (Watt, 1957, p.). The perils

of the ocean and the survival of the protagonist thus serve to transform him from a young and inexperienced boy into a diligent man. “Defoe’s plot, then, expresses some of the most important tendencies of the life of his time, and it is this which sets his hero apart from most of the travellers in literature. (...) profit is Crusoe’s only vocation, and the whole world is his territory” (Watt, 1957, pp.66-67). In the novel, the ocean is assigned a marginal function as a means of connection rather than being given a central role. However, this is consistent with the general view of the epoch, which considered the ocean as an “extra-societal and void space whose only positive attribute was its surface that ensured the facilitation of transport, trade and circulation” (Frank, 2022, p.92). Although it has not been accredited a key function, the ocean brings to light a new personal trait of the protagonist: his restlessness. By virtue of his disposition, the protagonist is able to “trumps almost any fear of the chaotic manifestations and life-threatening powers of the ocean” (Frank, 2022, p.91). However, this restlessness prompts Crusoe to never be discouraged, even when facing a tremendous storm, and to use his wit and experience to overcome adversities. These are sailors’ defining qualities more than *homo economicus*’ characteristics. Cohen addresses the analysis of Robison Crusoe as a “crafty navigator” rather than an entrepreneur in her *The Novel and the Sea* (2010). According the Cohen: “[t]he ethos of craft contains traits translatable from navigators to speculators” (p.63). Even considering this new perspective, the novel still deals with capitalism and enterprise; however, it grapples with the problem of high-risk speculation from a different point of view. Cohen highlights how “Defoe repeatedly used the sea as a figure for the risks of trade, as for example, when he cautioned creditors to exercise similar ‘prudence’ in extending credit as that exercised in an ‘adventure by sea’.” In the instance of *Robinson Crusoe*, despite trying to re-interpret the novel, giving the ocean and the character of the sailor a more central function, the focus remains on the figure of the merchant and the trade system. Nonetheless, the novel is the result of Defoe’s reflection on his contemporary economic and social reality, offering a distinct depiction of his ideals and considerations. “Defoe participated in the discourse of his age when he invoked the mariner’s comportment as a model for financial speculations” (Cohen, 2010, p.65). The idea that the oceans constituted just a means to economic progress and global trade persisted long after the end of sailors’ age. “In 1821, Hegel yoked ‘the [watery] element of flux, danger, and destruction’ with ‘the passion for gain’, when he called the ocean the ‘natural element for industry, animating its outward movement” (Cohen, 2010, p.66).

However, the oceanic trade did not only include the dissemination and transport of goods and riches, but also of enslaved people. As Mentz elegantly poses it:

In modern world history, the Atlantic circulates in a loop, from Europe and Africa westward through the tropics, up into the Caribbean, and northeast along the coast of North America before returning to Europe. Similar loops, spinning counter clockwise, connect southern Africa and South Atlantic gyres, these circles fuelled the ‘triangular trade’ that brought millions of enslaved Africans across the ocean into plantation slavery, while returning raw materials from the New World back to Europeans economies. (Mentz, 2023, p.118)

This aspect of the ‘triangular trade’ has been scrutinized by postcolonial academics. Different European and non-European scholars analysed the consequences of colonialism on various aspects of decolonized people identities. Gilroy reflects on his and many others’ fragmented identity born from the displacement and the slave trade in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). In the book, Gilroy challenges the notion of identity as a singular and static concept. Drawing on his experience and his own multifaceted identity, as a European and as a Black man, Gilroy disputes “racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses” (p.1), claiming to occupy a liminal space between them. The scholar employs the image of the slave ship to convey the dual nature of the Atlantic Ocean:

The image of the ship as living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons that I hope will become clearer below. Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs. (Gilroy, 1993, pp.4-5)

Gilroy perceives the ship as more than a vessel, as a metaphor of cultural mixing, albeit traumatic. The ocean allows these ships to travel, permitting the assortment of cultures and stories, disrupting them at the same time. In Gilroy’s view “[t]he overintegrated conceptions of culture which present immutable” (Gilroy, 1993, p.3), the clear-cut distinction between ‘black’ and ‘white’, is not a believable concept in this contemporary. The story and history of colonized people enable scholars to debate this conception; the ocean being the main mean for these stories to happen.

It is not only the vastness of the ocean that inspires powerful metaphors and the imagination of writers. The depth of the abyss have often been used to portray the inner darkness of the human mind, in an attempt to grasp its inscrutability. The ocean abysses have been associated with deep, unfathomable emotions such as love, desire, rage and even grief. A poem that can be understood to

represent this metaphor is *Full Fathom Five* by Sylvia Plath. The poem, which owes its title to Ariel's famous song in *The Tempest*, has been described by Plath herself as "one of the best and most curiously moving poems about my father-sea-god muse" (Lowe, 2007, p.28) in her journals. Several poems by Plath employ images of the ocean, relating them to her happy childhood and the figure of her father, or of nautical death. Until her ninth birthday, Sylvia and her family lived near the ocean in Nauset, Massachusetts, after which she moved with her brother into her grandparents house due to the illness of her father. The death of Otto Plath deeply scarred the young Sylvia, ending her idyllic childhood. The coastal paradise, the beaches of Nauset, then represents the childhood happiness and is deeply intertwined with the memories of her father, as well as his death. Seascape serves Plath to recall a moment of true happiness in her life while also reunite her with the absent father, painting a picture of nostalgia and sorrow. This deep and overwhelming feeling is closely associated with the beaches of Massachusetts, due to the symbolic and commemorative value with which they are imbued. Her husband's Ted Hughes's poem *The Beach* undeniably demonstrates her feelings. In the poetry, he recalls taking Sylvia to Woolacombe Sands to alleviate her nostalgia, however, when they arrive, the scenery does not cure her longing: "You refused to get out. / You sat behind your mask, inaccessible / Staring towards the ocean that had failed you" (Lowe, 2007, p.23). The seascapes to which Plath tries to return are locus amoenus where she is reunited with her father, Otto. These settings of happiness are also permeated with death. According to Lindberg-Seversted, quoted by Peter Lowe, "Plath developed an increasingly sophisticated response to natural imagery in which the outer world, whilst retaining recognizable features, became a starting point for psychological exploration" (Lowe, 2007, p.24). Through the marine panorama, Plath explores her grief towards her father's death, depicting her longing for happier days. In *Full Fathom Five*, the image of her father recalls the one described by Ariel: "Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made: / Those are pearls that were his eyes: / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange" (Shakespeare, 2014, v.397-403). The process by which the dead father figure is transformed in something "rich and strange" by the sea suggests a shifting humanity, present even if transformed. At the beginning of the poem, for Plath the encounter with her father carries a threatening connotation: "All obscurity / Starts with a danger: / Your dangers are many" (Plath, 1958, v.14-16). To engage with this figure bears a degree of risk, it means to confront what should be buried. Yet, these risks and Sylvia's conflicting feelings are described through nautical and maritime terms, As Lowe reports: "Nautical terms are employed here in a psychological context. 'Fathom', as well as being a measurement of the depth of water can also be applied to the act of coming to understand something ('fathoming out'). 'Surface' carries with it the sense of something once submerged breaking into one's consciousness" (Lowe, 2007, p.29). Although, Plath's first

response to the appearance of this “old man”, whom she “half-believed” was dead, ensues in her a sense of danger and unsettledness, her sentiments change throughout the poem. By the close of it, Plath’s response changes drastically, becoming a desire to reunite with her father: “I walked dry on your kingdom’s border / Exiled to no good. / Your shelled bed I remember. / Father, this thick air is murderous. / I would breathe water” (Plath, 1958, v.41-45). In a complete inversion of which should be living environments, by the close of the poem the dry land becomes equated with death, leaving the poetess the desire to “breathe water”. Sylvia Plath meditates on the merging between poetic art and childhood traumas. In a journal entry she observes:

[*Full Fathom Five*] has the background of *The Tempest*, the association of the sea, which is a central metaphor for my childhood, my poems and the artist’s subconscious, to the father image – relating to my own father, the buried male muse and god-creator risen to be my mate in Ted, to the sea-father Neptune – and the pearls and coral highly-wrought to art: pearls seachanged from the ubiquitous grit of sorrow and dull routine. (Lowe, 2007, p.30)

To Sylvia, water, especially the ocean, represents a boundary that separates her from her desires, childhood happiness and the reunion with her father, but also the means through which her desires might be attained.

The ocean is employed as a metaphor not only for the natural forces but also for human’s vulnerability. Its possible interpretations can be approached by various theoretical framework, each proposing a different significance. While ecocriticism and blue humanities deal with the environment and its metaphorical meaning, they diverge in scope and landscapes. Ecocriticism centres on terrestrial environments, often benefitting green spaces and land-based imaginary. In the ecocritical discourse, the ocean remains peripheral, even though it is a clear example of climate change, topic with which both stream of studies are concerned. For blue humanities, the ocean becomes the core of the research: an erratic, fluid mean that resist fix definitions and promotes new way to engage with a disrupted environment. Although there are clear differences between the two currents of study, several novels intertwine the two disciplines and have been analysed by scholars of both areas. One of these novels is *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh, published in 2019. In *The Great Derangement* (2016), Amitav Ghosh argues that climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of imagination, connecting the environmental disruption to literature and language. *Gun Island* blends Bengali mythology with contemporary literature, finding new paths to talk about human and nonhuman migration. The story takes place in different geographical areas, from the Sundarbans to Los

Angeles, landing in Venice and in the Mediterranean Sea. Through the portrayal of localized environmental crisis, Ghosh aims to highlight how the local and global are intertwined in the Anthropocene, as the concept of borders becomes meaningless when the entire Earth is endangered by climate change. However, the absence of borders is just one of the many topics addressed in the novel, alongside the emphasis on the importance of multispecies justice as a foundation for survival. Aiming at shifting the focus from a solely anthropocentric narrative to a more inclusive one, Ghosh also represents nonhuman migration and attempts of survival in this period of environmental crisis. Ghosh presents different creatures as a climate refugee, as both human and nonhuman attempt migrate or save themselves during this period of climate change. The death of Rani, a river dolphin, and her calves asks the reader to emphasise with another specie and reflect on the senselessness of these losses.

The story of Dananth Datta, also known as Deen, a central character in this choral novel, is intertwined with the myth of the Gun Merchant and Menasa Devi, the Bengali deity of snakes and all poisonous creatures. According to the myth, the Merchant is unwilling to show respect to the goddess and the natural world, therefore Manasa Devi unleashes her power against him until he bows before the deity, building in her honour a temple in the heart of the Sundarbans. It appears as if the goddess is responsible for ensuring that humans comprehend the consequences of their actions on nonhuman creatures. As Ursula Kluwick comments: “the legend emerges as an allegory of human hubris and environmental collapse” (Kluwick, 2020), enabling Ghosh to address the environmental crisis through other means than the scientific publications and Western-like novels. The connection between climate change, the origins of global trade and the myth of the Gun Merchant is further explored during a conference in Los Angeles to which Deen participates. The conference draws a connection line between the Little Ice Age and today climate crisis, highlighting the transition to coal utilisation for heating the houses of Londoners during this period. Initially, the relation between the events of the Little Ice Age and the myth appears as a mere coincidence to Deen, who throughout the unfolding of the novel reconsiders several of his viewpoint. He believes that climate change requires scientific and systematic solution, completing disregarding humanistic and cultural approaches. As Amitav Ghosh states in different instances, change in the socio-cultural approach is imperative to try to find a solution to the environmental disruption. The writer asserts that nonhuman forces engage in a communication that is “not merely strange in the sense of being unknown or alien; their uncanniness lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters we recognize something we had turned away from: that is to say, the presence and proximity of nonhuman interlocutors” (Ghosh, 2016, p.26). Thanks to the legend of the Gun Merchant, Deen begins to comprehend the entangled relationship between humans and nonhumans, reflecting on the necessity of cooperation for survival.

The novel deals with the phenomenon of migration, particularly climate migration, through the story of Tipu, Moyna's son. He offers Deen insights to the connection between climate change and the flow of refugees to Western nations. The novel concerns itself with racial and historical injustices, with the consequences of European colonization and its connection to climate crisis. The positive ending of the novel, a choral effort of human and nonhuman actors, emphasises faith in interspecies cooperation and how planetary environmentalism has the power to influence transnational accords. The 'miracle', performed by sea creatures that escorted the migrants' ship to the Italian shores, shifts the focus from a purely green reading to a more watery-centric analysis. The extraordinary migration of all these various marine species highlights how it is not only terrestrial landscapes that suffer the consequences of climate change, but also and above all the maritime environments. The cooperation between different maritime species and humans underlines the possibility, and the necessity, of a dialogue with water and the creatures that inhabit it.

Contemporary Seascapes

The major scholars of this current are quoted and analysed to offer a clear picture of the state of the art. Even though, the blue humanities deal with more than just literary perspectives, the major focus of the thesis is the literary field. The ocean is examined as a powerful everlasting metaphor. Poets and novelists, essayists and philosophers, turned to the ocean to attempt to explain the depths of what it means to be human, what it means to live in a specific historical period. Even though the blue humanities are a purely theoretical field in the majority of its representation, its true disruptive force is best appreciated when applying the watery perspective to literary works. The focus is placed on the depth and vastness of the ocean, and how these two characteristics influenced other streams of studies, such as ecocriticism and post-colonialism. The texts provided expand from eighteenth-century poems to contemporary novels, in the attempt to convey the enduring effectiveness of this body of water to marvel and enchant.

The adaptability of the oceans to various cultural and historical imagery is due to its liquid and wavering nature. Even today, in our everyday vocabulary, the ocean is present. *Surfing the web* or *deep diving into* a research topic are all idioms used by contemporary speakers, underlining how the deep-blue waterscapes are far from being forgotten. As argued by Mentz, our contemporary world is going to be wetter and wetter, due to the sea-level raising, the increased humidity of the air, and increasingly frequent floods. The human species has to engage with wet scenery, waterscapes and the instability and uncertainty they represent.

The topical moment in the life of a sailor is the shipwreck. The event that fully encapsulate the loss of control by human in a wet environment. Through the analysis of Mentz's work, *Shipwrecked Modernity*, it is possible to reflect on the metaphorical meaning of this event and employ it as a new historical perspective. This analysis is accompanied by the examination of the works of Gilroy and Cohen, in order to contextualise the Atlantic Ocean in its literary and historical background. The assessment of these scholars' works lays the proper foundation for a comprehensive dissection of the novels by George Lamming and Fred D'Aguiar.

CHAPTER 2

The ocean is now being studied not just as a physical environment, through which study the effect of climate change, but also as a conceptual space that can be used to engage with historical, ecological and literary processes. This chapter explores the intersections between the works of Margaret Cohen, *The Sea and the Novel*, Steve Mentz, *Shipwrecked Modernity*, and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, examining their theoretical contributions to the current discourse. Each scholar engages with the ocean through a distinct disciplinary lens. Margaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea* delves on the essential role of seafaring adventures in establishing the novel as a genre. She analyses the sailor's craft and ethos which transpires from ships' logs and personal diaries. In her work, the sea does not transpire as an abstract metaphorical space, but as a site of labour and perils. Conversely, Steve Mentz's *Shipwrecked Modernity* is characterised by an ecocritical reading of the ocean. Mentz invites the reader to adopt a new interpretative perspective on shipwreck and unpredictability. He suggests to disengage from the contemporary anthropocentric perspective, offering an alternative framework. In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy emphasises the pivotal role of the ocean in shaping modern and contemporary diasporic identities, exploring the consequences of colonial era's displacement and slavery, while highlighting individual and collective social implications. The three scholars address distinct aspects of the relation between human and water, yet exploring and reimagining the cultural role of the ocean. Their works examine maritime imagery in shaping literary genres, ecological consciousness, and modern history.

The present chapter offers a comprehensive review of their contributions, exploring each individual work. They allow for a more nuanced engagement with the necessary principles for the extensive literary scrutiny in the following chapters. A detailed discussion of each author's work is conducted in an independent section. In the conclusive part, their contributions are juxtaposed, thus providing a concise comparative survey.

MARGARET COHEN'S *THE NOVEL AND THE SEA*

Margaret Cohen in *The Novel and the Sea* emphasises from the outset how seascapes have been the scenery for stories and myths since the dawn of Western literature, starting with Odysseus and the Greek myths. In her analysis, Cohen focuses particularly on English proto-novels written during the Age of Sail, and how they were influenced by real ships' logs and technical writings. The evolution of the novel as a literary genre is a lengthy process that extends over a period of almost a century. During this period, the novel genre emerged, exhibiting numerous similarities to the romance; indeed, they are characterised by a shared element: adventure. However, while the roguish events described in the romances exhibit magical and fantastic elements, those narrated in the novels are verisimilar, despite their improbability. In order to achieve an accurate and plausible description of these adventures, writers drew inspiration from technical literature, with maritime novels being drawn from ships' logbooks. Cohen emphasises the significance of a specific sets of attributes that define the competent seafarers. These characteristics, as depicted in ships' logs and subsequently recounted in fiction, are epitomised in a single term: craft.

THE MARINER'S CRAFT

Cohen identifies several traits of the experience seaman's behaviour, varying from prudence to adherence to seafaring protocols, from knowledge of navigational techniques to correct and plain reports of events. The practical behaviour of sailors, their ethos, is what distinguishes the quality of their craft. The celebration of the ideal of seafaring skills and labour is praised in sea fiction. The comprehensive understanding embodied by the term 'craft' encompasses an array of various competencies which are essential for the execution of duties on the high seas. A defining aspect of the seafaring craft is the sense of collectivity, the shared commitment to achieving a common objective, referred to as the 'bond of the sea'. Although the actions of the crew, described in the ships' logs' straightforward and impersonal style, are detailed as being performed by one, it is clear that navigating an oceangoing ship independently is implausible. Nonetheless, the action of the individual, however great, are embedded within a broader context, converging with the actions of the entire crew. The individual's work contribute to the achievement of the shared aim, therefore their actions were inscribed in a rigidly hierarchical order. This hierarchy was essential for the proper execution of complex manoeuvres, even in critical and dangerous moments. The collectivity of the craft is characterised by the rigid chain of command, within which each individual has a precise and

clearly defined role. The relationships of the chain of command, the very hierarchy of seafaring tasks, are established by the competence and the ethos of the individual sailors. Therefore, life at sea deconstructed and reconfigured the land-based social ranks. The attainment of command is not determined by birth right or the prestige of an individual lineage, but rather, it is conferred on the basis and demonstration of one's ability and competence.

In order to avoid being overwhelmed by the force of the ocean, it is necessary to maintain an optimistic attitude, even during the most dire of circumstances. This use of deception is an aspect of the craft that is primarily employed by the high-ranking members of the ship's hierarchy. A common method employed to maintain high morale among the crew is the strategic optimism, often coupled by the deliberate concealment of certain information. This deceptive strategy reveals the instrumental role of crew members in the execution of the craft. The objective of survival in dangerous situation, alongside the necessity of collaboration to attain a common purpose, requires the transformation of individuals into tools in the pursuit of a successful outcome. In numerous instances, such deceptions are adopted in critical situations to prevent disorder and destabilization, thus guaranteeing the functioning of the chain of command. It is essential to consider the role of preparedness, both physical and mental, in ensuring the optimal functioning of the command structure and the achievement of the shared objectives. As reported by Cohen, Champlain emphasizes the need for the perfect mariner to always be "alert [dispos]" (Cohen, 2010, p.21), emphasising the necessity for the body and the mind to function in unison, thus resulting in the task being performed efficiently and proficiently. According to Cohen, "[i]n depending on the body working together with the mind, craft disrupts traditional philosophical hierarchies, which separate what are framed as the admirable pursuits of the mind from the devalued body." The encounter with the more-than-human power of the oceanic force thus necessitates another examination of the relationship between traditional philosophical hierarchies. Humans once more find themselves unable to subdue a more-than-human force. Nonetheless, it is imperative that they do so. In the endeavour to dominate over what is inherently indomitable, the ocean, the philosophical relations between the mind and the body, established during periods of land-based stability, become inadequate. Despite the multifaceted nature of seafaring expertise, which have been comprehensively examined by Cohen, this section focuses on the most prominent aspects delineated by seafaring's novels. There were various and distinct practical competencies that each sailor is required to possess, such as navigation, the organisation of supplies, and knowledge of maritime combat protocols, that proved to be less suited for the sea fiction genre and are usually not described, albeit in an unromanticised manner. The focus of novelists is more inclined towards the human aspects of the craft, rendering its ethos more accessible than its purely technical aspects. The novelists draw inspiration from the ships' logs and

the sailors' personal diaries, with the aim of maintaining a sense of authenticity in their works. Nonetheless, and almost consequently, they expand the less detailed aspects of the practical literature from which they are inspired, enhancing the personalities and behaviour of individual sailors. The advent of innovative navigational techniques and the general scientific progress has a profound impact on the nature of the seafaring profession. The advent of steamships diminishes the number of tasks considered necessary for the seafaring craft, with several responsibilities becoming obsolete. A shift in the definition of the craft concomitantly results in the transformation of the prestige attributed to maritime ethos. The sea adventures fiction can no longer glorify the work and the behaviour of the sailor, due to the decline of the once almost mythical status of the seafaring profession. Nonetheless, the public continues to be captivated by this genre of novels, fascinated by that forgotten and nostalgic ethos.

THE SEAFARING ADVENTURES'S GENRE AND THE NOVEL

The ships' logs and the adventures report by sailors in their personal diaries are characterised by a simple and plain style. The actions are listed in a clear and concise manner, avoiding superfluous descriptions. The function of the technical diaries is to provide future reader with information regarding the route taken, the dangers encountered during the sea crossing, and how these dangers were handled. "Plain style is just that: words of art, with art used in the sense of metier, craft, a specialized field of practical knowledge" (Cohen, 2010, p.43). In an effort to maintain an atmosphere of authenticity within their literary works, novelists adopt a writing style specific to this genre of practical literature. The audience familiarity with the simple style of logbooks results in an immediate evocation of the characteristics of the maritime craft. Among other novelists of the maritime fiction, Defoe employs this literary technique to convey the ethos of the sailor's work prior to the reader's engagement with the plot. The plot of the novels of adventures at sea, starting with *Robinson Crusoe*, present a rather linear development of events: the protagonist is confronted with a challenging or complex scenario; through meticulous observation and practical application of his skills, he devises a possible solution. This solution is subsequently implemented, resolving the issue and enabling the flow of narration to resume. In the process of unravelling these issues, the protagonist is able to display his technical expertise, while the readers are prompted to reflect and potentially find themselves the solution to the problem. Detailed descriptions of the technical aspects of maritime labour do not solicited much attention by the general public; however, the possibility to actively engage with the story appeals them. The practical knowledge of the sailor meets with the imaginative power of the reader, both trying to reach the best possible outcome. In contrast with the

reading of biographies of great historical figures, which provokes a sense of admiration and desire to emulate the subject's personality, the act of reading novels compels a more active participation from the reader. This is achieved by offering the reader with partial or ambiguous information, situating them within complex scenarios where the solution is neither simple nor linear. Novels encourage their audience to reach independent conclusions. As observed by Cohen, "novels thereby offer a nuanced and emancipatory initiation into ethics; and their conflicting signals also make for more entertaining reading" (Cohen, 2010, p.80). Thus, the reader engages with the text beyond the dichotomy of good and evil, since the solution to the issues presented do not define the moral characterisation of the protagonist's personality. The readers are not prompt to make ethical deliberation, rather are transported into the sailor's environment and are compelled to make practical decisions, cultivating their sense of agency. The function of the "armchair's sailor" is not to depict an external reality but to "performing the existence of an imaginary world" (Cohen, 2010, p.86). The problem-solving structure of the sea adventures novels enables the author to address abstract problems in addition to mere survival. The objective of identifying practical solutions entails that, after lengthy meditation, even philosophical issues are resolved within the domain of action, bringing to an end both the philosophical inquiries raised by the problem as well as the practical problem itself. By referring to Providence, both as a philosophical issue and as a practical act, Crusoe confronts himself with it, meditating at length on what he find on the island and how to best use the tools provided to him by Providence, concluding that "philosophical questions are collapsed into practical problems." (Cohen, 2019) The pragmatic solutions to philosophical dilemmas do not alter the temperaments of the protagonists. The moral or behavioural nuances of the protagonists are not the focus in maritime adventure novels. In contrast to other novels of the same historical period, such as Jane Austen's novels, the protagonists of these stories undergo an evolution and improvement of their practical knowledge. The inner lives of the characters are not thoroughly described, as it happens in other subgenres, precisely because outlining these aspects would not contribute to the pragmatic conclusions to which ultimately the characters arrive. This literary subgenre does not prioritise the emotional development of the protagonists; nevertheless, it is possible to transform the experiences of the high-sea into an ethos, a way of life, which serves to elevate the narration from the mere necessity for survival. The harsh working environment of the seafaring life, in addition to the onerous physical demands performed by the sailors, solicits a sympathetic response in the reader. This characterisation of working environments and the requirement of empathy by the audience is also indicative of another subgenre: industrial fiction. Industrial fiction, which emerges in Britain in the mid-century, portrays the degrading conditions of workers lives through sentimental strategies. In contrast, maritime fiction requires the audience to actively identify with sailors' struggles rather than

maintaining a passive stance. Hugo's comment in his preface to *Les Travaill*

THE SUBLIMATION OF THE SEA

As asserted by Cohen, the period of sea novels appears to have been abruptly interrupted in 1748, until the publication of *The Pilot* by James F. Cooper in 1824, which rekindles the authors desire to engage with the ocean. During this period an interesting process, termed by Cohen the “Sublimation of the Sea”, comes to be. This phenomenon concerns the representation of the sea through visual arts, literature, and, in general, aesthetic theory. In this process, a progressive elimination of ships and human labour from the representation of seascapes occurs. This is concomitant with the Enlightenment's denial of representation of practical work in non-practical arts: “the disconnection of work at sea from the sublime ocean belongs to the more general Enlightenment view that art should not be connected to business or instrumental reason” (Cohen, 2019, p.116). The culmination of this process is marked by the advent of Romanticism, during which artistic representations of the sea exhibit its grandeur and power without any human attempts to dominate it being depicted. The “Sublimation of the Sea” coincides with the period of sublime aesthetic, “a distinctive aesthetic of modernity, customarily defined as the pleasure offered by spectacles of overwhelming power” (Cohen, 2010, p.104). In the representation of the sublime, human efforts to rule, or even just comprehend, the power of nature are meaningless. The elevation procured by the sublime aesthetic do not stem from the achievement of practical solutions, which would tame the natural forces even if for a short period of time, but from witnessing the overwhelming power of it knowing it is not tameable. This elevated status of sublime is achieved in the literary genres though the use of poetry and philosophy. Despite not being historically accurate, the sublime's empty seas proves to be a stimuli for the fertile imagination of poets. The ocean therefore undergoes sublimation through

narrative poetry, such as its depiction in *Paradise Lost* by Milton. After being cleared of historical sailors during the Enlightenment, the sea is then repopulated by authors and poets during the Romanticism, who elevate the seventeenth-century stories of seafaring with epic poetry and heroic protagonists. The sublime is commonly associated with the idea of rising towards the divine plane, as depicted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the mountain peaks stage. However, the sea as sublime site functions as the stage for profound feelings of terror. It makes possible to experiences the sensation of impending danger. The aesthetic of the sublime, as shaped during the Enlightenment and Romantic epochs, lead to the idealisation of the ocean as a wild and ungovernable domain, characterised by dread and awe. This vision of the ocean has persisted in contemporary thought. The sublime terror in literature is now evoked particularly by the representation of shipwrecks.

STEVE MENTZ'S *SHIPWRECK MODERNITY*

The core event in Steve Mentz's analysis is the shipwreck. The focus of his study is to deconstruct and reinterpret the modern historical period through new ecological and philosophical lenses. According to Mentz, history does not follow a linear and clear pattern consisting of progressive successes, but instead consist in a sequence of ruptures, failures and disasters. His analysis of the modern era, from 1550 to 1719, through the lens of shipwrecks serves to reframe the contemporary world, which is characterised by ecological crises, and in which linearity and stability appear to be absent. Mentz, through the reinterpretation of novels and poems, reevaluates chaos, risk and failure as inherent components of progress, not impediments to it. The integration of a post-humanist perspective enables the decentralization of the human as a subject, acknowledging the historical interactions between humans and what is more-than-human. In these dynamics rarely the human subject emerges as the dominant figure. In the context of climate change, this perspective is imperative, as it reminds the audience the inextricable subjection of humanity to natural forces.

Mentz's study extends beyond Cohen's researches, enriching the historical-literary analysis with an ecocritical perspective.

THE SHIPWRECK AS METAPHOR

"Shipwreck lurks at the metaphorical heart of the ecology of saltwater globalization" (Mentz, 2015, p.2). The shipwreck event is the symbolic moment that encapsulate the fragility and chaos of global transformations, both of the early modern period and the contemporary era. For Mentz, the shipwreck serves as a metaphor for the historical experience itself. The violent clash between wet and dry, stability and instability, represents a tale of disasters, in which anthropocentric certainties are forcibly abandoned and need to be re-established. This forced encounter demands the rethinking of the frameworks with which the historical progress is usually interpreted. The fundamental ecological tension inherit in the experience of the wreck is that juxtaposition of wet and dry. The event begins with a rupture that evolves in a complete crisis, in which the expected continuity is broken, requiring the reconstruction of the continuity, a process that is marked by the repercussions of the rupture itself. The anthropocentric approach is characterised by an attempt to impose order on disorder and to interpret the chaotic experience, in which pattern has no place, using ordinary frames. Mentz argues that literary portrays of maritime disasters, from Hakluyt to Defoe, reveal the "Janus-faced ambivalences" of modern culture. The interpretations are, indeed, based on a double system, in

itself contradictory, that ought to explain these disasters both through providence and through empirical interpretations that pile on top of each other. These logical and schematic interpretative frameworks are insufficient for comprehending the phenomenon of shipwrecks, as they diverge from ordinary systems. The proposed proto-empirical explanations of these events attribute to human error and lack of experience the event of shipwreck. By contrast, providential explanations of these same events justify them on a hermeneutic process that asserts the existence of a pan-historical truth, a plan inscrutable and hidden from humanity of which only God is aware. According to this interpretation, the survival or demise of the crew during a wreck is not explained by human error, but rather by the will of God. Mentz contends that these two interpretations merge and accrue. However, they fail to provide a convincing explanation of these events in an ordinary manner, due to the elusion by these events of ordinary classification. Despite being critical and highlighting the shortcomings of these interpretations, Mentz acknowledges their necessity from an anthropocentric perspective, proper of the modern and contemporary period, since “[h]uman bodies survive this environment only with difficulty and only temporarily”.

It is precisely for these reasons, in order to avoid any anthropocentric ambiguities, that he proposes a new interpretative framework: *composture*.

THE INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK OF COMPOSTURE

Mentz’s approach challenges the conventional interpretation of progress as a linear series of major changes and reconstruction of a new order. Instead, he introduces a new metaphorical perspective, which he refers to as ‘*composture*’. Mentz asserts that the prevailing interpretative framework to comprehend history is ‘*theft*’, where the past generates innovation, yet the historical epochs are distinctly separated from one another. The term ‘*theft*’ is a controversial description based on “a long-lived caricature of a modernity that gives birth to itself by stealing from classical antiquity” (Mentz, 2015, p.ix). He contends that the past has an everlasting presence. The *composture* model recognises the existence of several moment of decay present at all times, not as obstacle to the progress of innovation, rather as a constitutive and integral part of it. Mentz alludes to a concept expressed by the Caribbean poet Édouard Glissant, according to whom history would be constituted by an “accumulation of sediments” (Mentz, 2015, p.x). He argues that history has to be reconceptualised; it should not be perceived as a sequence of isolated events but rather as a continuous process in which the past never ceases to exist. “This vision imagines history as a comingling and fecund process, a fertilizing combination of the living and the dead” (Mentz, 2015, p.x).

Mentz associates the ‘theft’ interpretative framework with a land-based view of history, which is defined by terrestrial separation and compartmentalisation. Whereas, the ‘composture’ approach entails a fluid, oceanic perspective. Whilst Mentz acknowledges the human necessity of establishing a schematisation of history, he suggests that this land-based approach is far from the actual unfolding of events. Therefore, composture does not entirely eliminate this schematisation; instead, it contextualises it, moving away from expressions such as “the birth of modernity” that have little (if any) value outside the anthropocentric perspective of history. The interaction of the ecological metaphor of the shipwreck and this new historical framework lead to the interpretation of composture. This concept can be expressed concisely as an accumulation of layers of successes and disasters that blend with the passage of history. This new historical approach invites new considerations of cultural, social and linguistic evolution. All elements are constituent components of these diverse sediments, “everything piles on top of everything else, and everything is simultaneously present in underwater composture” (Mentz, 2015, p.9).

THE SAILOR’S METIS

“The sea is not a free space but a labouring one. The ocean’s essential human term is metis: skilled, tool-driven work. Not liberty, but labour” (Mentz, 2015, p.77). The modern epoch has seen the human presence become pervasive within the maritime environment, though not to the extent of being able to dominate it. In this seascape, humans are confronted with a threatening and chaotic environment, far from land-based stability. In order to survive the forces of the ocean, the use of one’s metis is imperative. Metis captures both the set of physical skills and mental knowledge required to survive in the high seas. Nevertheless, neither metis nor human labour are enough to claim ownership of the ocean. According to Mentz, human techniques and labour are inadequate for the domination of the ocean; they are rather suited to form an alliance with it, allowing for coexistence, albeit temporarily. From an oceanic perspective, the sea is beyond history, epochs and dates. The succession of events, of which shipwrecks are but a component, does not constitute a definition of the passage of time. Although marine disasters are inevitable, they are defining characteristics of the ocean itself. Its destructive capacity is a manifestation of its more-than-human forces, but is not a defying quality of the ocean. The potential disasters are always considered by the experienced sailor, who is aware that the only possible prevention is labour. The relationship between humankind and the ocean has been defined by labour since the modern times. The nature of seafaring’s work extends beyond mere physical tasks, encompassing both mental and intellectual

components: “performing craft or metis requires exactly the opposite of abstraction. Seamanship accumulates the physical in dialogue with the rational” (Mentz, 2015, p.79). In the context of shipwrecks, metis is a way of responding promptly and permits a connection to more-than-human forces, such as Providence or the ocean itself. The work at sea therefore combines the physical symbolic experiences through these events. The maritime metis brings order to a chaotic environment, temporarily creating a space habitable for humans. Metis is “a form of intellectual and physical composure as well as anthropotechnic practice” (Mentz, 2015, p.78). Metis also encompasses the combination of technical and social actions, involving several fundamental actors, including the members of the crew, their social interactions and their practical knowledge. Maritime labour exemplifies the paradigm between human and non-human, established on their reliability. Mentz references the work of Samuel Champlain’s *Treatise on Seamanship*, where he asserts the significance of practical experience in the creation of trustworthiness, surpassing the role of theoretical knowledge. The mere theoretical and abstract comprehension is insufficient to become a competent sailor; seamen metis is a product of social and practical interactions. According to Mentz, “metis comprises an intellectual and practical response to disorder and uncertainty” (Mentz, 2015, p.81). He establishes a correlation between the endeavours of seafaring work and the technical expertise necessary to compose poetry. The two disciplines seek to blend numerous and distinct technical and cultural referents. For this reason, Mentz is compelled to contemplate the notion of poetry as a potential remedy for shipwreck, suggesting poetic art as a possible solution to re-interpret the shipwreck as a new historical and ecological perspective. The need of poetic art to be subject to discipline, knowledge and its ability to create harmony from linguistic chaos makes it an effective means through which interpreting tumultuous “shipwrecked modernity”. Mentz provides an example of a poetic movement, whose life was fairly brief, that sought to re-imagine the pastoral tradition in a marine environment. The piscatorial poetry offers an utopian perspective on the relationship between human and the ocean, depicting marine tumultuousness within poetic harmoniousness. This utopia, which can be achieved only through poetry, requires a compromise: a more fluidity in the verses and simultaneously establishing a poetic structure to the sea. According to Mentz, the final compromise between ocean catastrophes and human interpretation is narrative. “Stories, with their structural imperative to bring together unlike things, represent the intellectual infrastructure through which disorderly environments become provisionally legible” (Mentz, 2015, p.172). Through stories, human can establish an order of events, even if only chronologically, in an attempt to make sense of encounters with extremely dynamic and disruptive forces, such as oceanic ones. Throughout the book, Mentz’s analysis emphasises how crisis and shipwrecks are not disasters to be ignored, rather a constituent part of historical progress. New possibilities inevitably arise from the destruction of

previous structures. The positive outcome of shipwrecks is that “something always washes up on the beach” (Mentz, 2015, p.xxvi).

PAUL GILROY'S *BLACK ATLANTIC*

The ocean can be conceptualised as space for technical work, a medium through which is possible to study literary metaphors and the manner in which technical writings influence literary methods. The ocean can be regarded as a metaphor for understanding ecological contemporary changes and as a means to acclimatise to instability. However, the ocean is also a medium, an historical tract, and an erratic environment of traumatic cultural transformation. In his seminal work *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy delves extensively into this analysis. For Gilroy, the field of postcolonial studies must start anew from a focus on movement, from the Middle Passage, from the ocean. The contemporary condition of black identity has not been shaped by rigid, nationalist, terrestrial-bound borders; rather, it is influenced by the colonial past, the transatlantic trade, and the transoceanic flow of enslaved people. Therefore, the ocean becomes a political and cultural space, a hybrid, dynamic site that encompasses defined terrestrial zones: the Black Atlantic. Gilroy reviews the concept of modernity, arguing that it has been shaped by white, nationalist perspective, which oversimplifies the relation between the past and the present. This misleading conceptualization fails to acknowledge the impact of colonial history on black people, whose identity continues to be diasporic and fragmented. The concept of “double consciousness” is used to articulate the complex dynamics of modernity, urging a critical re-examination of the colonial past, which, as Gilroy argues, remains unresolved.

THE CONCEPT OF DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Gilroy's critique is directed towards racists, nationalist and ethnically absolutist discourses. These ideologies are characterised by the conceptualisation of identity as occupying a single, unambiguous space. Within this conceptualisation, the “black” and “white” identities are mutually exclusive. In his study, Gilroy's critique is analysed in relation to extreme-right ideologies, Marxist philosophies, and moderate political movements. He argues that each of these factions, as part of their ideological frameworks, uphold the concepts of an unchanging cultural identity, intrinsically linked to the nation, the indissoluble ethnic divergences, and the inherent differences of “black” and “white” identities. The expression “cultural insiderism” (Gilroy, 1993, p.3) is referred to indicate rhetorical strategies that asserts the impossibility of reconciling ethnic differences. This concept is maximised in order to categorise individuals without consideration of their social, cultural, ethnic experiences and identities. This perception is further solidified by the assertion that the nation, in order to preserve its very existence and integrity, is inherently resistant to the adoption of cultural and ethnic

diversity, which would compromise its essence. To this view the notion of creolization is juxtaposed, a new, hybrid and polyhedral theory. Gilroy himself serves as a prime example of the fallacy of these nationalist discourses, expressing the duplicity of his own consciousness. Gilroy's argument asserts that Black English, possibly for generations, occupies a unique cultural space between at least two major "cultural assemblage". These identities are distinguished by their respective historical trajectories, nonetheless, coexist in a single individual.

Gilroy draws extensively from the concepts expressed by Du Bois in his writings, being particularly captivated by the notion of "double-consciousness". Du Bois asserts that the expression "double-consciousness" encapsulates the core of the Afro-American experience, further elaborated and expanded by Gilroy to black individuals in Europe. This tension is expressed through a fracture between an individual's self-perception and others' opinion of him, in a society that is to some extent openly racist. This fracture gives rise not only to a social alienation, but also to a constant inner conflict, generated by the desire to integrate into society and at the same time maintain one's own identity. Du Bois writes during an American historical period in which the full civic inclusion of African-American individuals was far from being achieved. In this period of tensions, Du Bois exposes the fundamental contradiction at the heart of American democracy: the impossibility of coexistence of the liberal ideals professed, such as freedom, equality, and meritocracy, and the systematic racial exclusion of ethnic minorities. Du Bois also employs the expression "two souls" to emphasise the concept of an individual divided between two different identities: the desire to participate in the civil and political reality of a nation, to which the individual feels to be part of, yet simultaneously being denied the possibility to do so.

Despite the time that has passed since the publication of Du Bois's writings, Gilroy's work serves to remind the continuous relevance and contemporary persistence of these concepts. Gilroy invites scholars to reconsider their analysis of modern history as a period completely different and removed from its colonial past, but as time in which the consequences of this past are even more present. In order to re-evaluate the historical evolution of modernity, starting from its colonial origins, Gilroy returns to the Middle Passage, to the ocean, and to the slave ship.

THE SHIP AS SYMBOLIC VESSEL

Gilroy employs the metaphor of a ship traversing the seas to represent not only the historical phenomenon of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, but also to provide a contextual framework in which analysing the historical developments that unfolded after the conclusion of the colonial rule. The ship instantaneously reconnects with the representation of the Middle Passage,

while evoking the notion of a potential return to Africa. The circulation and exchange of idea, political philosophies and cultural influences between these regions is inextricably linked to the Atlantic Ocean. This image “of the ship as a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” is of fundamental importance in Gilroy’s analysis. He recounts Linebaugh’s suggestion that “the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record” (Gilroy, 1993, p.12).

Gilroy’s analyses in particular the painting *The Slave Ship* (1840) by Turner as a symbolic depiction of the Middle Passage. The painting portrays a ship’s crew throwing overboard the dead and dying enslaved Africans, as the ship is about to encounter a storm. The work was exhibited for the first time in 1840 at the Royal Academy in conjunction with the World Anti-Slavery Convention, held in London. The painting came into the possession of John Ruskin, who placed it for sale in 1857. Gilroy highlights Ruskin’s decision to sell the painting, noting it had occurred shortly after his strenuous involvement in the campaign to defend Governor Edward Eyre, who had governed Jamaica with an iron fist and has suppressed rebellions with brutality. Gilroy considers that Ruskin was compelled to sell the painting due to his inability to live with it. Throughout his career, when analysing Turner’s painting, Ruskin never focused on the content itself, but always discussed the techniques and use of light by Turner. It only acknowledges the nature of the ship in a footnote in his book *Modern Painters*.

The painting *The Slave Ship* is of exceptional importance, both in terms of its evocative moral force, and as a means of emphasising the degeneration of England’s ethics and politics. The analysis of this image enables the audience to reflect not only on the painted act and its moral implications, but also on its reception domestically and internationally. This in turn gives rise to questions and criticisms of colonial ideologies and their political, and artistic, expressions. Gilroy underscores the crucial role of ships not merely as a channel of transportation, but as living, moving reality, that has facilitated the connection between fixed and static point of the Atlantic Ocean. The ships are not simply objects, but must be conceptualised as cronotopes, as cultural and political units, rather than abstract concepts referring to the triangular trade. “They were something more, a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production” (Gilroy, 1993, p.17). The ship facilitates the reflection and exploration of the colonial history, between European ports and the rest of the world. Their symbolisms is immediately evocative of historical progress, thus emphasising the inextricable link between slavery policies, industrialisation and modernisation. It serves to reconstruct and reconceptualise when modernity begins and the principles on which it is founded on, reviving the discourse around them. For these reasons, Gilroy emphasises the slave ship as a

chronotope, as a mean to examine the Black Atlantic and the African Diasporas in Western hemisphere.

DIASPORA AND AFRICAN HERITAGE

Prior to exploring Gilroy's analysis of the African diaspora, the racial slavery heritage of the colonial era has to be considered in more detail. According to Gilroy, there are two main approaches to interpret the impact of slavery on the cultural history of the African diaspora. The first considers slavery as "repository". Despite the horrors of slavery, successive generations have preserved and transformed African cultures and traditions over time. The creation of new genres of music, literature, and philosophy result in new cultural forms that build upon, rather than deny, African traditions. Therefore, the cultural evolution of diasporas would be a symbol of cultural survival and transformation. The second perspective regards slavery as "erasure". The cultural traditions are completely erased by the traumas of slavery. Succeeding generations have been unable to retain anything of their ancestors' cultural heritage as they were brutally replaced by Western and colonial norms. These two contrasting approaches have practical implication for the evolution and analysis of contemporary thought and culture of African diasporas. In his analysis, Gilroy considers the influence of the Enlightenment thought on both modernity and contemporaneity, exploring the hypocrisy of the Western ideology, with a particular emphasis on the Enlightenment one. While proclaiming values such as freedom and equality, the European powers maintained colonial and slavery systems. As Gilroy observes, these same ideals were subsequently used to abolish slavery. The abolitionists' advocated for the emancipation of African communities through the principles and concepts of the Enlightenment period. This exposition demonstrates how this hypocrisy, which is fundamental to modern principles, is still present in contemporary system, with its ambiguity and contradictions. Black intellectuals and scholars continue to be confronted with these tensions. They have not been eradicated; rather they continue to be fundamental in contemporary intellectual frameworks, thus raising questions about the extent of the influence of past systems to present ones. In this framework, Gilroy incorporates his reflections on African diaspora, both in America and in Europe. He posits that these communities may offer a new perspective to rethink conventional concepts of space and time. Rather than describing history and movement as a linear trajectory from Africa to slavery to civil rights, the existence of these diaspora highlights the interconnectedness of communities, ideas, and cultural histories and their shared nature. These factors disrupt the notion of black identity as a single, linear cultural, political and social narrative. It introduces a relational approach, where individual across the globe are able to share cultural and emotional affiliations despite their diverse

temporal and spatial locations. The concept of “playful diasporic intimacy” is used to refer to the creative and artistic relations between different communities. It is underscored how this intimacy is born precisely from the shared experience of a traumatic past and a “double-consciousness”, and this result in new dynamic forms of expression and resistance. These communities diverge from the conventional conceptions of national identity, as they are perceived to be sufficient to encapsulate the fluid and evolving nature of black identities. The existence of these diaspora, and their relations, disrupts national and territorial ideologies, encouraging the new idea of identity, specifically black identity, as a more fluid, transnational, layered and complex phenomenon.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The three authors analysed offer a wide range of perspectives of the sea as an epistemological space. Cohen's analysis is focused on the realistic and technical maritime environment. She emphasises the literary representation of this setting as a locus of labour, skill, and material risks. Her primary focus is on the concept of hydrographic realism, exploring the development throughout history of the evolution of the novel. However, the ecological and postcolonial perspectives are completely absent in her considerations. Cohen's study dives into the material and realistic depiction of seafaring, starting from proto-novels and ships' logs, in which the colonial and empire narrations are entirely avoided. As the period discussed in her work does not encompass contemporary literature, she abstains from offering a more contemporary literary critique. Instead, she provides a brief and concise feminist interpretation of women in the context of piracy. While Cohen's study emphasises the literary aspects of seafaring literature, Mentz engages with an ecocritical perspective in his research, perceiving the ocean as a more chaotic and philosophical space, characterised by instability and maritime catastrophes. In his book, he re-interprets the concept of shipwreck, not as a disaster, but as a new starting point, moving away from the stability proper of land-based ecological thinking. Mentz proposes the sea as a metaphor for existence and precariousness, in which the consequences of climate change are already clearly visible. In addition to this perspective, he introduces the concept of post-humanism, which involves a shift in focus from an anthropocentric mentality to a more comprehensive one. In this new paradigm, humans are regarded as one of several actors, rather than being the core subjects. The postcolonial approach is not entirely absent, yet it is not considered to be central to the study. In order to effectively engage with the postcolonial epistemological perspective of the sea, it was necessary to dive in the conceptual analysis of Gilroy's metaphorical slave ship. In his study, Gilroy's primary concern is the conceptualisation of the ocean as a place of historical trauma and cultural transformations. The Atlantic is seen as the medium of slavery and diasporas connections. In contrast to the approaches of Cohen and Mentz, who emphasised the sea's ecological and technical dimension, he focused on its role as a mean for both forced and voluntary movement. In his book, Gilroy offers a new interpretation of modernity, arguing that it is characterised by the mobility of enslaved people and diasporic communities. In his perspective, mobility is both traumatic and generative, from which "countercultures of modernity" are born. In Mentz's reading of mobility, the postcolonial approach is absent. However, he reconsiders mobility as being inextricably linked to failure, while also eliminating its negative connotations. The concept of shipwreck is used to define the condition for knowledge itself, with failure being interpreted as a resource to achieve progress,

rather than being an obstacle to it. Within this framework, he argues that individuals must accept loss and drift as inherited aspects of existence. Compared with Mentz, Cohen does not deal with the metaphorical notion of shipwreck; rather, her focus is on the interpretation of technical and professional mobility. In her work, she delves into the importance of characters such as the trained mariner, the pirate, and the adventurer influenced the narrative forms. Cohen centres her research on the literary analysis rather than the possible philosophical interpretation of the texts, grounding her study in classical novels and maritime, with emphasis on literary techniques and the importance of seafaring fiction to the evolution of literary genres. By contrast, Mentz employs novels as a foundation for his ecocritical theory. He moves freely from literature to philosophy, and vice versa, without concerning himself greatly with close literary readings. Instead, Gilroy centres his discussion on black expressive culture, exploring the concept through literature and music. He posits the notion of black diasporic art as a theoretical construct, distinct from its portrayal as a mere cultural anecdote or a marginal aspect to other theoretical frameworks. He argues that diasporic realities remain an essential tool for the comprehension of the concepts such as freedom and modernity, and simultaneously being profoundly anti-racist and anti-nationalist.

The three texts employ diverse critical approaches, dealing with various theoretical frameworks. However, it is only through the synthesis of their respective analyses that a comprehensive understanding of the selected novels can be achieved. These works prove to be of great importance in order to appreciate the nuanced historical, literary, and metaphorical dimension of the sea in the novel *Water with Berries*, by George Lamming, and *Feeding the Ghosts*, by Fred D'Aguiar.

CHAPTER 3

Having outlined the core theoretical considerations, including the role of the ocean and the significance of the diaspora, this chapter focuses on a close reading of George Lamming's *Water with Berries* (1971).

The title of the novel already infers a connection between the text and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The author was a renowned Caribbean writer, who composed various novels associated with Shakespearean plays, particularly the one under scrutiny and *The Pleasures of Exile* (1992). He was convinced that for the establishment of a new, autonomous and united Caribbean nation to be realised, it was necessary that the region confronted its colonial past and reclaimed its individual literature and culture. Through the adaptation of colonial stories, such as *The Tempest*, the author is able to regain control of the narrative, previously dominated by the coloniser's perspective. The writer pursued his studies in London, and his disappointment with the European scholars' thought is explicit in numerous works, essays, and interviews. The novel chronicles the experiences of Teeton, one of the numerous Calibans depicted in the story, as he contends with his identity in London, exploring his yearning to return to his homeland, his revolutionary sentiment, and the perpetual awareness of his position within British society.

The chapter is divided into two main sections, the first being a literary analysis of the novel. The second will be a discussion of the historical background of the work, since it is fundamental to explore Lamming's life, so inextricably bound to that of the Caribbean region, to fully comprehend his works. The initial section addresses the significance of reclaiming literary works such as *The Tempest* for the Caribbean literary tradition. The novel is examined in order to unravel the intricate use of the Shakespeare's play by Lamming, and the complex theme explored. This will be followed by an analysis of the characters of *The Tempest* and the profound impact of the figure of Caliban, exploring his relationship with language and the resonances his story has for numerous writers. The study demonstrates how the novel draws back to some of the main concepts expressed by Gilroy and Mentz. Their theoretical framework of the diasporic communities and the concept of composture prove to be useful tools to dissect the Lamming's novel.

REWRITING SHAKESPEARE: LITERARY ANALYSIS OF GEORGE LAMMING'S *WATER WITH BERRIES*

In the colonial context, the domination of populations and ethnic groups is inextricably linked to language and literature. The imposition of a foreign linguistic and cultural framework on these communities serves to diminish their autonomy; moreover, it reinforces the dominance of white cultural norms. Vincent Rafael offers an insightful consideration of how language is the perfect instrument of empire. In *The Experience of Translation* are reported Nebrija words, “One thing I discovered and concluded with certainty is that language was always the companion of empire; therefore, it follows that together they begin, grow, and flourish, and together they fall” (Rafael, 2023, p.23). These insightful reflections highlight the pivotal role that language plays in maintain an empire’s dominance. The objective of annihilating the subjugated culture was not fully realised until the colonised subject accepted the superiority of the language, culture and values of the coloniser. The immediate consequence of this process is the forceful acknowledgement by the colonised culture of its inferiority, and the acceptance of the necessity to re-educate (or from a colonial standpoint, merely educate) the population through the values and virtues of the coloniser. In the words of Homi Bhabha, “to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English” (Nixon, 1987, p.560). During decolonization, the same values imposed as culturally and morally superior are mocked and insulted by the colonised masses. The writers must first affirm their identity through the language that has been imposed on to them. Consequently, it is necessary that the colonial texts and literature are re-appropriated, in order to dismantle the frameworks in which the colonised identity has been inscribed. In order to establish their presence within the global literary context, it is fundamental to engage in the deconstruction and reconstruction of the style and literary contexts that have been shaped by colonial domination and have thus become integral components of the historical and cultural heritage of the colonised population. “This is a particularly formidable task when the writer operates within the language, style, and favoured formats of the receding colonial power and proceeds as if he or she had no prior language at all in which a markedly different literature could be written” (Cartelli, 1995, p.85). From a Eurocentric perspective, this process is often seen as being inscribed in a binary paradigm of ‘centre-versus-margin’ discourse. Mukherjee criticises this ‘the empire writes back to the centre’ paradigm since it implies that “we do not write out of our own needs but rather out of our obsession with an absent other” (Cartelli, 1995, p.87). In fact, when attempting to convey their experience, West Indians, Africans and, more broadly, any colonised culture inevitably becomes re-inscribed in the textual representations of colonialism. The process of confronting the colonial past happens also through literature. In this stage of postcolonial fiction,

writers, such as Lamming, attempt to create alternative political and cultural contexts in which the new postcolonial literature is able to thrive, eliminating their dependency from colonialist paradigms. To this end, they adopt the texts and works imposed onto them as their own, regaining authority over these narrative discourses and reconstructing a new literary corpus based on the colonial past, narrated from a different perspective. In their reconstruction, these writers find themselves unavoidably introduced within a broader world literature context. However, this context does not inherently acknowledge the necessity of reaffirmation sought by these authors, consequently establishing an association and a comparison between them and the colonial “motherland”. Moretti’s critique of the global literary system is centred on this “one and unequal” nature (Campbell, 2012, p.486). He attributes this nature to the continuous enablement and facilitation of the asymmetrical power dynamics between European, or Western, literature and the West Indian and African ones. In this context, the works produced by authors, such as Walcott and Lamming, might be regarded as an effort to address this imbalance of power within world literature. Therefore, the Caribbean reality is revealed to the international readership through the narrated accounts of systemic and racial colonial reality, as experienced by the region’s inhabitants, through a renovated literature once imposed upon them. Simultaneously, this process enables Caribbean readers to engage with a literature of their own, allowing them to narrate their past with their own tools and construct an independent future.

Shakespeare occupies a central position in the realm of postcolonial Caribbean literature, since his works were adopted to demonstrate the cultural inferiority of the colonised civilization. Instead of relinquish Shakespeare in the context of his role within the colonizer culture, the Caribbean authors adopted Shakespeare as a vessel for political and cultural expression. They engaged with his literary works as a means to articulate a counter-discourse that emphasised independence and reconstruction, offering a new narrative to the prevailing colonialist ones, as Chantal Zabus writes:

The adaptation and re-interpretation of the earlier Old World literature of colonization, i.e., *The Tempest*, as literature of decolonization is, at its worst, sheer parasitism but, at its best, superior in effectiveness to an anti-colonial polemic. As an articulate literary riposte, it constitutes one of the most cogent strategies of decolonization in literature. (Cartelli, 1995, p.84)

A significant number of Caribbean and African authors who engage with the English playwright centre their focus on one play in particular, *The Tempest*. It is widely accepted that this play, which is believed to be Shakespeare’s final solo composition, features one of the most recognisable depiction of the colonised subject in Western literature. This representation is characterised by its perspective from the viewpoint of the colonial power. The figure of Caliban is a fictional and imaginative

reconstruction of the Caribbean native people encountered by the English settlers. The reconstruction of Shakespearean literature through postcolonial lenses has to necessarily reinterpret Caliban and his relation with Prospero, who is an interpretation the Western coloniser. The creation of a new narration based on *The Tempest* serves to underscore the importance for decolonisation within the literary framework of the dominant culture. Postcolonial authors re-contextualise the characters of Caliban and Prospero, reimagining their dynamic and imbuing them of greater complexity. It is noteworthy that Caribbean and African writers adopted this play and its variations as a new lineage, thus challenging the Western one. This allowed them to discuss their cultural, political and social ambitions. The reinterpretation of *The Tempest* as a novel that engages with the historical abuse and traumas experienced by Caribbean and African people, and the use of this narrative to articulate a sentiment of liberation, was undoubtedly perceived as philistine. The authors who approached this play anticipated the critical perception that would ensue, yet they embraced these criticisms, confronting them. Lamming declared:

I shall reply that my mistake, lived and deeply felt by millions of men like me – proves the positive value of error (...) It is my intention to make use of *The Tempest* as a way of presenting a certain state of feeling which is the heritage of the exiled and colonial writer from the British Caribbean. (...) Naturally, I anticipate from various quarters the obvious charge of blasphemy; yet there are occasions when blasphemy must be seen as one privilege of the excluded Caliban. (Nixon, 1987, pp. 558)

His assertion that his unorthodoxy is collectively grounded is crucial. His claim challenges the fundamental hypocrisy at the basis of the superiority of Shakespeare's plays according to the British and Western critics. The concept of Shakespeare's works possessing an inherent universal value, if valid, would imply the existence of an inherent capacity to comprehend and appreciate their profound significance; however, the criticisms made against him infer a restricted capacity for inclusivity in both the message and the nature of Shakespeare's literature. Moreover, the author's adoption of *The Tempest* as literary background for his work is indicative of his profound conviction in the intellectual potential of his fellow's artists, and their capacity to challenge Western literary compositions. Certain scholars, Baker being amongst them, argue that the processes of drawing from Western literature might result in the unintentional creation of a cycle in which these texts are continually revisited. However, it is already apparent that works such as *The Tempest* are inextricably linked to their postcolonial analysis and interpretations. This is largely attributable to the contributions of postcolonial, Caribbean and African authors and scholars.

The rewriting of the *The Tempest* through postcolonial lenses entails the reconceptualization of its characters and the shift from Prospero's perspective to Caliban's. In Shakespeare's work, Prospero expresses more than merely a representation of the British colonizer, the master who bestows upon the natives the ability of speech and self-expression. He is depicted as an absolute controlling figure, the focal point of the narrative, the eye of the storm. All the characters in the play are subject to Prospero's influence, the master playwright, and subject to change at his demand. The words of Prospero materialise, as it happens to the storm itself, so does to the characters; Caliban would 'be' as Prospero names him (Robinson, 2000), a 'savage' and 'deformed slave'. In Shakespeare's play, both Prospero and Miranda insult Caliban in various manners: in Act 1, Scene 2, 345-352 in which Prospero calls Caliban a "lying slave", and Miranda follows up a few lines later with "abhorred slave" (Shakespeare, 2014). Moreover, in Act 5, Scene 1, 291 Prospero says that Caliban is "disproportioned in his manners" (Shakespeare, 2014). From a postcolonial perspective, the character of Prospero is that of a tyrannical and despotic master. "The monster of the play is not Caliban, but Prospero, an 'obscene and selfish monster'" (Robinson, 2000, p.435). However, many of these subsequent adaptations of the play have imagined a future in which Prospero is no longer on the island, thus reflecting the actual historical process of decolonisation. However, even if Prospero is no longer physically present on the island, his influence does not diminish, as is often observed following the end of the colonial regime. Prospero continues to attempt to exercise authority over the island from a distance, seeking to assert a new form of dominion over it. Nevertheless, in order to reclaim the character of Caliban, depriving him of his racist stereotypes, his has to be rewritten through new narratives. In postcolonial scholars' analysis and discourses, the figure of Caliban was simultaneously hailed and repudiated, since it was the colonial definition of Shakespearean values, requiring a re-imagination of the character in various new perspectives. Caliban functions as a symbol for many of the former colonized populations, especially Caribbean ones. Lamming reflects on the fundamental symbolical figure of Caliban when he claims, "Caliban's history belongs entirely to the future. Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution reordered our history. The Cuban revolution was a Caribbean response to that imperial menace which Prospero conceived as a civilising mission" (Nixon, 1987, p.567). "Caliban's history" represents the history of an entire population.

It is apparent from Lamming's essay on *The Tempest* that he particularly fond of the "water with berries" passage in the play. In these verses, Caliban recounts how Prospero offered him "water with berries" (Shakespeare, 2014, 1.1.335) during the initial period of his time on the island. However, even during this seemingly peaceful time, Prospero persistently threatened Caliban, intimidations that would eventually become reality. Nevertheless, Prospero clearly gave Caliban something he

would never forget, language. Lamming contemplates the almost prophetic essence of Shakespeare's play, "*The Tempest* was also prophetic of a political future which is our present. Moreover, the circumstances of my life, both as a colonial and exiled descendant of Caliban in the twentieth century, is an example of that prophecy" (Robinson, 2000, p.434). Despite his persistent critique of the notion of dependency used to legitimise colonialism, the Caribbean writer acknowledges that language has become an inextricable bond between the colonial power and the former colonies. The imposition of the colonizers' language on both Lamming and Caliban creates a personal and communal identity's dilemma. The colonized individual is unable to express his or her identity outside the boundaries of the colonizer's linguistic cage. Moreover, colonialism has also given rise to a linguistic discrimination system, whereby the colonised populations are regarded as inferior due to their first language being one that was imposed on them. The West Indian author recognises that he is perceived as a second-class speaker of his first language (Robinson, 2000). This resentment is not only felt by Caribbean author, or Lamming particularly. In a 2019 interview, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie expressed her view on the topic:

I do want to say that English is not to the side, English is very much at the centre. I consider myself bilingual and equally so. English and Igbo have equal emotional power for me. (...) I do feel that I own English. It's both a practical position, I grew up in this world that spoke English, I read books only in English. But it's also a political position. Because there is a part of me that feels deeply resentful for the fact that, you know, people invade your continent, colonize it, (...) and then, years later, they turn around surprised and tell you 'Oh you speak English! Why don't you speak your language?' So to me it's mine, and I really do think that Africans have taken ownership. We've done things with it but it's ours. (Adichie, 2019)

The Caliban portrayed, specifically in *The Pleasures of Exile*, is not only the former colonial subject, but specifically the colonised writer-scholar, the intellectual who has to use words in his everyday representation of the colonial identity. For this subject, the imposition of the colonisers' language is more pronounced than in other instances, since he or she is acutely conscious of the implications inherent in his or her own works. Lamming contributes to this discourse declaring, "Prospero lives in the absolute certainty that Language which is his gift to Caliban is the very prison in which Caliban's achievement will be realised and restricted. Caliban can never reach perfection, not even the perfection implicit in Miranda's privileged ignorance" (Nixon, 1987, p.568). Caliban's subjugation to the linguistic conventions of his former master perpetuates a state of subjugation. This confines him to a life as a perpetual servant, incapable of obtaining complete autonomy; a realization

further exacerbated by the awareness of his status both to himself and in the eyes of his former colonisers. The Prospero-Caliban dichotomy is expressed in a similar manner by Chris Searle, “the ex-master’s language...is still the currency of communication which buys out the identity of the child’s as soon as he begins to acquire it” (Nixon, 1987, p.568). Various Caribbean authors have recognised the limitations of perceiving Caliban as the successor to Prospero’s linguistic legacy. They are not the linguistic descendant of the former colonisers; the use of the former master language can be seen as a symbol of servitude and a constant reminder of the traumatic past therefore demanding the appropriation of the colonizer’s literature. It is not solely the immediate universal value of Shakespeare’s works that is relevant; it is also the possibility of decolonising the cultural history of a population by replacing an “imposed” culture with an “endemic line of thought” (Nixon, 1987, p.569). The adoption of this literature constitutes a crucial moment in the transition of literature and culture from a state of imposition to lived experience and active engagement. Caliban’s significance extends beyond mere representation of a population; rather, he embodies the archetype for future heroes within the Caribbean literary tradition. These future characters are developed to perpetuate the cultural and political activism that is inextricably related to the legacy of the newly defined Caliban, a lineage that must be perpetually strengthened by new adaptations, necessitating one literary work after the other.

In George Lamming’s *Water with Berries* the use of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is deliberately opaque and obviously intricate. According to the author, “my subject is the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero’s and his language” (Robinson, 2000, p.442). In this novel, the author engage with the innovative technique of multiplying the character of Caliban, presenting three characters: Teeton, a painter, Derek, an actor, and Roger, a composer, all representations of the famous Shakespearean islander. However, Lamming subverts the customary narrative structure of *The Tempest* from the outset, it is not Prospero who invades Caliban’s island; rather, it is Caliban who, after Prospero’s departures, travels to his homeland. According to a 1973 interview, “In Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, it was Prospero in the role of visitor to Caliban’s island. In *Water with Berries*, it is reversed. The three characters really represent three aspects of Caliban making his journey to Prospero’s ancestral home” (Robinson, 2000, p.442). The three artists have embarked on a journey to London, motivated by the idea of England as a nation that could foster the fulfilment of their personal aspirations. Lamming has more than once considered the importance of London and Paris as locations in which a Caribbean aspiring scholar (or anyone) might have chosen to pursue their studies. These locations were regarded as being pivotal to the intellectual movements and the

places where to receive the best education. He was profoundly disillusioned by his experience in the European continent. In an article written for the 25th anniversary of the Cuban independent cultural institution, Casa de las Americas (*CASA*), the sentiment in question is articulated with great clarity:

Paris and London were not only the names of cities. They had become in our imagination the unchallenged criteria for a certain excellence of achievement in critical and creative thinking. (...) Today, I shudder to think how a country, so foreign to our instincts, could have achieved the miracle of being called Mother. (Lamming, 1984, p.3).

However, throughout the novel, the protagonists undergo a process of artistic sensibility deterioration and personal identity dissolution. Lamming reflected on their values disruption:

For there have been men who grew up, not with a knowledge of Prospero's background and world, but with an idea of that world. And what is happening to them now is that they are experiencing in their consciousness the disintegration of that idea, the irrelevance and the falsity of that idea beside the hitherto obscured reality. (Robinson, 2000, p.443)

The collective enterprises of the three Caliban in exile constitute a labyrinth of misfortunes, which will come to define their identity, culminating in their final experiences, which will mark the complete rupture between their former selves and their new identities. However, this fracture starts with the dissolution of England as this ideal *locus amenus*. The primary protagonist is undoubtedly Teeton, the painter. He is intricately interwoven throughout the novel to the other Shakespearean characters. From the first moment this Caliban is introduced, the narrator emphasises the significance of the maps of his fictional motherland, San Cristobal, affixed on the window. Lamming's depiction of the islands evokes parallels with Derek Walcott's poem *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, in which he poetically portrays the topography of the Caribbean region.

“What was the Caribbean? ... islands that coupled as sadly as turtles
engendering islets, as the turtle of Cuba
mounting Jamaica engendered the Caymans, as, behind
the hammerhead turtle of Haiti-San Domingo
trailed the little turtles from Tortuga to Tobago;
he followed the bobbing trek of the turtles
leaving America for the open Atlantic,
felt his own flesh loaded like the pregnant beaches

with their moon-guarded eggs—they yearned for Africa...”. (Walcott, 1979)

The map carries with it a profound significance of domination. According to Willis, Caribbean authors are acutely aware of the history of domination embodied by a map. She noted how Caribbean scholars, who must travel to Europe, almost as if they were exiled, perceived that the map becomes even more symbolically charged, especially in relation to the experience of personal alienation, presenting the reflections of Sylvia Wynter on the matter, “the ‘I growing up’ in relation to traditional social practice is also the ‘I growing away’ in relation to European institutionalised education. The result is the artist’s (often permanent) inscription in a cultural Middle Passage” (Willis, 1982, p.619). Therefore, it is rather interesting that this is one of the first objects to be described in Teeton’s room. His emotional attachment to these maps is emphasised on multiple occasions, stating that Teeton devotes a considerable amount of time contemplating them, reminiscing about his time on the motherland. Moreover, his decision to gift these precious maps to the Old dowager, his tenant, to whom he is profoundly attached, serves to underscore their significance. Teeton’s relationship with the Old Dowager is characterised by a peculiar cordiality, made of personal rituals and attitudes, through which the woman assumes the role of the archetypal former coloniser, albeit one in decline. Teeton is unable to reveal to his tenant his imminent departure, which would signify the end of his reliance on her civilised benevolence. The relationship between Teeton and the Old Dowager exhibits certain parallels with that of Caliban and Prospero. The Old Dowager, in this context, can be interpreted as a particular representation of the colonial domination paradigm, wherein the coloniser is regarded as the agent that brings civilisation and progress to the colonised population. Teeton depends on her, relies on her. The initial part of the novel examines thoroughly his difficulties in disclosing to her his imminent departure, portraying her as the crucial obstacle to his return home. This is of particular interest when considering the other relationships of the artist, namely the one with Derek and Roger. Even though both parties acknowledge the special nature of the bond between Derek and Roger, the dynamic interplay among the trio is profoundly dependent on the qualities of Teeton and his presence in their lives. Nonetheless, it appears somewhat anomalous that he is preoccupied solely with the Old Dowager’s response to his departure.

However, it should be mentioned that Teeton interacts with other San Cristobal citizen besides Derek and Roger. Despite the absence of explicit statements regarding the dynamics of the episode, it is possible to ascertain that Teeton was forced to depart from San Cristobal due to his involvement with a revolutionary party, which pursue the alteration of the status quo in the island through violence. Upon his arrival in London, Teeton encounters other Caribbean citizens who aspire to

return to the island and complete what was left undone. To ensure their safety, these characters remain anonymous and are instead referred to by the names of places in San Cristobal. The secret Gathering can be interpreted as a revolutionary diaspora in the novel. The ideological underpinning from which they draw inspiration and the subversive plans they seek to actualise are not rooted in London, but back home. They arrived in the city under the false impression that they would be able to cultivate their artistic career, however, none of them is able to come to terms with their colonial past and the traumas. They are utterly aware of their position as subject in a place such as London, the core of the empire. This situation is utterly analogous of Lamming's, insofar as both individuals proceeded to move to England's capital with a conscious awareness of the numerous possibilities that it had to offer, yet with an unshakable recollection of their subordinate status. He discusses at length of the knowledge that he is not seen as an English first-class speaker nor is completely alienated from his colonial past. The novels and the essays that the author produced on Shakespeare's works were analysed and critiqued by scholars from a Eurocentric perspective, who do not immediately appreciate the importance of reimagining Shakespearean plays for the West Indian writer. The manner in which these characters are presented is also worthy of note. It appears that the elements in question do not align with the content of *The Tempest*; rather, they seem to be more consistent with another Shakespearean play, *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Primarily, it is important to note that the interactions between these characters are the only one reported as if part of a theatrical script. Furthermore, the characters adopt false names, as if they were preparing for a performance and, indeed, they were. The clandestine meetings that they convene are almost rehearsal (the last one being explicitly one) in order to prepare for their revolutionary spectacle. Moreover, the group's title evokes the artisans' gathering of the other Shakespeare's comedy. The decision to establish a connection between the revolutionary group and the collective of amateur actors serves to infuse their actions with a poetic dimension. It is insufficient to just recognise the necessity of their action; it must also be situated within a literary framework. In accordance with the viewpoint of the Caribbean author, the establishment of an independent cultural and political future is dependent on the re-appropriation of the literary colonial past. Consequently, a revised and nuanced literary perspective is required in order to portray the actions of these revolutionaries. Such perspective must encompass both the actions themselves and the depiction of these individuals as contributors and archetypes to the future literary Caribbean culture.

Beyond his two friends and revolutionary group members, Teeton encounters other San Cristobal citizens in London. One of the settings of the novel is the Mona Bar, a place frequented by most of the main characters. In this setting, the character of Jeremy, an old San Cristobal acquaintance, is introduced. Teeton is deeply unsettled by the encounter; he knows not to befriend or trust the falsely

good-mannered Jeremy, since he does not only know about Teeton's past, but is also rumoured to have had an affair with the German ambassador back at home. A connection between Jeremy and the character Ariel in Shakespeare's play can be drawn. Like Caliban, Ariel is a Prospero's servant, but through his services he has come into Prospero's good graces. Lamming, as many other Caribbean authors, identified the bootlicking servant in the character of Ariel, who is willing to betray his fellow servants in the hope of being spared. In their analysis of different interpretations of *The Tempest* by Caribbean authors, including Lamming's one, both Nixon and Robinson reflect on this particular aspect of Ariel's character. Nixon addresses this issue when analysing Césaire's adaptation *Une Tempête*, quoting, "But from Caliban's perspective Ariel is a colonial collaborator, a political and cultural sellout who, aspiring both to rid himself non-violently of Prospero and to emulate his values, is reduced to negotiating for liberty from a position of powerlessness" (Nixon, 1987, p.573). Instead, Robinson presents Lamming's impressions regarding this character, "Lamming calls Ariel 'a privileged servant', 'a lackey', 'the embodiment of the perfect and unspeakable secret police'" (Robinson, 1987, p.435). Teeton's hatred for Jeremy is never disguised; on the contrary it is made fully apparent even before Jeremy's entrance into the Mona Bar. During the conversation, the artist has to constantly remind himself never to lower his guard while talking to Jeremy, precisely because of his connection with the masters. Towards the end of their conversation, Jeremy feels he must justify himself to his fellow colonised compatriot and tries to dispel the rumours surrounding his encounters with the ambassador, a futile attempt. Jeremy meets Teeton to inform him about the suicide of his wife, Randa, an information that shatters the painter.

Shakespeare's Miranda is doubled and divided in Myra and Randa (Robinson, 2000, p.445). Seven years prior, Randa had an affair with the American Ambassador to save Teeton from prison. Following the revelation of her death, Teeton is overwhelmed by the shock and wanders the street and the outskirts of London. He comes to lay in a heath. Suddenly, he hears music and songs coming from a distance; he supposes these are the hymns of the Haitian Ceremony of Souls. It is at this moment that he encounters Myra, who appears to have materialised from the shadows or the water of a nearby pond. The setting of the ceremony brings attention to the complex connection between the two Miranda's incarnations. The significance of this scene is rooted in the centrality of the Haitian Ceremony:

'You wouldn't have heard of the Ceremony of the Souls,' Teeton said. 'The relatives gather,' said Teeton. 'Every eight years or so according to custom. In one place. And when the Priest has found his powers, the dead come forward. You don't see them; but they will be there, and you can hear them. They speak about all the things that had never been said when they were alive.'

They are now free to accuse, and free to pardon. And the living must reply. Always through the Priest. Sometimes they argue all through the night. For hours. The living and the dead. It will go on until they reach a point of reconciliation. Then you know it's the end. The end of all complaint from the dead; the end of all retribution for the living. The dead depart, and the relatives are free at last to go home'. (Lamming, 1971, pp. 116-18)

In the opening passages of *The Pleasures of Exile*, the Caribbean author details a visit to the Republic of Haiti during the Ceremony of Souls. This festivity is of great significance in Haitian culture, as the population celebrate it as a major holiday. The occasion is a day when the living remember and communicate with their ancestors. He recounts that the core belief of the ceremony is that the spirits of departed ancestors are trapped in a historical nightmare; however they are called back to the present by their descendants. The spirits provide a "full and honest report on their past relations with the living" following their return from a "purgatory of water" (Campbell, 2012, p.487). Therefore, the living community acquires knowledge and insights through the answers and their connection with the deceased. The Ceremony of Souls is a ritual that imbues history and present with equal potential (Campbell, 2012). The author explores the Haitian ceremony in different novels, believing that it could possibly be one of the rituals at the basis of a possible Pan-Caribbean identity. The writer is deeply invested in this concept. He conceptualises literature as a medium for the exchange of ideas, motifs, stories and ceremonies, highlighting its potential as a foundation for the emergence of a new and autonomous Pan-Caribbean culture. It is therefore interesting to note that Teeton encounters Myra for the first time following the news of his wife's death, during the Ceremony of Souls, and near a pond. It can thus be deduced that the past is still very much influential and relevant in the present, even if this is not immediately apparent. The woman, shrouded in mystery as much as the character of his deceased wife, insists that Teeton ought to respond truthfully to her inquiries, and she will reciprocate. The figure of Myra is veiled by darkness, thus rendering her features indistinguishable for Teeton, emphasising their insignificance in this scene; rather what is essential is the communication between the two characters, the open and truthful dialogue, which helps Teeton to revisit and deal with the painful news of Randa's death.

Myra and Randa are not the only double character that appear in the novel. The character of Prospero is not physically present on stage; however, it is revealed that he is the father of Myra, whom he abandoned, the ex-husband of the Old Dowager, as well as the brother of Fernando, the Old Dowager's lover. Nevertheless, the core symbolic significance of Prospero's representation in *The Tempest* is multiplied and divided in three distinct characters, just as the spirit of Caliban is reincarnated in the three artists. The first figure is the Old Dowager, who is representative of the

empire in decline, with her cordial manners, with which she seems to want to educate Teeton. The second character is Prospero himself, who, despite his absence, symbolises the active execution of colonialism, in fact it is him who traversed the ocean with his daughter to flee to San Cristobal, thereby re-enacting the Shakespearean narrative of Prospero. The third is Fernando, who, according to Robinson, embodies the curse of colonization:

'I may not be long for this world,' he said, as though the mist had darkened his vision again, 'but I know what I've learnt. That experiment in ruling over your kind. It was a curse. The wealth it fetched was a curse. The power it brought was a curse. That's why my brother found it to his liking. He knew it could deform whatever nature it touched. A curse I tell you. A curse! And it will come back to plague my race until one of us dies. That curse will always come back. Like how you've come here'. (Lamming, 1971, p. 229)

In this novel, Lamming seeks to deconstruct the fundamental tenets of the colonial enterprise. This objective can be realised through the eradication of the colonial power itself. The artist can only be free to depart after the death of the two characters who represent the empire, one protective and one hostile. They are the representation of domination and imperialism, only through their death can the colonised be liberated. By the end of the novel, all three artists were implicated in heinous crimes, influenced by a profound loss of identity. The writer has spoken of the violence in this novel as a metaphor of exorcism:

That horror and that brutality [of the past] have a price, which has to be paid by the man who inflicted it – just as the man who suffered it has to find a way of exorcising that demon. It seems to that there is almost a therapeutic need for a certain kind of violence in the breaking. There cannot be parting of the ways. There has to be a smashing. (Robinson, 2000, p.447)

The novel illustrates with postcolonial discourses, which could be interpreted through various theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, in order to establish a renewed connection with the thought of Paul Gilroy, it is necessary to give full consideration to his fundamental concept of diaspora. The focal point of the novel is the character of Teeton, the most thoroughly explored of the three Calibans, and the centre of many diverse diasporic movements. The initial analysis must focus on the relationships between the three Caribbean islanders, a nation which, as inherited, is not entirely free from its colonial past and the influence of the colonial powers is still evident. Teeton himself is a revolutionary man, primarily because he feels that his home is not yet completely free. On the other hand, Roger is the son of a distinguished magistrate, and Derek was raised in a monastery by the

monks. The manner in which these individuals interact with the colonial power, and the way in which they perceive themselves in relation to it, is deeply influenced by each of these backgrounds. The imposition of the Christian religion on Derek has disastrous consequences, since he is unable to free himself from the constant sense of guilt born during his childhood. Meanwhile, Roger is unable to adequately process the role of his father within the colonial structure, harbouring a sense of resentment towards his father while simultaneously experiencing affection for him as an individual. His character's complexity is further enhanced by his marriage with a white woman, Nicole, with whom he is incapable of living, precisely because of his unresolved past. These various forms of representation are indicative of the multifaceted repercussions of colonial domination. It is particularly within the analysis of Teeton's character that Gilroy's concept of double consciousness is apparent. It is possible to explore the effects of this double souls by examining the protagonist's relationships and his persistent sense of inadequacy, since the painter, as well as Lamming, experiences challenges in residing in the core of the empire, perpetually reminded of his insufficiencies. Despite the role of the Old Dowager in Teeton's life, her benevolence and imposition of certain peculiar ritualistic behaviour on the painter appear to mask a deeper aspiration to educate him, unveiling a colonial mindset.

In the context of the diaspora, another movement that Teeton encounters is the Secret Gathering. Despite the obscurity surrounding the individual participants backgrounds, their interactions offer some degree of insight. A notable aspect of the Gathering is the correlation between the fictitious names and specific locations within the Caribbean nation, which suggest a shared sense of purpose and action among these individuals, implying their collective desire freedom. The congregation promotes the imperative ideal for a collective resistance against imperialist entities, sentiments which appear to echo Lamming's own convictions, who had repeatedly emphasised the necessity for a Pan-Caribbean liberation movement. In different instances, he has discussed the importance of perceiving the Caribbean not as individual nations but as a unified entity. The Secret Gathering, and Teeton's participation therein, thus signifies a representation that transcends the individual postcolonial entity, but the necessity for a communal confrontation of the repercussions of the colonial rule. The writer extend an invitation to the reader, most specifically the colonised audience, to engage in reflection on the fundamental importance of diasporic communities and united international movements.

It might seem that the ocean or other bodies of water play a marginal role in the novel, primarily due to their absence as a major stage during the unfolding of the story. However, it is necessary to acknowledge their significance as the setting for two pivotal moments in Teeton's experience, specifically during the ceremony of Souls and the final part of the novel, when Teeton escapes from Ferdinando's island. In both cases, the protagonist is able to overcome a traumatic experience, with

water serving as a medium for healing. During the ceremony scene, Myra appears to emerge from the lake as a spirit, almost a ghost. Her presence is indicative of both the past, embodied by Randa, and the present moment. In this context, the notion of composture expressed by Steve Mentz in *Shipwreck Modernity* is evoked. The past, and the failure that helped progress come to fruition, is not just a matter of memory; it is an actual presence in the present, and in this novel, it is even physical. The protagonist's life and identity are emblematic of this concept. Two major failures are highlighted in the story: the failed revolutionary attempt by Teeton in San Cristobal and his broken relationship with his wife. These defeats do not simply fade into the background; they shape Teeton's character, relationships and decisions. The decision to participate in the Secret Gathering stems not only from his desire for an independent San Cristobal, but also from past events. The way the group is organised, the decisions made in meetings, and each choice taken by Teeton and the other participants stem from the missteps of previous attempts, which are as valid and meaningful as the successes. Teeton's relationship with his wife is even more telling: he had to leave her in San Cristobal, and he was torn by the choices she made. He knew that she had saved him; the affair with the US Ambassador was the only way to do so, nonetheless, he also feels guilty for being the only one of his comrades to escape, and shameful for having accepted the deal. He rejected his wife, while still loving her. Not only is their relationship complex and nuanced, it is also related only from Teeton's perspective, which is inherently biased. Teeton's failures in his relationship with his wife directly influence his relationships with the other characters in his life, as demonstrated by his gift of the portrait of Randa to Nicole. The importance of Nicole in Teeton's life is emphasised through subtle cues in Roger and Derek's conversations. With her, he tries to restore the broken relationship with his wife, with whom he cannot communicate, and redeem himself from his past failures. Nicole and the Old Dowager both provide emotional support and inspiration in his life. Encountering Myra brings back memories of the past, during a profoundly emotionally charged moment, and forces Teeton to confront his failures and mistakes, as well as the progress he has made as a result of them. This concept articulated by Mentz is not only pertinent to Teeton, but to all characters in the novel, and to Lamming himself. The novel draws from deep historical and cultural root, representing an unresolved past that, despite being regarded as concluded, remains vivid and offers a path to a more promising future. The presence of water is notable in the final scene, where Teeton retreats from the corpses of the two colonial power incarnations. The approaching storm is the background of this overwhelming sense of freedom and dread. Teeton is unaware of the route back to the shore, yet he is motivated by a sense of obligation to return home. The artist was free to move, to liberate himself and to escape only as a result of the demise of the two colonial characters. Although this liberty does not bring emotional clarity, as conveyed by the turbulent waters, it appears to be ample for the

protagonist. The last chapter of the novel consists in a concise exposition of the subsequent events following Teeton's escape. All three artists, Teeton, Derek, and Roger are apprehended and charged for their respective crimes. Even though their actions were committed for different reasons; however, the underlying, persistent motivation is to liberate themselves from the colonial power. The unresolved ending of the novel leaves the future of the three Calibans ambiguous. Nevertheless, this does not imply that Teeton did not experience complete freedom that night in the ocean, nor does it suggest that he could not imagine a more promising future for San Cristobal. The medium through which this freedom is possible, and which embodies it, is the ocean. The water in the novel represents a liberating force, as well as providing a connection to all the diasporic communities and individuals to their roots, allowing for a deeper relation with one's own past, and providing the means through which it might be possible to escape to better futures.

FROM EMPIRE TO INDEPENDENCE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BARBADOS

Lamming is a Barbadian author, an island in the Caribbean region. He was witness to a significant historical event during his lifetime: the attainment of independence by Barbados from the British Empire in 1966. The Barbados constitutes a distinctive case within the Caribbean region, as they have historically remained under the governance of the British Empire until their independence.

The Caribbean writer began publishing his novels in a very peculiar period of the Barbados' history, during the 1950s and 1960s. This period is characterised by the ongoing efforts to achieve independence, by the significant struggles to establish a universal suffrage, and by the still prevailing notion that a Pan-Caribbean nation might be possible. One of the most significant political figure of these complex times is Grantley Adams, the head of the Barbados Progressive League, a party aiming to serve as a moderate representative of the working class. The party wanted to challenge the political dominance exercised by the merchant-planter elite, and diminish their oligarchic political influence. The League was held in high regard by the general public following the passage of the Representation of the People Act in 1943, a law that granted the right to vote to men with an income of 25£ and women. This development, while significant, was nevertheless constrained in its scope, representing a modest advancement in the rise of democratic rights in the colony. The other political parties in the colony were the Elector's Association, which reflected the conservative stance of the planters' elite, and the Congress Party, which aimed to achieve a socialist government. Adams was regarded as the optimal candidate, a perception that was shared not only by the population of Barbados, but also by the British government, as evidenced by the favourable opinions from London, due to his pro-British stance, making him progressive yet moderate. He ruled virtually without any competitors until 1955, during which time his political leadership had been a long crusade against the radicals and anti-colonial forces on the island (Beckles). However, during this period, his stance grew increasingly conservative. The political landscape of the region underwent significant transformations, marked by the emergence of prominent political figures and parties, most notably Barrow's Democratic Labour Party. Adams, however, had been able to establish his dominance not only within the island's borders but also on the regional stage. His political endeavours were met with appreciation from the English, and he had also forged agreements with various regional leaders, including Jamaica and Tobago. In 1958, sensing a shift in the political landscape and desirous of maintain his political power, he accomplished a significant achievement: the establishment of the Federation of the West Indies. This is a pivotal juncture for Lamming. The writer had always been an advocate of the Pan-Caribbean movement, as evidenced by his endeavours to establish and combine cultural traditions of the region's islands. The establishment of the Federation was met with

enthusiasm by many, however, it rapidly began to crumble due to divergent perspectives on the ideological and political future of the region. Adams, in his capacity as Prime Minister of the Federation, was in favour of maintaining the status quo of British control. Nevertheless, both Barbados and other Caribbean islands aspired to be Independent. Furthermore, his role as Prime Minister precluded him from simultaneously serving as the head of government in Bridgetown, a role that he delegated to Dr. Cummins. Nonetheless, the new head of the government was not able to exercise the same authority over the other political parties as his predecessor. In 1961, the Democratic Labour Party triumphed in the electoral process, achieving a decisive victory that showed a complete control of the political landscape. Adams could not maintain the unity of the West Indies Federation, which ultimately constitutionally dissolved in 1962. Even though there were later attempts made to restore it, the region never saw the establishment of a Federal government. Barrow tried to revive the Federation of West Indies. Aiming to do so, he had to require the British government to provide financial assistance, a request that was ultimately accepted by the British government, albeit not with the same degree of fervour that Barrow anticipated. Barrow emphasised two key points for the successful establishment of the Federation: the British investment programme and the sheer necessity of addressing the region's independence issue. In 1963, however, complications arose with the formation of a coherent structure within the federal government and the British government declined to fulfil its obligation as per the terms of the agreement. Nonetheless, by 1965, the British government expressed satisfaction with the economic and political achievement of the Democratic Labour Party. During his three years as head of the government, Barrow had worked to achieve the independence of Barbados. Following protracted and arduous negotiations, the country of Barbados attained full sovereignty on 30th November 1966, thereby becoming an independent state. Barrow was appointed as first Prime Minister of the country. The election of Barrow as Prime Minister was not a straightforward decision. The British government would have preferred a more moderate head of state in Barbados following its imminent attainment of independence. This sentiment is clearly articulated in a report to the Colonial Office by Sir John Stow:

All the parties... have been holding well-attended meetings, which so far have been reasonably orderly. However, the speeches have, since the resignations, gone down to a very low level and the mudslinging as violent as in any election campaign, is now prevalent on both sides. There may be some broken heads at these meetings in the atmosphere of tension in which they take place. Before the resignations the issues were clear-cut, independence alone or through a federation. Both opposition parties appear, however, in the light of Barrow's abuse at recent

meetings, to have come to the conclusion that he must be removed from the scene. That elections must be held before independence [may be] granted to Barbados. (Cox-Alomar, 2004, p.678)

Given Lamming's personal involvement in the process of his nation's independence, these particularly turbulent times served as a significant source of inspiration for his literary works. The writer desired to establish of a robust cultural and literary foundation for the newly independent nation. His works delve extensively into the historical and political ramifications of the British rule, offering a nuanced perspective on its repercussions for the Barbadian population. The corpus of the authors essays and interviews reflects on the literary background imposed on the small colony, challenging and deconstructing it. Despite the fact that his aspiration for a Pan-Caribbean nation was never realised, he is undoubtedly one of the region's most significant authors, shaping the literary, and by extension, imaginative background for future generations.

CONSIDERATIONS ON GEORGE LAMMING'S *WATER WITH BERRIES*

In *Water with Berries* (1971), George Lamming intensely explores themes such as the yearning for freedom and from colonial oppression. He investigates the complex relationship between the coloniser and the colonised from various diverse viewpoints, including language and manners, creating rich and layered characters. The depiction of the lives of the three Calibans in London offers a valuable opportunity to examine their desire for freedom from colonial power, portraying how different aspects of the colonial domination affect their existence. Derek wants to escape the teachings of the monastery and the feeling of guilty they imposed onto him; Roger struggles under the heavy burden of his father's legacy and the love he feels for a white woman; Teeton fights against the colonial authority in San Cristobal and the complex relationship he established with the Old Dowager. The final shatter with their respective oppressive forces leads to a violent liberation, and their potential demise.

The literary analysis draws greatly from the insights of Paul Gilroy and Steve Mentz. To truly grasp the complex ties between Teeton and the various interpretations of colonial power and diasporic communities, the concepts of double consciousness and diaspora were applied, as discussed in *The Black Atlantic*. Whereas, *Shipwrecked Modernity* offers the theoretical framework for a more nuanced understanding of the role of water and its symbolic meaning. Additionally, Lamming's interviews and articles clarify the significance of language in his works and perception of power dynamics.

To better comprehend the main motifs of the novel, an overview of the key historical events that characterised the Caribbean during the 1950s and 1960s. Lamming, as one of the major intellectual in the region, played a crucial role in fostering a sentiment of independence and promoting a Pan-Caribbean identity. His works reflect the layered and intricate relationship between the settlers and the population. Moreover, his novels created the basis for a rich Caribbean literary cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 4

The present chapter analyses the novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) by Fred D'Aguiar. The Anglo-Guyanese author recounts the events that took place on board the *Zong* slave ship in 1781, in the high seas of the Caribbean region. During the crossing, the crew of the *Zong* disposed of the bodies of dead captives and of more than 122 enslaved people that were still alive. The owner of the slave ship requested compensation from the insurance companies for the deceased captives, and as a result, the event was reported in the papers, significantly influencing the discourse around slavery from the outset in the 19th century and leading to a debate on the fundamental nature of the practice itself. In the novel, the narrative of the *Zong* massacre is reiterated in each section, as the fundamental assertion of D'Aguiar's works argues that the past is laid to rest only when is recounted. Nevertheless, it appears impossible for this past to be permanently left behind, regardless of how many times it is narrated, as it persists in the present. The author reflects on the consequences of slavery and hypothesises that it is the root of contemporary racism, attempting to address the traumas of his own past through the medium of narration. Even though the moral compass of the story and the central character of two sections is Mintah, an enslaved woman who is able to climb back on board after being thrown at sea, the novel recounts the stories of all the African captives that lost their life during the colonial era. Through the character of Mintah, D'Aguiar is able to explore the themes of reproduction, heritage and fertility.

In this chapter, the analysis focuses on the necessity of reiterating the story of the *Zong* perpetually, the dichotomy between the elements of wood and water, and imperative need to cling to one's heritage.

In the final sections of this chapter, the analysis addresses the works of Paul Gilroy and Steve Mentz. The concept of African heritage as 'repository', as articulated in *The Black Atlantic*, and the metaphor of the ship as a chronotopos are distinctly exemplified in the novel under scrutiny. The centrality of the dualism between wood and water enables an in-depth examination of the novel through the lens of the shipwreck phenomenon, as conceptualized in *Shipwrecked Modernity*.

THE *ZONG* MASSACRE REIMAGINED: LITERARY ANALYSIS OF FRED D'AGUIAR *FEEDING THE GHOSTS*

Since the advent of the European oceanic exploration era, the oceans have been perceived as a vast and blank space, a place void of historical significance. However, the analysis of a diverse corpus of records, personal journals, ships' logs, and maps has contributed to the creation of a rich corpus of literature that proved essential to study our history, albeit from an anthropocentric perspective. Derek Walcott posits the notion that the sea has the capacity to restore events that have been erased from historical memory, yet the oceans retain them, conceptualising "the ocean as history". On the contrary, Fred D'Aguiar interprets "the ocean as slavery". The identical structure of these two statements allows for the subject/ objects to be interchangeable, "slavery is history," "history is slavery", highlighting the intertwined nature of these two concepts. The ocean serves as a means for narratives of forced migration, the Middle Passage, and colonialism; while at the same time, it facilitated the emergence of anti-colonialist solidarity and movements. "Oceans were equally important as material sites of death and of hope" (Mawani, 2018, p.89). Within these imaginative responses, the Atlantic Ocean has taken on a particular relevance, as both a literal and an imagined site of diasporic memory, and of various diasporic crossings. Phillips refers to the Atlantic Ocean as his imaginative "home", regarding it as the literal and figurative centre of the individual and communal crossings between Africa, the Caribbean, the UK and the US. It is not only a place of transition but a space where everything halts too. Toni Morrison comments in interview, "millions of people disappeared without a trace, and there is not one monument anywhere to pay homage to them, because they never arrived safely on shore. So it's like a whole nation that is under the sea. A nameless, violent extermination" (Ward, 2019, p.783). In an attempt to deal with the weight of this traumatic experience requires the cultural and literary framework to conceptualise these events, Fred D'Aguiar narrates the stories of those who did and did not survive the Middle Passage, helping the survivors elaborate the historical traumas of the slave trade.

The sea, as the core of individual and collective memories, allows to question the notions of space, time and history, acting as a catalyst, compelling whoever interrogates its waters towards stories of racial violence and anti-colonial sentiment. The ocean permits to change the historical perspective, shifting from the perception of progress as a series of consecutive and linear events to an intricate verticality. In this verticality, the consequences of an event extend both in depth and in breadth. Therefore, in the context of the ocean, the past remains perpetually present, a notion that is particularly salient in the case of colonialism and slave trade past, exerting a profound influence on the lives and memories of the descendants and on the racist systems that are in place today.

D'Aguiar challenges the notion that the colonial past can be disregarded as a mere chapter in the human history. Instead, he insists on the notion that the institution of slavery directly resulted in contemporary forms of racism. The narratives that the author brings to life serve multiple functions. In an interview, the Anglo-Guyanese writer highlights the manner in which these stories are used to provide a sympathetic and empathetic understanding of the traumas endured by enslaved people during the colonial era. He writes:

[To get them to redraw] their coveted maps of empathy [by activating] their ability to experience fellow-feeling for someone of a different race, the opposite gender and the power-brokered relationships between and within such groupings" and to give them a "view of themselves and of the multi-racial world they inhabit. (Craps, 2010, p.473)

D'Aguiar's concern focuses on the concept of justice, not only for the living, but also for those who were forgotten, for the dead. Vanessa Guignery asserts that D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* "gives voice to the murdered slaves of the ship *Zong*" (Ward, 2019, p.785). The writer emphasises the presence of a "double narrative" in his work, referring to his personal experience of racism as a Black man in Europe and then in the US, which prompted him to research historical precedents of racism in modern times:

My black ancestry and Caribbean experience aligns me with a history of slavery. My skin has drawn a lot of static from whites who hate blacks, both in my teenage years growing up in and since my arrival in the US in 1992 to teach. Stories from the past about the auction block are automatically my stories. I feel on behalf of those who suffered these things. Racism is not over by any means. There are examples of it every day in the media. People die every day at the hands of racists. I deplore these things. I feel them. I write about race to keep the idea of one race as superior to another strange and unacceptable. (Frías, 2002, p.8)

He has traced his steps back to the colonial times, where he encountered numerous stories that demanded to be told. A past that has not yet been laid to rest. This is a pivotal concept in the works of D'Aguiar, who underlines it on multiple occasions the necessity for a story to be told in order to be laid to rest. Slave narratives are not a contemporary phenomenon; however, they were previously redacted for a specific abolitionist market and were often heavily edited. Enslaved black people who, for the great majority, were forbidden to learn to read or write, lacked both voice and a listening audience or readership. At present, when slavery is remembered in the UK, the focus tends to fall on British abolitionists, perpetuating the myth that a band of white British men heroically freed the

grateful and passive enslaved Africans. Of course, the reality was very different; alongside black abolitionists, enslaved people played an instrumental role in resisting slavery and liberating themselves from it. Literary creative works have been viewed as offering a counter-history, or counter-memory, to this received history of slavery. Chassot explains how literature can supplement historiography by attempting to capture the silenced perspectives of the enslaved subjects (Chassot, 2015). Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that experiences such as colonialism and slavery cannot be merely disregarded. Craps reports Jacques Derrida's reflections on the necessity to learn and live with the ghosts in order to construct a just future:

No justice . . . seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism, (Derrida quoted in Craps, 2010, p.467)

The philosopher insists on the necessity to live not solely in the present but "beyond all living presents" (Craps, 2010, p.467), conscious of those already dead and those who are not yet born. This assertion is of particular poignancy when considering the concept of mid-mourning. Mid-mourning diverges from the notion of mourning in that it oscillates between introjection and incorporation, never successfully moving past this state of grief (Craps, 2010, p.468). Consequently, those who are subjected to racial and colonial trauma find themselves in a perpetual intermediate state, unable to move on or process the trauma, existing in a state of everlasting unresolved grief. The issue lies in the endurance of colonialism, which was not a singular event, but rather a continued and systemic process that encompassed centuries of enslavement, genocide, and force labour. This still continues to resonate in contemporary society, manifesting in the persistent systemic racism that is present in societal structures. Moreover, the collective nature of the trauma makes it a persistent and ongoing phenomenon. It is not possible to mourn for something that has not yet fully ceased to exist. Living with the ghosts of the past involves coming to terms with the lingering effects of unresolved historical traumas. This distressing past continues to manifest as a haunting and disruptive element in the present, affecting the lives of those of survived. However, for Fred D'Aguiar, "[t]he past is laid to rest when it is told" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p.230). Despite the repeated emphasis on the significance of this concept, the past remains unresolved. This observation is reinforced by the novel itself, which seems to be perpetually compelled to retell its story. The novel is structured into three sections. The

first portrays the events on the *Zong* as they unfold, with accounts from the perspectives of different characters, members of the crew and captives alike, notably Mintah, a female captive. Literary works produced in the last centuries concerning the transatlantic slave trade rarely depict the Middle Passage, due to the impossibility of reporting on the total inhuman treatment of the enslaved people and the terrors of the crossing. Nonetheless, in recent years, some authors, such as D'Aguiar and Smallwood, have attempted to narrate the experiences of those who were aboard during the crossing. The novel depicts the slave ship at sea as a liminal space-time, with the disorienting and traumatic effects it entails. The historian Smallwood posits that the voyage initiates a profound metamorphosis in the captives, rendering them no longer individuals but rather "Atlantic commodities", ready for sale at auction upon arrival, which entails a complete loss of their individuality, names, status, social bonds, family ties. D'Aguiar concurs with Smallwood's conclusion to *Saltwater Slavery*: for those who survived it, the Middle Passage in fact "was perhaps the antithesis of a 'middle' passage, with all that phrase implies about a smooth, linear progression leading to a known end" (Chassot, 2015, p.104). The moment the ship sets sail, they become mere objects, a phenomenon Smallwood describes as, "[they] became, for the purpose of transatlantic shipment, mere physical units that could be arranged and molded at will – whether folded together spoonlike in rows or flattened side by side in a plane"(Chassot, 2015, p.99). Orlando Patterson identifies this as the primary constituent of slavery: social death (Chassot, 2015, p.92). "Alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth," Patterson explains, the enslaved people "ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" (Chassot, 2015, p.92); their existence was a form of "living death". This undead state was instrumental in achieving the "desired object: an African body fully alienated and available for exploitation in the American marketplace". In *Feeding the Ghosts*, the author does not recoil from depicting this process, describing the inhumanities committed on the ship. D'Aguiar uncovers the underlying economic rationality that guided the decision to killing the *Zong* captives, which was rooted in the dehumanisation of the Africans, using the concept of necessity to justify these deaths, which were in fact a means to maximise profit. The decision to dispose of the captives while they were still alive was not influenced by considerations of morality for the crew; their disposal while still alive was essential from a financial standpoint. D'Aguiar emphasises the extent to which those engaged in the slave trade were able to exercise not only the authority to life or death on the captives, but also the opportunity to profit from these decisions. The point of view that wants the captives as a dehumanised and socially dead entity is juxtaposed to an alternative. This perspective is expressed by Fred D'Aguiar through the character of Mintah, the moral compass of the entire novel. Thanks to her story, the author narrates the attempts of the captives to preserve their humanity and to persist in their existence as subject beings. Mintah's resistance is characterised by the use of her voice when

calling Kelsal, following him around the ship with her voice and gaze; even when he is not in her proximity, he feels them. Mintah's gaze and voice provide her agency and subjectivity. The contrast between her resistance and Kelsal's submission is evident in his inability to openly speak against the captain. He can only resort to obedience. However, the various near-death experiences that Mintah is confronted with during the Middle Passage push her to almost lose her subjectivity, inducing a state similar to a coma. During this liminal state of being, it is not only used the language of death, but also the language of wood. The wood and the wooden imaginary are recurring themes throughout the novel, as is the ocean. These two elements are in opposition in the novel, but constantly present, with the wood being Mintah's ally during her life. The terrestrial element transports her back to her childhood and to her father, who continues to live in Mintah thanks to his association with the wood. While placing her head on the wooden ship, before and after being thrown overboard, Mintah remembers her father's wooden works, which in turn gives her a sense of individuality, of being herself and not merely a captive. It is important to note that this does not imply that she does not be scarred by the events of the crossing. She is profoundly traumatised; however, the wood, the feeling it under her skin, provides her with a sense of partial stability, while everything else is lost in the instability of the ocean. Mintah ponders that, on that ship that is going nowhere, "[t]ime runs on the spot, neither backwards nor forwards". She perceives life at sea as a paradoxical state, "[a] life on water was no life to live, just an in-between life, a suspended life, a life in abeyance, until land presented itself and enabled that life to resume". This notion can be applied to her life too. Following her experiences on the *Zong*, she finds herself in a state that is neither fully alive nor completely dead. The ocean has rendered her conception of life and death ambiguous, leaving her adrift in a state of limbo. She feels compelled to recount the *Zong* massacre eternally, in an attempt to process and come to terms with the events happened during the crossing, almost as if she is constantly trying to survive them. After the arrival in Jamaica, the stage moves to London, where the insurance trial is taking place. During the hearings, some of the crewmembers, among who there are Kelsal and the Captain, recount the events of the *Zong* massacre. Obviously, the narrative is not only told from the perspective of the perpetrators, but they are also attempting to win the judicial case. Consequently, numerous actions and details are not reported fully nor truthfully. During the trial, the diary of Mintah, which Simon gives to the insurance lawyers, is not accepted as evidence, thus highlighting how black voices remains unheard in the legal system. The diary was written on the ship, after Mintah managed to miraculously return on board, with a pen and some paper she found. It is noteworthy that, in this instance as well, Mintah's recounting of the *Zong* massacre transpires through the means of wood. She survives the event and narrates her story only through the medium that enables her survival. The judge, sceptical that such diary could have been written by a slave,

rejects it. However, it is important to note Simon's emotional response to this rejection. He feels distraught not just because the diary is not included as evidence, but more significantly because he was unable to ensure that Mintah's story was heard. Her compulsion to narrate her experiences, in the hope of bringing closure to the past, appears to transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. Despite her physical absence, Mintah's voice does not fail to attempt to expose the truth, to reach Kelsal. Following the conclusion of the trial, a section of the diary presented to the judge is recounted at the beginning of the last part of the novel. This section begins with a direct account by Mintah of the events that took place on the *Zong*. "I am Mintah. I was thrown into the sea and the god of wood held out his hand to me and I took it and climbed out of the sea" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p.183). In this passage, the wood is blessed not only a personification but even a deification. It is explicitly highlighted how it is the wood that saved Mintah. Then her years in Maryland and Jamaica, where she is perpetually haunted by the memories, are described. D'Aguiar's decision to alter the gender of the survivor, who was a male slave, enables him to create a narrative that includes themes of fertility, resistance and empowerment. In order to survive the psychological impact of the *Zong* massacre, Mintah sought to carve wooden figures of the captives who lost their lives, thus commemorating their stories. This practice allows the themes of woodcarving and reproduction to interweave. Following the events on the slave ship, Mintah became infertile; the figures she carves thus become her kin, her progeny. A number of metaphors pertaining birth and reproduction populate the text, yet these metaphors refer only to the wooden figures. This ritual of carving people enables her to perpetuate the memories of the dead, a process she refers to as "feeding the ghosts". The past remains unresolved; the story must be told repeatedly, not once but perpetually. As it is impossible to lay this past to rest, D'Aguiar argues that "each articulation, each imagining, feeds the need for a further act of retrieval". The wood imaginary is employed to imply a sense of continuity with her African traditions, despite the rupture caused by the Middle Passage. However, this continuity is not intended to symbolise a return to Africa, but rather serves as a means to process the traumas of the Middle Passage and the slave trade. At the novel's conclusion, a fire devours Mintah's modest house, with her and her statues still inside. The description of the statues engulfed in flames recalls the dancing figures that had appeared in Mintah's dream. Despite the seemingly tragic conclusion, this does not undermine the significance of her works. The fire appears to liberate the spirits of the people trapped by the sea, suggesting that they may continue to narrate their story, freely circulating around the world. Therefore, the ghosts remain at large, able to tell their past, thanks to Mintah's commitment in capturing them.

Feeding the Ghosts comprises a prologue and an epilogue, which are set in a transhistorical approach. In the epilogue, the events that took place on the *Zong* are transported out of time and out of space, thereby suggesting the persistence of racial attitudes and practices. D'Aguiar writes

I am in your community, in a cottage or apartment or cardboard box, tucked away in a quiet corner, ruminating over these very things. The *Zong* is on the high seas. Men, women and children are thrown overboard by the captain and his crew. One of them is me. One of them is you. One of them is doing the throwing, the other is being thrown. I'm not sure who is who, you or I. There is no fear, nor shame in this piece of information. There is only the fact of the *Zong* and its unending voyage and those deaths that cannot be undone. Where death has begun but remains unfinished because it recurs. (D'Aguiar, 1997, p.229)

Black and white stories intertwine in the colonial era and in slavery. However, D'Aguiar's primary concern is not with the notions of blame or shame; rather, he is interested in depicting the story of the *Zong* and its carnage, in the hope of bringing an end to its perpetual murders, which cannot be laid to rest. D'Aguiar refuses to obscure in his depictions the horrors of the Middle Passage. "Only by doing so can we begin a dialogue about how to arrest its voyage." Baucom argues, importantly, that D'Aguiar's novel teaches us that "history is its own future, its own answer, its own predicate; that history is not 'history,' not a property of the past but the property the present inherits as its structuring material". By establishing this transhistorical locus, D'Aguiar enables the audience to be present in the past as much as the past is present in contemporaneity. The author pays close attention to the Middle Passage, not only to describe the horror that other authors were unable to depict, but also to suggest that writing and remembering are collective acts. "D'Aguiar implicitly equates remembering and activism. To name and thus remember in order to re-present". These actions allow for the reconstruction of the narratives of enslavement, including the voices of the captives. D'Aguiar's work can be conceptualised as "[a] slave narrative becomes a prism through which the present is examined" (Ward, 2019, p.785).

The thorough analysis of Gilroy's work enables for a comprehensive examination of some of the main motifs of the novel. Many of the concepts outlined in *The Black Atlantic* prove relevant here, the wooden fil rouge, present throughout the novel, being the prime example. Mintah is able to reconnect with her father and, through him, her African heritage by means of this element. Her carvings become the physical manifestation of this bond, prompting consideration of the "repository" concept expressed in Gilroy's book. Gilroy posits that the African cultural heritage could undergo

one of two paths: erasure or repository. The former implies the complete loss of the cultural heritage due to the traumas and dehumanization suffered during the Middle Passage; while the latter, termed “repository”, suggests the survival and subsequent transformation of the heritage, particularly among the future generations. Mintah’s carvings become the material expressions of this cultural continuity, evolving from a craft of sustenance for her father to a psychological means of survival during and after the transatlantic crossing. Her African heritage becomes a raft through the traumas of slavery. It could be argued that, given her lack of biological progeny, her heritage might be considered ephemeral. However, Mintah dedicates her life to three primary occupations: the carving of the statues, the assistance of other African people in escaping their enslavement, and teaching. After being able to free herself from enslavement, Mintah begins to educate the black children within her local communities. Though deprived of the experience of motherhood, Mintah’s legacy manifests itself in two distinct forms: her statues and her role as a teacher. Through teaching, she ensures the survival of the African heritage across generations.

The narrative of the *Zong* is not an isolated historical incident from 1781; it represents the broader system of the transatlantic slave trade. Only a few authors have been able to depict the horrors that transpired on board the ships. In his work, Gilroy frames the ship as a living, moving, micro-cosmos. D’Aguiar mirrors this symbolism, yet advancing it, turning the *Zong* into a vessel that transcends time. Mintah asserts that the ship is outside and foreign to any spatial location, serving therefore as a metaphor for every slave vessel. This is emphasised in different occasions, particularly during the epilogue, where the ship is depicted as existing beyond the conventional notions of space and time. By situating the events on board in a transhistorical state, the author invites reflection on their contemporaneity and the continued relevance of these narratives. Therefore, D’Aguiar’s vessel metaphor extends beyond Gilroy’s application.

The ocean is the other pivotal element in the novel, despite its subtle presence. It surfaces in the initial act of the story, in the recounting of the events by the crewmembers, and subsequently, it manifests in the third part as a recurring haunting presence in Mintah’s life. During the Middle Passage, she perceives the ocean as a liminal space, existing in a state of suspended time. The ocean seems a cage in which it is impossible to orient for her, leading to a profound disdain for it. However, when she is thrown overboard and is forcibly immersed in the ocean, it seems to soothingly call her, inviting her to immerse in its infinite depth, tempting her to stay for the eternity. The only means for her of resisting the allure of the sea is to cling to the nearest terrestrial element that she encounters: a rope. This elemental contrast shapes Mintah’s entire life. Water represents trauma, dislocation, dissolution, whereas, by contrast, wood represents memory, identity and

endurance. This dynamic is present in every section of the novel. In the second segment, the crew's recollection of the events that took place on the high seas is counterbalanced by Mintah's own memory: her diary. In the final section, the constant presence of the ocean, both in her proximity and in her sleep, is kept at bay by her wooden works. Each phase of her life portrays this opposition.

The trauma of the *Zong* carnage can be compared to a shipwreck in Mintah's existence. As Mentz suggests in *Shipwrecked* Modernity, shipwrecks mark the collision with the destabilising force of water, symbolising rupture and transformation. In D'Aguiar's novel, the slave ship represents the colonial era as a whole. The wreck experienced by Mintah is the imposed transformation of the self. The Middle Passage was seen as an instrumental moment during which the captives were deprived of their identity completely. The encounter with the water symbolises the physical immersion in this concept, asking Mintah to die not only physically but also spiritually, to strip herself of everything she was, of her essence, of her African being. Her search for wood is not merely a quest for bodily salvation, but rather a search for the preservation of her African identity.

In this context, the ship is not merely a moving prison in which they are entrapped; it is a vessel that carries with it the representation of the enslaved people's cultural legacy. The ocean is not perceived as a space that transcends the conventional notion of nation, as intended by Mentz, but rather an environment that challenges the concept of space itself, a non-space. Following the rupture, it is necessary to regain a sense of order and stability, which is intrinsically diverse from the pre-existing one. However, the recovery remains incomplete. On one hand, Mintah's experience demonstrates the everlasting rupture of trauma, whereas her identification with wood reveals a desire for continuity. Her acts of preservation are overshadowed by the impossibility of complete recovery. Her actions are never definitive solutions; rather they are ongoing attempts to navigate through her traumas.

THE ECONOMY OF ATROCITY: THE ZONG MASSACRE (1781)

“Aloft all hands, strike the top-masts and
belay;
Yon angry setting sun and fierce-edged
clouds
Declare the Typhon's coming.
Before it sweeps your decks, throw overboard
The dead and dying – ne'er heed their chains
Hope, Hope, fallacious Hope!
Where is thy market now?” (Turner, 1840)



Figure 2 *The Slave Ship*, J.M.W. Turner, 1840

This poem was written by J.M.W. Turner to accompany his painting *The Slave Ship*, which was exhibited at the Royal Gallery in 1840. Amidst the waves, which have been reddened by the setting sun, it is possible to discern the presence of a ship. On board, a number of crew members can be observed throwing overboard the enslaved men, women and children they were transporting to Jamaica. This is the event narrated in Fred D’Aguiar’s novel *Feeding the Ghosts*. The book recounts the story of the *Zong* massacre, a real-life event which took place in the Caribbean Seas in 1781. This historical event had significant consequences for the public perception of the slave trade, particularly in England. In order to fully grasp the impact of the event and the importance of the novel, one must acknowledge the events portrayed.

At the time of the massacre, the slave trade was regarded as one of the most lucrative enterprises existent. The English Parliament invested a considerable amount of time and resources in the slave trade, both financially and logistically. It was an organised system of brutality and inhuman treatment of its African victims. Following the 1712 Act, many private investors sought to profit from this lucrative trade. However, the trade itself was rife with dangers, including disease, possible riots and perils at sea. The ships were anchored in African ports for a protracted periods, which led to an elevated risk of disease transmission among the crew members. This was further exacerbated by the presence of an increasingly growing number of enslaved people on the lower decks. The duration of the spent at the coast could extend up to several months. Consequently, during this period, tropical illnesses that afflicted the sailors began to propagate among the African captives. This resulted in the demise of some enslaved Africans and crew members even before the ship’s departure. The confined

and overcrowded quarters of the ship, which were characterised by stringent restrictions, rendered the containment of the illness almost unfeasible. The spatial dimension allocated to African captives were inadequate to stand upright or to move. It was soon realised by slave traders and crew members that the most critical phase of the voyage was the period of waiting off the African coasts. This juncture represented a particularly perilous moment, characterised by an elevated susceptibility to contracting tropical disease that was further compounded by the encroaching presence of the enslaved Africans. The crew on every slave ship were acutely aware of the potential threat posed by enslaved people, regarding them as unreliable and capable of overwhelming them at any given moment. Consequently, traders exercised great caution in their decision regarding which individuals to transport, in order to mitigate the risks of riots and the potential problems that might arise from transporting a large number of young and strong enslaved, despite their possible economic value. Africans who were more accommodating and were regarded by their fellows captives as having a certain status were selected for the role of helpers and the captors sought to use their status to their advantage. However, the constant reports detailing rebellions and riots occurring on ships off the African coastline led to a state of tension and paranoia among the sailors. This resulted in a collective readiness to respond to any potential attack with any means necessary. On the slave ship, the dynamics between the crew and the captives grew more complex, especially as the number of African prisoners increased. Every element of daily life seemed meticulously crafted to provoke anger among the enslaved people and evoke fear within the crew. The ships were managed by anxious sailors and crowded by traumatised enslaved Africans. However, the existence of economic incentives and bonuses for a successful voyage served as a crucial factor in maintaining order on the ship. Any acts of extreme violence and brutality directed towards the enslaved captives could potentially prove counterproductive. Although the history of the slave trade is a history of violence, this was more institutional than personal. Brutality was the basis of the whole system. It is irrefutable that no slave ship could hope to traverse the ocean without the existence of violence in the main mechanisms, including the chains, the guns, and the daily regime. This is the background to the *Zong* massacre. However, the *Zong* carnage sprang from a very different set of circumstances.

It was imperative that the ships be entirely self-sufficient during the months spent traversing the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, a stringent protocol was implemented to meticulously account for and package supplies. Ordinarily, the vessels transported the double amount of provisions required, thus ensuring the safety of the entire ship against any potential contingencies. It was not uncommon for the food to decay or to be consumed by rodents, and for water to spill and leak during the journey, despite the crew's best effort to prevent it. Human error was also a factor to be considered, as was the risk of miscalculating the necessary supplies and the voyage's duration in the event of getting lost

at sea. Despite having extra provisions, there was always the possibility of reducing rations to the minimal amount required for all on board. Whilst the *Zong* was anchored in the port of São Tomé, the vessel's crew were tasked with loading the provisions required. However, the first mate Kalsall, who was responsible for overseeing the loading process, was not present and did not report for duty. Consequently, the question of who was in command on the day remains unanswered. While this may appear as a minor detail, it was a contributing factor to the eventual massacre. The *Zong* departed, with no one on board aware of any issues with the supplies. During the voyage, an epidemic broke out on the ship, killing many of the enslaved Africans and a portion of the crew. Captain Collingwood fell ill and could not command the ship appropriately. It was routine that the command would be entrusted to the first mate, Kalsall. However, for reasons that remain unknown, the captain delegated the responsibility to the only passenger aboard the *Zong*, Sir Robert Stubbs, provoking the rage of the first mate, who was suspended for insubordination due to his reaction regarding this matter. As the ship traversed the open ocean, the challenges and problems inherent in these dynamics became increasingly pronounced. Nevertheless, the ship was approaching its destination, Jamaica. The Caribbean Sea, which they were entering, posed a significant threat to the voyage, since numerous Caribbean islands had fallen under French control, thereby rendering them enemy territory. It was at this moment that the crew realised that the supplies of fresh water had been leaking during the journey, and the quantity of drinkable water remained was just enough to reach Jamaica. It was not possible to halt and replenish the supplies and the event of an incident during the final stretch of the journey would have resulted in serious problems. On 28th November 1781, the ship caught sight of the most extreme point of Jamaica, but they did not recognize it, erroneously recognising it as the island of St Dominque, a French possession. Therefore, the ship's course was changed, moving further away from their destination. Later, during the trial, using the ship's logs and crew's testimonies it was assessed that the water supplies would have been sufficient for four days; the journey to return to Jamaica would have been about fourteen days. On the 29th of November, the captain of the ship, whoever it was, confronted a grave crisis. It was at this moment that the proposal that "Part of the Slaves should be destroyed to save the rest and the remainder of the slaves and the crew put to short allowance" was made, and the crew agreed unanimously. Subsequent hearings in London accepted a number of 122 enslaved individuals who were murdered, in addition to ten who jumped to their deaths. Regardless of the exact number, it was indisputable that a mass killing occurred on the *Zong*. Stubbs asserted that other enslaved Africans died en route back to Jamaica, most likely to reinforce the idea that these killings were somewhat necessary. On 9th January 1782, a Jamaican newspaper announced the sale of 200 Africans; they were the remaining survivors of the 442 enslaved captives that had departed from São Tomé in August 1781.

Gregson, the ship's owner, sought to claim insurance for the deceased enslaved people. This event marks the pivotal moment in the development of the event of the *Zong* as propulsion for the Abolition of slavery, as it introduces an international dimension to the event. In England, there was already a growing concern with the practice of the slave trade, perceived as an inhumane business. However, the population had a passive, or rather insignificant role, in the discussion around the morality of slavery, which was confined to a small circle of intellectuals. This concept underwent a gradual transformation in the context of the American Independence (and subsequently, the French Revolution). During this period, an abolitionist movement emerged within the English population, making a shift in the political discourse. The insurance company's decision to withhold compensation from Gregson prompted him to pursue legal action. Twelve days after this decision, an anonymous letter was published both on the *Morning Chronicles* and the *London Advertiser*. In this letter, there was a detailed account of the events that have taken place on the *Zong* and emphasised the significance of the matter. However, it became evident that the treatment of enslaved people as cargo and the killing of African captives on board were not uncommon practices on slave ships. The case was adjudicated by a jury, which determined that the owner of the slave ships was entitled to compensation. This determination was made under a specific provision in the insurance contracts:

Touching the Adventures and Perils which we the Assurers are contented to bear and do take upon us in this Voyage, they are of the Seas, men-of-War, Fire, Enemies, Pirates, Rovers, Thieves, Jettison, Letters of Mart and Counter-Mart, Surprisals, Takings at Sea, Arrests, Restraints and detainments of all Kings, Princes and People, of what Nation, Condition or Quality soever, Barratry of the Master and Mariners, and of all other Perils, Losses and Misfortunes [my italics] that have or shall come to the Hurt, Detriment, or Damage of the said Goods and Merchandises and Ship, etc, or any Part thereof. (Walvin, 2011, p.108)

The fundamental basis of the insurance business concerning the slave trade was that African captives were considered as cargo and that, under certain circumstances, the disposal of a cargo could be compensable. It has been documented that the captain of the slave ships frequently exploited this provision, commonly incorporated within the insurance contracts, to dispose of enslaved Africans. Captives who rioted and rebelled during the journey were subjected to brutal assaults and sustained terrible injuries, resulting in the reduction of the captives' possible value. To address this problem, the captains usually decided to dispose of the injured individuals. The practice of disposing of wounded enslaves to mitigate the losses was a well-acquainted practice even before the events of the *Zong*. As the trial unfolded, all these information began to emerge in the papers,

captivating the public's attention. Nonetheless, the general public was not wholly unfamiliar with these stories; they periodically appeared in the periodicals. However, the decision to dispose of enslaved individuals was consistently portrayed as the ultimate assurance of the security of the crewmembers. The *Zong* case presented an entirely novel perspective on the issue. Gregson's demand to receive a compensation resulted in a shift in the focus of the debate from the technicalities of insurance law to a discussion on the very nature of slavery and the slave trade. Despite the public's interest in the news of the *Zong* and the subsequent trial, it was not until 1788 that a growing abolitionist sentiment emerged, as evidenced by the petitions and the campaigns of the period. In the following years, the events of the *Zong* continued to be remembered, as evidenced by the publication of essays and pamphlets recounting the event. Despite the fact that the abolitionist movement did not immediately achieve its objectives, a new era of politicians and ministers, who were supporters of the abolitionist cause, were appointed to power at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1807, the Act for total British Abolition was passed. It did not stop the Atlantic slave trade or prevent other massacres such as the *Zong* one. For instance, in 1820, the crew of the Spanish schooner *Vicua* were even preparing to blow up the entire ship and its African captives to avoid capture and prosecution. Nonetheless, it did spark new interest in the topic, and a new phase of the abolition movement began.

CONSIDERATIONS ON FRED D'AGUIAR'S *FEEDING THE GHOSTS*

Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* is characterised by a significant presence of reflections on colonial traumas and healing attempts. In re-imagining the *Zong* massacre, D'Aguiar appears to describe the under-narrated phenomenon of the Middle Passage. As he states in various interviews, the necessity to chronicle this period stems from the conviction that this is the moment of origin of contemporary racism. The writer is compelled to recount these stories in order to never forget those who are dead and to express his own experience with racism. The motif of re-telling pervades the entire novel, allowing for an interpretation that consider this the sole action that is able to both alleviate the lingering traumas and a means of remembering the dead. Mintah's experience and her attempts to recovery may be compared to that of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The impelling necessity to recount their traumatic experiences endured during the voyage is a pervasive theme in both literary works, proving to be just a temporary cure in both instances.

In his work, Gilroy proposes a symbolic interpretation of the slave ship, interpreting it as a living micro-cosmos in which the true nature of colonialism and slavery of the colonial period are encapsulated. His metaphor proves to be of a significant importance in the literary examination of D'aguiar's novel, in which, however, the author transports the ship outside of space and time, discussing the persisting characteristics of racism. The ocean assumes a central role throughout the narrative, always present in the protagonist life, as a persistent company. The analysis of the of the dichotomy between wood and water draws upon the insightful concepts proposed by Mentz in *Shipwrecked Modernity*, where a detailed and nuanced analysis discussion of the metaphorical interpretation of shipwrecks is conducted.

The novel is a fictionalisation of the authentic events that unfolded in the Caribbean Sea in 1781. To provide a comprehensive historical framework to the D'Aguiar's work, a concise exposition of the *Zong* massacre has been presented, discussing the profound and enduring influence of the event on the public, both in Britain and abroad, and addressing its contribution to the intensification of the discourse surrounding the abolition of slavery.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this thesis is to apply the theoretical framework of the blue humanities to postcolonial literary works, highlighting their relevance in the contemporary contexts. This new current of study argues for a shift from an anthropocentric point of view to one that includes non-human and more-than-human perspectives, enabling the rise of alternative narratives.

The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this perspective, drawing on the works of scholars such as J. R. Gillis and S. Oppermann. This highlights the importance of imagery in shaping our perceptions, pointing out the necessity of change the discussion around bodies of water to remodel their cultural significance. By analysing various modern and contemporary works, including poems and novels, the thesis explored the diverse ocean symbolism. The sea emerges not merely as a background of creative production but also as a central site in Western literature. Revaluating these texts through the lens of blue humanities concepts enables a more nuanced critical discussion.

The second chapter outlines the key theoretical contributions from Margaret Cohen, Steve Mentz, and Paul Gilroy, identifying the core ideas at the basis of the following analyses of George Lamming and Fred D'Aguiar's novels. Margaret Cohen poses particular attention to the significance of the seafaring narratives role in shaping literary history. The ocean is more than merely a setting; it actively reflects the emotional and psychological struggles of the human mind. Steve Mentz introduces the theoretical approach that uses the phenomenon of shipwreck to re-interpret modernity. His concepts of *compture* and *wreck* serve not only for examining literary works but also as perspectives for understanding historical shifts. This framework enriches the subsequent analyses, providing an innovative frames to read themes of disruption and recovery. Conversely, Gilroy delves into the legacy of African diaspora in the Western hemisphere. He used the concept of double consciousness and the imagery of the ship as a transhistorical vessel. In his reading, the Atlantic Ocean becomes more than a geographical site, a space in which both trauma and resistance intertwine.

The final two chapters apply the theoretical frames to close readings of George Lamming's *Water with Berries* and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*. These chapters explore how the intersection of ecological and postcolonial perspectives reveals new dimensions to the reading of identity, memory and water.

In Lamming's novel, the motif of water intertwines with rituals of remembrance. His interest in the Ceremony of Souls prompts considerations for a Pan-Caribbean sentiment rooted in shared histories of resistance. By adapting Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Lamming creates a postcolonial

counter-narrative in which both colonised and coloniser are re-examined. As he argues, literature becomes essential to conceptualise a shared cultural identity on the Caribbean.

D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* offers a fictional recounting of the *Zong* massacre, using the ocean as both a historical setting and a symbolic force. The fluidity and instability of the sea serve as metaphors for memory and the fractured transmission of African heritage. Through its depiction of water as a medium of trauma and resistance, the novel prompts an extensive reflection on the profound psychological and cultural consequences of colonial violence.

Collectively, these analyses illustrate the pivotal function of the ocean in shaping literary imagery of identity and history. The symbolic function of water bodies, when approached through a more-than-human framework, has the capacity to open space for ecological and transhistorical approaches.

The present thesis has examined the intersection of postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives through a close analysis of two novels by Caribbean authors, focusing on their exploration of the enduring legacy of colonialism and the metaphorical role of the ocean. The analysis is grounded in Gilroy's concepts with emphasis on the Middle Passage and identity. It has been demonstrated how water may function as an imaginative force in postcolonial literature, through the concepts enlightened by Mentz in his works.

As the present study concentrated on the Caribbean context, in future research, the author is interested in extending this perspective to include other former colonial regions. With the increasingly acclaim of the clue humanities approach, a comparative analysis might facilitate the understanding of possible similar oceanic and postcolonial motifs in various geographical settings. Moreover, the present analysis focused exclusively on prose, leaving the opportunity for future studies to consider poems, where their core feature of rhythm and meter may offer valuable expressive opportunities for exploring themes of memory and ecological disruption.

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