



**HAL**  
open science

# Liquid Spaces, Black History, and Diasporic Memories in Paule Marshall's Triangular Road: A Memoir

Corinne Duboin

► **To cite this version:**

Corinne Duboin. Liquid Spaces, Black History, and Diasporic Memories in Paule Marshall's Triangular Road: A Memoir. Magali Compan; Valérie Magdelaine-Andriajafitrimo. *Convergences océanes: Ces océans qui nous habitent*, Presses Universitaires Indianocéaniques, pp.283-303, 2024, 10.61736/DCUZ4064 . hal-04727075

**HAL Id: hal-04727075**

**<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-04727075v1>**

Submitted on 16 Nov 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Liquid Spaces, Black History, and Diasporic Memories in Paule Marshall's *Triangular Road: A Memoir*

Corinne DUBOIN<sup>1</sup>  
DIRE UR 7387 – Université de La Réunion

Water is the first thing in my memory. [...] My grandfather, who knew everything, had forgotten, as if it was not worth remembering, the name of our tribe in that deeply unknown place before the trade. Derek Walcott wrote, “the sea is history.” I knew that before I knew it was history I was looking at.  
—Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*<sup>2</sup>

After thirteen years of compulsive itinerancy I know my Atlantic ‘home’ to be a triangular shape with Britain at one apex, the west coast of Africa at another, and the new world of North America (including the Caribbean) forming the third point of the triangle.  
—Caryl Phillips, *A New World Orders*

I had, at that moment of return [from England and Ghana], completed the triangular trade of my historical origins. West Africa had given me a sense of place, of belonging; and that place and belonging, I knew, was the West Indies. My absence and travels, at the same time, had given me a sense of movement and restlessness-rootlessness.  
—Kamau Brathwaite<sup>4</sup>

In a preliminary note on her 2009 memoir, Barbadian American fiction writer Paule Marshall (1929-2019) states that, “This book is an adaptation of a lecture series delivered at Harvard University in 2005 on the theme of ‘Bodies of Water’ – specific rivers, seas and oceans – and their profound impact on black history and culture throughout the Americas”<sup>5</sup>. Revisiting land-based narratives of displacement and dispersal, Marshall excavates a history, lost or hidden – “submerged” – in aquatic spaces that are interrelated both geographically and historically: the James River in coastal Virginia, USA; the Caribbean Sea and its archipelago; The Atlantic Ocean and the West coast of Africa. As noted by Sam Vásquez, the title of her memoir, *Triangular Road*, “concretize[s] the triangle trade and its aftermath, and highlight[s] the ways in which the Barbadian-American writer claims kinship with various African diasporic communities. Marshall’s memoir represents the triangle as a symbol of the African diasporic/transnational individual [...]”<sup>6</sup>.

Marshall’s view of the multipolar Atlantic world, her triangulation of a dynamic, fluid space, and her will to embrace all facets of her multicultural identity give rise to a liquid map of both routes and roots. The writer’s memories of her personal journeys across water interlaced with historical evocations of painful oceanic passages, from African captives to Caribbean migrants, shed light on the complicated construction of self “in the wake of slavery”, to borrow Christina Sharpe’s polysemic phrase<sup>7</sup> that implies the long-standing consequences of colonization and slavery, the mourning of the dead, and black consciousness in America today, all at once.

Marshall’s multilayered textual remapping of liquid spaces lends itself to a hydrocritical approach<sup>8</sup>. Building upon Hofmeyr’s concept of “hydrocolonialism”<sup>9</sup> we will expose the writer’s representations of seas and waterways and their fundamental role in colonial expansion, the slave trade, and the rise of the plantation system in the New World – a brutal

history and a legacy that shaped her own parents' destiny and still has an impact on today's Black diaspora.

Born in Brooklyn to "Bajan" immigrant parents, feeling "both African American and West Indian" (TR 3), the memoirist at work retraces her lost lineage that links her to the Caribbean and "the Mother Continent" of Africa (TR 164), and embarks on a journey of self-discovery. Marshall reimagines her transoceanic genealogy so as to grasp the full picture of her diffracted diasporic identity. We will consider the author's construction of her fragmented, hybrid work of nonfiction as a "tidalectic" narrative navigating across time and space back and forth, fluctuating between interconnected personal trajectory, family memory, and collective history.

Marshall's memoir, published when she turned eighty, is not a chronological retelling of her life or of significant personal events in the private sphere. Her memories focus on her eye-opening travel experiences as a younger novelist grappling with her artistic and ethnic identity. She structures her narrative in four chapters of different lengths, starting with her "Homage to Mr. Hughes", the famous African American poet and fiction writer, and prominent figure of the Harlem Renaissance movement of the twenties. Through the evocation of their literary and cultural tour of Europe<sup>10</sup>, sponsored by the American government in 1965, at "the height of the Civil Rights Movement" (TR 2), Marshall pays tribute to Langston Hughes, whom she views as "a paterfamilias" (TR 4), "a loving taskmaster, mentor, teacher, griot, literary sponsor and treasured elder friend" (TR 33).

Marshall explains how his first travel memoir inspired her: "I had read *The Big Sea* as a teenager and had privately vowed, even back then, to follow the example of its author. Not only would I become a writer, but a travelin' woman as well" (TR 29). Her own memoir not only confirms that she did follow her literary father's footsteps, as a successful writer and frequent overseas traveler, but also that Hughes's poetic rendering of his life as a cosmopolitan wanderer resonates with Marshall. Indeed, the next three chapters of her memoir are entitled respectively: "I've Known Rivers: The James River"; "I've Known Seas: The Caribbean Sea"; and "I've Known Oceans: The Atlantic". These refer to a chapter in *The Big Sea*, "I've Known Rivers", in which Hughes explains how he came to write a poem at seventeen, while he was crossing the South on a train to Mexico, where his father lived:

Now it was just sunset, and we crossed the Mississippi, slowly, over a long bridge. I looked out the window of the Pullman at the great muddy river flowing down toward the heart of the South, and I began to think what that river, the old Mississippi, had meant to Negroes in the past – how to be sold down the river was the worst fate that could overtake a slave in times of bondage. [...] Then I began to think about other rivers in our past – the Congo, and the Niger, and the Nile in Africa – and the thought came to me: "I've known rivers", and I put it down on the back of an envelope I had in my pocket, and within the space of ten or fifteen minutes, as the train gathered speed in the dusk, I had written this poem, which I called "The Negro Speaks of Rivers":

I've known rivers:  
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.  
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.  
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.  
I've known rivers:  
Ancient, dusky rivers.  
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.<sup>11</sup>

The "muddy water" of the Mississippi River and its continuous flow bring to Hughes's mind the dark history of the South, that of the black slaves "sold down the river". The poet evokes the domestic trade and the displacement of slaves from the coastal States to the Deep South, on the banks of the Mississippi. His mind also travels back to the ancient times of Africa. Through the use of a collective "I", Hughes celebrates his African cultural heritage and retraces the long history of an enduring Black people. He builds a deep emotional connection

with legendary rivers that have shaped the destiny of the continent and its diaspora. Thus, Marshall pays tribute to her late mentor not only in her opening chapter, but throughout her memoir. The next three chapters echo Hughes's poem, used as a structuring hypotext. Through stylistic repetitions and variations, Marshall extends the theme of the ongoing intimate relationship between Black life and the fluid watery world that becomes the main thread of her narrative, combining global and local history. Marshall's paratextual framing devices signal that she does not intend to chronicle her life. As a woman of African descent, the daughter of Caribbean immigrants, and a diasporic writer in multicultural America, she aims to connect specific moments in the path of her life with the painful trajectories of her dispersed community across waters over the centuries.

What is most relevant is not simply the various historical facts and personal memories she brings to light, but the way she tells them, assembles or reorganizes them, and responds to them, thus giving her own perspective on the past that resurfaces and informs the present. As a novelist, Marshall considered that "the two themes most central to [her] work [were] the importance of truly confronting the past, both in personal and historical terms, and the necessity of reversing the present order"<sup>12</sup>. True to her convictions as a writer, she constructs her multiscalar memorial narrative around spatio-temporal porosities, i.e. around the superposition and intermingling of separate temporalities and the interconnection of specific physical (aquatic) and human geographies. Though the author has shaped her narrative around distinct waterscapes, she intends to expose the ramifications and legacies of the colonial enterprise in the Americas, showing that, as DeLoughrey puts it, "histories, like bodies of water, stream into one another"<sup>13</sup>.

Hester Blum has pointed out that the "oceanic turn"<sup>14</sup> in postcolonial studies has prompted a rethinking of seas and oceans, no longer conceived as a-historical empty spaces and areas crisscrossed by shipping routes – or "smooth", open spaces controlled and "striated" by expansionist European States on a "horizontal plane"<sup>15</sup> –, but as large masses of water whose surfaces, depths, and floors have been the sites of haunting colonial histories, of violent encounters, white domination and black or indigenous rebellions, racial othering, forced displacement, dehumanization, and death. In this line of thought, Bystrom and Hofmeyr have used and redefined the term "hydro-colonialism":

The possible meanings of the term could include (1) colonization by means of water (various forms of maritime imperialism); (2) colonization of water (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarization and geopoliticization of oceans); and (3) a colony on water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island).<sup>16</sup>

In the April 2019 issue of *English Language Notes* dedicated to "Hydro-criticism"<sup>17</sup>, Hofmeyr further indicated that "hydrocolonialism signals a commitment to understanding a world indelibly shaped by imperial uses of water" and that it "makes visible relations of power that have been shaped around water and its colonial appropriations"<sup>18</sup>. In their recent collective work *Hydrohumanities*, De Wolff and Faletti have also called attention to the fact that "there have been notable shifts in how humanities scholars have conceptualized water-power relationships, from power *over* water, to water *as* power, to rethinking *with* water the very concept of power itself"<sup>19</sup>.

Such concepts and critical approaches can be useful for exploring how Paule Marshall builds a "hydro-colonial poetics"<sup>20</sup> so as to demonstrate the historicity of both saline and fresh water, and their central role in European imperialism. She reconstructs a geohistory on a global scale, showing the interactions between British colonists (and their descendants) and the natural environment they sought to conquer and exploit. Marshall exposes how the use and management of waterways were fundamental to the establishment and development of the plantation system, a thriving capitalist economy that relied on the deportation of African captives, the commodification of Black bodies and the exploitation of enslaved labor. By writing a global history of rivers and oceans that repeats itself, she traces a genealogy of racialized power relations that allows us to understand the present, as she experiences it, in light of a past inscribed in space as "a practiced place"<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, as geographer Katherine McKittrick states, "the legacy of slavery and the labor of the unfree both shape and are part of the environment we presently inhabit"<sup>22</sup>.

In the chapter "I've Known Rivers: The James River", Marshall explains that after her appointment as "writer-in-residence at Virginia Commonwealth University" in Richmond in

1983, her “first venturing below the Mason-Dixon line” (TR 40), she did intensive research at local libraries, read history books and consulted archives in order to gain more accurate information about Virginia and its colonial history. The memoirist draws on this historical knowledge to inform her readers about overlooked or forgotten facts, and to fuel her own reflection and imagination:

Long after the semester began, and with my classes under way, I continued my private crash course in southern history, finally able to redress the truncated once-over-lightly, deliberately sanitized version of the antebellum South that had been standard in the textbooks of my day in high school and even college. I had never, for example, come across so much as a word in any of those pages about the “scrambles” held along the tidal James. (TR 52-53)

Marshall’s engaging memoir does have a didactic function. The author describes the topography of the region, which facilitated the development of the slave trade in North America in the early seventeenth century and beyond. Indeed, the James, “America’s most historic river” (TR 36), is one of the tidal rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay, a large estuary on the Atlantic coast, where the first African slaves landed in 1619, at Point Comfort, Virginia (TR 56, 61). Marshall indicates that the British settlement, that later became the city of Richmond, “or River City, as the Virginian capital is called” (TR 36), was also strategically located on the banks of the James. It thus prospered as a major center of the US slave trade, actually “the principle port of entry for Africans brought to the New World in the eighteenth century” (TR 47), in a region where “King Tobacco” became the most lucrative “cash crop of all time” (TR 48):

The city’s downtown marks “the Falls”, meaning the end of the rock-bound James, “where the water falleth so rudely and with such violence, as not any boat can pass”, and the beginning of the river’s long, smooth tidal basin that is navigable all the way to historic Jamestown<sup>23</sup> and the Atlantic Ocean some sixty miles downstream. Rough water and smooth. [...] Indeed, it was the combination of the whitewater power of the James fueling the new industries, together with the tidewater offering safe passage to the ships up from the Atlantic, with their chattel cargo, that made for the wealth and status the Old Dominion would enjoy for nearly two centuries. (TR 44-45)

Citing Captain John Smith<sup>24</sup>, an English colonist who explored and charted the bay and its many rivers, thus providing useful maps that helped the new settlers penetrate further inland through costal waterways, Marshall exposes the tenets of their hydro-colonial project in America. The littoral zone, the estuary, and the Tidewater region of Virginia between the Atlantic shores and the Fall Line constitute a unique ecotonal area, a transition zone and a hybrid ecosystem between land and sea, where the rivers meet the ocean. Historically speaking, “this entanglement of water and land”<sup>25</sup> was also a liminal space of negotiations, racial hierarchies, and oppression. Territorial conquests and increasing profits were made possible with the use and management of *water* together with the exploitation and subjugation of *bodies* as the concomitant bases of a colonial economy. Slave traders and settlers controlled (im)mobility on water, the circulation of goods and crops, the forced transportation, landing, and selling of slaves on the riverbanks. They used tidal flows to their benefit since the large and deep bay permitted direct access from the ocean, from Africa and the Caribbean, to the plantations with docks and wharfs built along the tidal river: “The trade was so brisk, the money to be made so plentiful, that often the buying and selling took place on board the ship the moment it docked, or even on the dock itself. Other times, ‘scrambles’ were held on the small towns and villages along the tidal James before the ships reached Richmond” (TR 47). Yet, Marshall does not intend to enlighten her readers the way a historian would do, matter-of-factly. As Lia Bascomb notes, “As she stands on the banks of the James River in Virginia thinking about the peoples who were auctioned off not far away she re-members a history, she reconstructs the fragments of History into a related history. She relies on her imagination and historical ‘fact’, and in the pages of her memoir creates a mythical history to bring those people back into view”<sup>26</sup>. Writing her memoir, she also turns out to be a worthy heiress to the authors of autobiographical slave narratives who intended to write their own history and whose social and political discourses aimed to raise awareness on the ignominy of the “peculiar institution”. Indeed, through her description of scrambles, also known as “grab

and go” slave auctions, Marshall reconstructs scenes of horror that would take place first at sea, on water, then by the river, thus passing moral judgement and appealing to her readers’ sensitivity:

The condition of the chattel cargo was such after the long weeks, sometimes months, at sea, that to placate the townsfolk who complained about the sight and smell of the shipments, a decree was drawn up declaring that the chattel were to be brought into town only at night. Only then was it permitted to march them, chained together at the neck and legs, along the high, precipitous south riverbank over the rattletrap Mayo’s Bridge, which, in turn, deposited them in Olde Richmond Towne on the north bank, its sleep undisturbed. Then, at daybreak, in a place apart from the town proper called the Bottom, amid a cohort of traders, agents, suppliers, exporters, commodities brokers, auctioneers, and scores of independent buyers large and small, the shipment would be put up for sale. (TR 46-47)

[...] In the “scrambles”, the chattel cargo was taken from the hold, off the boat, and herded into a fenced-in yard or pen or stockade with a locked gate. Waiting outside would be a crowd of eager buyers, each with a long rope. Then, once the gate was opened, the “scrambles” began, with the buyers dashing about the yard or pen or stockade, desperate to lasso and corral as many chattel as possible never mind their condition: the stench, the running sores, the caked shit. (TR 47-48)

Marshall’s account gives emphasis to the traders and planters’ appalling inhumanity, their cynicism and crass indifference to the suffering and severe pain inflicted on enslaved Africans, treated as human “cargo” and deprived of their dignity to the point of abjection during the Middle Passage and upon arrival in the New World. The ship’s cramped hold, the pen with locked gates, the fenced-in yard, and the Bottom form a continuum from sea to land, as successive heterotopic sites of confinement, alienation, commodification, and trauma. The author also creates an impression of immediacy and points to heightened physical and moral violence against Black captives. She depicts the fierce competition of greedy and unscrupulous buyers, who crowd and strive to catch as many slaves as possible in a hurry, *en masse*, like cattle. This passage is quite reminiscent of Equiano’s description of his dreadful experience, as he was led from the slave ship to a yard for sale in Bridgetown, Barbados with other captives,

all pent up together like so many sheep in a fold [...]. On a signal given, [...] the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamour [...], and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans [...].<sup>27</sup>

As underlined by Paule Marshall, the “smooth” navigable waters enabled the transportation of an enslaved workforce and the establishment of a new economic system in the colonial territories, while the use of “rough” water as a driving force increased the exploitation of slaves and their economic output. Indeed, Marshall makes it clear that the James’s tumultuous waters and the geological Fall Line with rapids and waterfalls, suitable for the use of hydropower with the building of mills and dams, also contributed to a flourishing plantation economy. The river conditioned the region’s dynamic industrial development in the nineteenth century, with the use of “chattel labor”: “They also worked as hired-out hands [...] in factories, mills, tobacco warehouses and munition plants that harnessing the Falls of the James had made possible” (TR 50). It is worth noting that in his travel book, *The Atlantic Sound*, Black British writer Caryl Phillips revisits the colonial history of Charles Town, now Charleston, South Carolina, and in much the same way as Marshall, highlights the intimate interweaving of local plantation economy, global geography and liquid spaces: “The city was located at the center of a vast network of commerce that reached across the Atlantic to Africa and Europe, and which penetrated the American continent as far as the Misissippi River”<sup>28</sup>.

While slaves were rendered powerless, a condition that led to their precarious lives and social death, their vitality as man-power sustained the economy. Marshall insists on corporeality, on the representation of slaves as Black bodies, as living forces, exploitable raw material (flesh and muscle), and disposable human commodities. In this sense, she describes what Achille Mbembe has more recently called “brutalism”: “The transformation of humanity into matter and energy”, Mbembe asserts, “is the ultimate project of brutality”<sup>29</sup>. Indeed, Marshall points out that tobacco planters “needed an endless supply of John Henry *muscle, brawn and sweat*” (TR 48, emphasis added). She alludes here to an iconic figure in African American folklore. As legend has it, John Henry, born a slave, was an exceptionally strong

man who worked on the railroads in Virginia after the Civil War, digging tunnels. He died of exhaustion after pounding holes with a heavy hammer faster than with a steam drill so as to blast rock with explosives. Henry embodies physical strength, stamina, resistance, and determination, while also symbolizing arduousness and the overexploitation of Black labor. Moreover, Marshall reminds her readers that,

In addition to everything having to do with cultivating the land, the same *muscle, brawn and sweat* also figured in the railway system (CSX) that soon reached from Florida to Mississippi, with its hub Olde Richmond Towne. [...] And what of the great neoclassical Jeffersonian state capital buildings in downtown Richmond [...]? Chattel labor again. [...] Then came the Tara big houses that soon proliferated along the Tidewater. The same *brawn and sweat* were put to work creating them as well [...]. (TR 50, emphasis added)

The memoirist urges her American readers to take another look at their environment so as to identify the elusive traces of a Black history to be remembered, “wrenching landmarks”, among which “the replacement of the notorious old Mayo’s Bridge” (TR 46), or “the ruins of the extensive docks that once lined both sides of the James near Richmond”, including “the Manchester Docks on the South bank” (TR 47). The lavish plantation houses along the river, “a tourist favorite” (TR 55), which Marshall ironically calls “the Tara big houses” in reference to Scarlett O’Hara’s estate in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, together with civic buildings, are not only remnants of the once-fantasized grandeur and refinement of the colonial South; as part of a historical legacy, they also bear testament to the unseen but essential contribution of slaves to the wealth of the Old South and to the building of a new nation. Besides, with the expansion of cotton-growing in the Lower South in the early nineteenth century, and given its geographical proximity to waterways and the Atlantic coast, the Richmond region continued to be a key location for the sale of slaves after the transatlantic trade was abolished by the United States in 1808:

The surplus was simply, periodically, herded by cart into Richmond Towne, where it was quickly sold in the Bottom, then as quickly packed into cattle cars of the CSX Railroad and into the holds of the ships at the Manchester Docks to be railroaded and shipped due south, deep south: New Orleans. The Mississippi Delta.  
The river and the railroad provided the final solution. (TR 54)

With the domestic or internal slave trade, “a second Middle Passage” for historian Ira Berlin<sup>30</sup>, new generations of African Americans were displaced and separated from their families. They were forcibly transferred on foot, marching in “coffles”, by rail and inland waterways from the James to the Mississippi River, or by sea. Once more, Marshall questions the binaries between land and water in the colonial enterprise. The colonization of marine and terrestrial spaces, the control of natural forces (winds, water currents), western technology and the machinery of steamboats and trains all contributed to strengthening the hegemonic hold on the racialized and enslaved Other. The images of slaves crammed into carts, livestock rail cars, and ship holds, as well as the author’s choice of words, with their strong historical and emotional connotations, notably “the final solution”, which echoes “the final solution to the Jewish question” and the Holocaust, evoke the devastating, radical violence of slavers and the ensuing trauma for the enslaved. As noted by Ada Savin, Marshall’s memory “seems to work through associations and cross-references; it is a ‘multidirectional memory’, in Michael Rothberg’s definition [...]”<sup>31</sup>. Indeed, as theorized by Rothberg, “Memories are not owned by groups [...]. Rather, the borders of memory and identity are jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation form a history that initially might seem foreign or distant”<sup>32</sup>.

Paule Marshall’s powerful representation of the James, and more broadly of liquid spaces in Black history, contrasts sharply with today’s picturesque image of American waterscapes. Known for its historic sites and natural environment, the Tidewater region has become a tourist destination that offers a wide range of cultural and outdoor recreational activities – whitewater rafting, hiking, and more. Marshall recounts that, while promenading with a friend along the James on Labor Day, 1998, she heard “the sound of laughter from upriver. A rafting party” (TR 42). The carefree young rafters, all white, “take to the water, splashing and frolicking like two-year-olds in a playground pool. [...] The swim over, the excursionists clamber back upon the rafts [...] and continue their rollicking ride down river” (TR 43-44). As

she witnessed this joyful scene, Marshall was overwhelmed by an “odd sensation” (TR 44), remembering the dark years of colonial time on that very same spot. The river that runs through Richmond is the fluid yet indelible imprint of the city’s past intertwined with the present.

In her evocation of the Caribbean Sea, Marshall also highlights the impact of a colonial system that repeats itself in an interconnected archipelago. During the triangular trade, Barbados, “a green little coral gemstone of an island” and “the first bit of terra firma sighted on the long, grueling Atlantic run” (TR 62), was a stopover and a gateway to the New World, “Barbados being, circa 1600, as important a holding pen and transshipment point as Richmond, Virginia, would become, circa 1820, owing to a surplus at the time locally bred chattel” (TR 61-62). The island “was also the birthplace of [her] parents” (TR 63), who migrated to the USA where they met. Through the account of her parents’ journeys across the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic, from a British-owned island whose economy was based on sugarcane plantations to the USA, in their hope for a better future, the author traces the twists and turns of their lives within the larger history of the Black diaspora and its continuous global overseas dissemination.

Marshall depicts her father, Sam Burke, as “just another bare-behind, chigger-foot country boy destined for a life cutting canes for pennies on an island that had been transformed by then into little else than a sugar bowl to sweeten England’s tea” (TR 72). He first left for Cuba. Marshall borrows phrases from her Creole-speaking father to describe his lot on the big island: “The work? Unhappily, it was the same damn thing he had fled: cutting canes from dawn till dusk [...]. *The work hard*” (TR 73). He eventually managed to reach New York illegally, crossing the seas as a stowaway on a freighter transporting raw sugar: “Their destination? The big Domino Sugar Refinery – the biggest in the world”, located on Brooklyn’s waterfront (TR 74). Sam Burke’s itinerant journey from port to port is part of the history of the Caribbean sugar industry in a global economy that satisfied the ever-growing needs of Western consumers. Marshall implies that her father’s experience as a Black migrant echoes the fate of his African ancestors, as he was reduced to slavery-like conditions in the cane fields and traveled in the hold of a cargo ship in the wake of the triangular trade and the slave ship. The author also mentions her mother Adriana’s passage to New York on a steamer:

The SS *Nerissa* brought her north, a leaky old tub [...]. It was a slow, turbulent journey up the Caribbean Sea that kept her, she said, “puking and praying”, and clinging to the sepia-brown photograph of her mother. “All the same, I reach safe, yes. I saw New York rise shining from the sea”. [...] Adriana recalled the sight of the city emerging from the Atlantic. [...] The soaring wonder of New York City! (TR 65)

The sea-crossing is a physical and emotional ordeal. It is an uncomfortable journey, an uprooting from one’s native land, a separation from one’s family that leads to the grief of loss. Yet, it also means the possibility of a new beginning, filled with promise: The American metropolis appears as a mirage, a dream city rising from the sea. Adriana’s description is reminiscent of Jamaican poet Claude McKay’s first impression of the city he would later both love and hate: “Often I was possessed with the desire to see New York as when I first saw it from the boat – one solid massive mammoth mass of spiring steel and stone”<sup>33</sup>.

Marshall’s parents are representative of first-generation Caribbean émigrés in “Big America” or “dispersed widely across England, Canada and elsewhere” (TR 109). They also embody the Black diaspora’s ambiguous relationship to the sea and the ocean. Their erratic displacements across transitional liquid spaces can be interpreted as the signs of a permanent, forced instability with no way out. As the Creole saying goes, “*The sea ain’t got no back door!*” (TR 88), thus underlining its danger as a place of death and the need to be cautious in life. At the same time, her parents’ perilous crossings are transformative; they reflect their strong desire to assert a new sense of self, “looking to do better, determined to progress” as Barbadian Americans (TR 76). However, Paule Marshall points out that, “The West Indian wing of the Great Migration North could not have taken place without Panama Money” (TR 67), in reference to the remittances sent home by Barbadians and other Caribbean migrant workers recruited for the building of the Panama Canal between 1904 and 1914. Indeed, “Panama Money” sent by her brother paid Adriana’s passage to New York:

While she was still an infant, her brother, Joseph Fitzroy Clement, the eldest son, had been among the legion of young men from the islands who, hearing of the money to be made on the canal, had eagerly left for the isthmus; there to work from the time God's sun rose till it set, hacking away at the near-impenetrable jungle, draining the huge pestilential swamps, carving a waterway to link the two great oceans. A hellhole of mud, torrential rains and brutal sun with temperatures at 120 degrees well before noon. Close to 5,000 would die over the course of the construction. Malaria. Yellow fever. Bubonic plague. The plague eventually claimed Joseph Fitzroy, but not before he dutifully sent home the better part of his pay during his years there. So, too, did most of the other islanders. (TR 66-67)

Marshall's compelling description brings to mind Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death* (1926), a short story collection dedicated to migrants within the Caribbean region and their rediasporization. The incipit of the first story, "Drought", highlights the harsh working conditions under the scorching sun in the Panama Canal Zone: "The whistle blew for eleven o'clock. Throats parched, grim, sun-crazed blacks cutting stone on the white burning hillside dropped with a clang the hot, dust-powdered drills and flew up over the rugged edges of the horizon to descent into a dry, waterless gut"<sup>34</sup>.

The construction of the Panama Canal is a prime example of hydro-imperialism, serving American economic, political, and military interests on a global scale, and facilitating the circulation of goods and people between the Atlantic and the Pacific. The project was seen as a sign of U.S. technological superiority and of America's ability to dominate wild nature and bring "modernity" to non-Western nations<sup>35</sup>. The author draws attention to the fact that in order to assert its power over the strategic location, the U.S. exploited a workforce – mainly men of color from the Caribbean islands – in horrendous material, climatic and sanitary conditions, aggravated by the very presence of water that caused diseases and cost her uncle's life.

Joseph Fitzroy Clement, who emigrated to provide for his family, appears as a sacrificial figure. He is one in a long line of Black men and women whose tragic destinies were shaped by bodies of water, just as they helped shape and control waterways under coercive transcontinental/transoceanic (neo)colonial systems. Marshall weaves a web of geo-historical connections and interwoven aquatic routes in which oceans, seas, rivers and canals have played a fundamental role. She aims to offer a global view of hydro-colonialism and the ramifications of the triangular trade in the larger Black Atlantic that has generated persistent social inequalities, racial hierarchies, and the precarity of Black lives. Indeed, taken as a whole, her memoir highlights the continuum between past and present realities, as she throws light upon the plight of Black people in diaspora whose bodies and lives have been crushed by a necropolitical machinery, "necropowers" that have had "the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not"<sup>36</sup>.

Anthropologists Torres and Rodriguez Ramos view the Caribbean as "a continent divided by water", given the fact that "theses [insular] landscapes form part of a larger relational network of human action and experience. In this sense, [...] landscapes are conceived and conceptualized by the people who occupy, interact, create, and negotiate their social realities within spaces"<sup>37</sup>. Hydro-colonialism in the Americas including the Caribbean, as a form of white power on lands, water masses, and Black bodies, has itself contributed to rethinking and reshaping landscapes, exploiting and exhausting soils, whether for monoculture (tobacco, sugar cane, cotton, etc.) or for the extraction of raw materials (gold, coal, oil, etc.). As Martin Japtok puts it, "Paule Marshall shows the inescapability of this history by inscribing it into the very landscape"<sup>38</sup>. She also emphasizes hydro-colonialism's devastating long-term environmental effects, as in the case of the "now shamefully polluted and ill-used" James River (TR 60):

Having read up on it, I know that the once-pristine James has become over time a dumping ground not only for generations of human and animal waste but, worse, dangerous industrial contaminants as well: PCBs, PCTs, TBT (tributyltin), nitrogen, ammonia, fecal coliform, Kepone, toxic mercury, creosote and pathogens of all kinds. Add also tons of sulfuric acid and from the now-defunct Civil War arsenals, armories and munitions plants whose ruins still line the riverbank in downtown Richmond. Include as well the over six hundred chemicals associated with tobacco and Philip Morris, the state's prime industry. (TR 43)

Marshall's lengthy enumeration of untreated human wastes, non-human organic pollutants, and inorganic chemicals is intended to expose the evils of a long history, that of the South, from the early days of tobacco plantations, slavery and the Civil War to the contemporary era of intensive agriculture, petrochemical plants, and the tobacco industry.

In a similar way, in her short essay *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid denounces Western tourism in Antigua, its neo-colonial character and its socio-ecological impact, particularly regarding the management of wastewater, discharged into the crystal-clear sea: "[...] for, you see, in Antigua, there is no proper sewage-disposal system. But the Caribbean Sea is very big and the Atlantic Ocean is even bigger; it would amaze you even to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up"<sup>39</sup>. Kincaid draws a link between water, ecological disaster, and slavery, with discarded non-human matter and Black bodies thrown overboard from slave ships. As noted by DeLoughrey, "Caribbean writers have long been concerned with the heavy waters of ocean modernity and have rendered waste in terms of pollution as well as the wasted lives of slaves and refugees"<sup>40</sup>.

In his recent environmental study of slavery, historian David Silkenat contends that, "In seeking to extract labor from their slaves and fertility from the soil, they [planters] created a brutal capitalism that laid waste to the Southern landscape and to Black bodies"<sup>41</sup>. Through her evocation of the polluted James River, which has been steadily deteriorating since the arrival of the first European settlers, Marshall condemns the destructive human and ecological impacts of plantocracy and its legacies. In this sense, her depiction of the river can be related to the concept of the plantationocene.

Interestingly enough, Marshall uses geological time, which she contrasts with the historical period of colonization and its aftermath, to substantiate her view on colonists' destructive will to shape and control their world, and yet underline the limits of man's power over the natural environment. As she mentions the Fall Line of the James River, "the ancient geological rift" (TR 44), she points out that, "This stretch of the James is a veritable minefield of boulder-size antediluvian rocks that might have been flung there millennia ago by the quick-anger God of the Old Testament" (TR 38). In the same way, she describes Bathsheba Beach in Barbados as an unspoiled beach,

[...] where several massive limestone boulders, long blackened by time, stood tall in the roiling surf. Stonehenge. This assemblage of huge rocks was a West Indian Stonehenge, I decided, whose provenance and purpose lay open to the imagination. An earthquake or a hurricane millennia ago might have dislodged them from the "Scottish" hills and sent them hurtling down to the shoreline. Or, in a superhuman show of strength, the original Amerindian or Carib dwellers of Barbados might have placed them there to ward off the invaders from the sea. And it had worked [...] when the first merchant ship arrived from Goree or Guinea, Elmira or Whydah or the Bight of Benin, the Stonehenge barrier at Bathsheba had forced it to hightail around to leeward the mild-mannered Caribbean to find a landing site. (TR 113-114)

The author, who visits the Caribbean and undertakes a voyage into her ancestral past, confers on aquatic and coastal spaces a capacity for re-enchantment and reconnection with immemorial, pre-historical, pre-colonial times, shrouded in mystery and imbued with divine, spiritual power. The crashing waves and the massive rock formations combine; they acquire an uncontrollable natural and geological force that once prevented any landing and human invasion on this site. While the "Scottish" hills, so named by the white colonists in memory of their native land, are an incongruous reminder of European colonial appropriation and of a human-dominated view of nature, Marshall maps the geography and geology of the liminal shore as symbolic of anti-colonial resistance and rebellion. As Agnieka Lobodzienc rightly puts it, the "vivid image [...] of the Caribbean landscape [...] offers itself as a fertile ground for reimagining the past"<sup>42</sup>. The author creates her own mythology; her personal re-reading of the conflicted Caribbean history contradicts the dominant historiography as well as white colonial "geo-logics"<sup>43</sup>.

Evoking the neighboring island of Grenada, its lush vegetation and waterfalls, besides "the inescapable sugarcane", Marshall writes: "Grenada. It suggested the Eden the world had once been" (TR 121), meaning before the arrival of settlers. She also marvels at the sight of Grand Anse and its beach: "Equally flawless was the blue-green water of the bay – water so clear the golden mica on the seabed could be seen with the naked eye" (TR 130-131). Yet,

landscapes of primal beauty sadden as much as they dazzle her, and the seaside is a vast symbol of tensions and paradoxes. The author depicts contrasting natural landscapes that reflect the many layers of a tormented history she attempts to grasp: “To my right rose the ‘Scottish Highlands’ [...]. To my left, the Atlantic repeatedly flung its high, swollen grayish-green waves onto the shingle beach with a cry each time that might have been taken from the Book of Lamentations. The Atlantic: an entire permanently sitting shiva” (TR 112). Marshall’s mention of the Jewish ritual of mourning alludes to “the knotted intersection of histories”<sup>44</sup>. It conveys a sense of sacred grief and suggests the author’s emotional connection to the place. Her depiction of the seashore, where water and land meet, with “the inconsolable ocean, the misnamed hills” (TR 112), is a way for her to honor the African captives, ripped from their homeland, who perished at sea and were “victims of the unritual”<sup>45</sup>. The ocean becomes a memorial site for *unnamed* ancestors, alongside *renamed* hills that bear witness to the imperialist hold of Europeans. Both suggest a complex history of forced displacement and erasure that needs to be questioned.

Edwidge Danticat’s short story “Children of the Sea” comes to mind, as the Haitian American writer fictionalizes the plight of Haitian “boat people” who “see themselves as Job or the Children of Israel”<sup>46</sup> and take the risk of perishing *en route* to Florida. The tragic character of Céliane, raped by a Macoute, who jumps overboard with her stillborn baby, was inspired by an actual fact related by Danticat in her essay, “We are Ugly, but We are Here”, published in 1996: “Two years ago a mother jumped into the sea when she discovered that her baby daughter had died in her arms [...]. Mother and child, they sank to the bottom of an ocean which already holds millions of souls from the middle passage – the holocaust of the slave trade – that is our legacy”<sup>47</sup>. Danticat highlights that the violent history of the Black diaspora repeats itself (uprootedness and the deadly trans-oceanic crossings) and overlaps with Jewish history. To borrow from Rothberg’s definition of memory, both Marshall and Danticat allude to multiple “knots of memory” that are “rhizomatic networks of temporality and cultural reference”<sup>48</sup>.

Likewise, in the introduction to his travel memoir *The Island: Martinique*, African American writer John Edgar Wideman revisits the island’s colonial past, evoking “the holocaust of slavery”<sup>49</sup>. Being of African descent, he states that, “slavery’s shadow, as metaphor, as history and prophecy, as living heritage on Martinique, influenced my understanding of the island, of myself – who I am, who I might become”<sup>50</sup>. In the same way as Marshall perceives Barbados as an ambiguous place, he views Martinique “as paradise and prison, utopia and purgatory, Eden and gulag”<sup>51</sup>. Like Marshall and Danticat, he considers that the history of colonial power and its aftermath must be viewed in a much broader context: “that power, particularly its abuses, intrigues me. Whether in the context of a plantation or prison or concentration camp, how does the exercise of absolute authority change us – the powerful and the powerless?”<sup>52</sup>. As a Black man in America, Wideman searches for personal answers; yet, his questioning is tied to a larger perspective that embraces converging human histories.

Like Wideman, Marshall immerses herself in the landscape to better understand its history and thus find her place and come to terms with her sense of identity as a daughter of the Caribbean diaspora. As the locals told her that “‘a sea-bath’ [...] has the power to heal whatever ailed you” (TR 101-102), she had a swim at Bathsheba: “I floated for awhile [...] floating as if simply allowing the warm, amniotic waters of the Caribbean archipelago to take me where they willed. The islands were to become something of a home away from home for years to come” (TR 119). The Atlantic turns into a healing place of rebirth, of intimate revelation. Diving into the baptismal waters of the ocean where her ancestors endured the trauma of the Middle Passage, feeling the materiality of water gives her a strong, soothing sense of being and belonging. Similarly, interviewed about her historical novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) on the mass killing at Massacre River in 1937, Edwidge Danticat revealed that she herself “had to step foot in the river. [...] I wanted to put my hand in the water, feel the sand underneath the water”<sup>53</sup>. As suggested by Rinaldo Walcott, “The aquatic and the saline, then, are not just metaphors for Black people’s emergence as a category of persons in the Americas and beyond; the aquatic is a kind of foundational birth claim for blackness and thus Black diasporic people”<sup>54</sup>.

In her quest for meaning, Marshall undertakes a reverse “Middle Passage”, going back in time, from Virginia, down the James River to the Caribbean and Nigeria, along the Atlantic slave routes<sup>55</sup>. The “triangular road” she takes, as a narrator, is multidirectional, multidimensional,

and circular. As Ada Savin writes, Marshall's memoir is "marked by the tension between cyclical and progressive conceptions of time"<sup>56</sup>. It challenges the linear vision of time and events, and is suggestive of the ebb and flow of both memory and history. In that sense, her narrative and discursive strategies are reminiscent of Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite's concept of "tidalectics", based on "the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic [...] motion, rather than linear"<sup>57</sup>, and used to rethink the history and cultures of Black diasporas in terms of interwoven transnational displacements and transoceanic circulations. Critic Elaine Savory describes "tidalectics" as "the ways in which ideas flow together and separate like the edges of waves on a coral beach. They weave together, reshape, separate, flow back, and come forward again"<sup>58</sup>. Marshall's tidalectic narrative, her evocation of bodies of water and their impact on (post)colonial history, is a fragmented, discontinuous account. Narrative ruptures, temporal and spatial shifts highlight the sudden resurgence, the backwash flow of a traumatic past that activates the author's memory, her imagination and critical consciousness. In August 1983, as she was shopping in downtown Richmond, she got to see a "Civil War reenactment" in the city streets: "For a hairbreadth of a second, time reverses itself: [...] I am suddenly chattel cargo, merchandise, goods, a commodity to be bought and sold in the Bottom [...] For a hairbreadth of a second, I am caught in a terrifying time warp [...]" (TR 51). In Barbados, as Marshall comes across a group of women carrying heavy bundles of canes on their heads, she spots a woman whose aloofness triggers her imagination: "Her unsightly feet taking her back to some past event [...] Might it have been the Easter Sunday morning uprising of 1816 [...]? The rebellion had been led by the legendary, the 'incorrigible' Bussa and [...] Nanny Griggs" (TR 116-117).

Marshall's account of origins, the return of the repressed (the inaugural wound of the Middle Passage and the scars of slavery) engender a circular narrative that fills in the gaps of a "felt" history. Through her epic journey from the USA, to the Caribbean islands, to Africa, Marshall attempts to retrace her lineage, to unravel the genealogical threads of her dispersed family and uncover mysteries. By re-membering facts or inventing them as "a story teller, a fabulist" whose tales "resonate with the historical truths" (TR 148), she compensates for blanks, absences and silences, and draws her "improvised ancestral tree" (TR 117) that includes "adopted 'kinfolk'" (TR 110) and heroic figures, such as Olaudah Equiano or the victims of the Zong Massacre (TR 111), spiritual ancestors she identifies with.

The memoir's echoes, the recurrent temporal slippages also allow the author to highlight the unsuspected consequences of a colonial history that still affects everyday life. By way of example, in her second chapter devoted to the James River, Marshall traces the colonial history of Virginia, with its slave economy based primarily on the culture of tobacco, "the jovial weed" to which all of Europe was addicted at the time" (TR 48). Without any transition, the author inserts the death certificate of her sister in her main narrative:

*Date: October 6, 1995*

*Place: Downstate Hospital, Brooklyn, New York*

*Patient's name: Anita Burke Wharton*

*Time of death: 3:16 a.m.*

*Cause of death: Pulmonary Hypertension (TR 48)*

Then, Marshall explains in a factual, unemotional way that she always refused to buy cartons of cigarettes for her elder sister, a heavy smoker who died of lung disease. The reader is told that her favorite brand of cigarettes was "*Virginia Slims*" (TR 49), manufactured by Philip Morris, the largest tobacco company in the United States, headquartered in Richmond, Virginia. The italicized passage stands out; it is disruptive. The conciseness of the death notice, its clinical coldness, together with Marshall's understatement keep the pain of loss at bay. More than a sudden digression on a personal remembrance, the juxtaposition of two distinct facts and the temporal shift – tobacco plantations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and her sister's recent death – actually induce an implicit correlation. Through this narrative collage, Marshall blames the cynical, health-damaging tobacco industry and its most profitable companies, whose current prosperity is intimately tied to a history of slavery that began on the banks of the James River and comes back.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo explains in *The Repeating Island* that "the culture of the Caribbean [...] is not terrestrial but aquatic, a sinuous culture where time unfolds irregularly and resists being captured by the cycles of clock and calendar. The Caribbean is the natural and

indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity”<sup>59</sup>. Marshall’s memoir is a reflection of this definition. The Barbadian American author takes many paths and detours, navigating through times and spaces, so as to recapture the story of her scattered community hidden in the folds of personal and collective memories. She circulates on her “triangular road”, in the etymological sense of the word (from Latin *circulare*, “to form a circle”) so as to feel whole: “After all, my life, as I saw it, was a thing divided in three” (TR 163). There was Brooklyn, her home-town, then the Caribbean she visited regularly once a writer, and “lying in wait across the Atlantic [...] had been the Gulf of Guinea and the colossus of ancestral Africa, the greatest portion of my tripartite self that I had yet to discover, yet to know” (TR 163). Her voyage to Africa in 1977, narrated in the last and rather short chapter, “I’ve Known Oceans: The Atlantic”, helped her to come full circle: “*Omowale* meaning in Yoruba language, ‘*The child has returned*’. [...] ‘the displaced child has returned’” (TR 158).

*Triangular Road* is a rich, multi-faceted work of non-fiction. Through personal anecdotes and family memories, as well as through a reading of history that combines facts and feelings, Paule Marshall aims to shed light on the importance of aquatic spaces in the global history of the Black diaspora and in the imperialist project of the European colonists in the Americas. Her art of remembering, combined with her art of writing, are assets that enable her to establish historical and personal truths and pay tribute to her ancestors.

## Bibliography

BASCOMB, Lia T., “Water, Roads, and Mapping Diaspora Through Biomythography”, *Anthurium, a Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 14, n°1, 2017, Article 10, p. 1-25, <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol14/iss1/10>.

BENÍTEZ-ROJO, Antonio, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1996.

BERLIN, Ira, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations*, London, Penguin, 2010.

BLUM, Hester, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies”, *PMLA*, vol. 125, n°3, May 2010, p. 670-677.

<sup>59</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997, p. 11.

BRAND, Dionne, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Toronto, Vintage Canada, 2011.

BYSTROM, Kerry, and Isabel HOFMEYR, “Oceanic Routes: (Post-) Notes on Hydro-Colonialism”, *Comparative Literature*, vol. 69, n°1, 2017, p. 1-6.

CERTEAU, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984.

CLITANDRE, Nadège T., *Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary*, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 2018.

DANTICAT, Edwidge, “Children of the Sea”, *Krik? Krak!* [1995], New York, Vintage, 1996, p. 1-29.

DANTICAT, Edwidge, “We are Ugly, but We are Here”, *The Caribbean Writer*, vol. 10, 1996, p. 137-141.

DE WOLFF, Kim, and Rina C. FALETTI, “Introduction: Hydrohumanities”, Kim De Wolff, Rina C. Faletti, Ignacio López-Calvo (eds.), *Hydrohumanities: Water Discourses and Environmental Futures*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022, p. 1-14.

DELEUZE, Gilles, and Félix GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London, Athlone, 1988.

DELOUGHREY, Elizabeth, *Routes and Roots. Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2007.

DELOUGHREY, Elizabeth, "Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity", *PMLA*, vol. 125, n°3, May 2010, p. 703-712.

EQUIANO, Olaudah, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself* [1789], New York, Norton, 2001.

GILROY, Paul, *Against Race. Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.

HOFMEYR, Isabel, "Provisional Notes on Hydrocolonialism", *English Language Notes*, Vol. 57, n°1, April 2019, p. 11-20.

HUGHES, Langston, *The Big Sea* [1940], New York, Hill and Wang, 1963.

JAPTOK, Martin, "Sugarcane as History in Paule Marshall's 'To Da-Duh, in Memoriam'", *African American Review*, vol. 50, n°4, Winter 2017, p. 1025-1032.

KINCAID, Jamaica, *A Small Place*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.

LOBODZIEC, Agnieszka, "Literariness and Racial Consciousness in Paule Marshall's Memoir *Triangular Road* and Gloria Naylor's Fictionalized Memoir *1996*", *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, vol. 50, n°2-3, 2015, p. 51-61.

LOICHOT, Valérie, *Water Graves: The Art of the Unritual in the Greater Caribbean*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2020.

MCKAY, Claude, *A Long Way From Home: An Autobiography* [1937], London, Pluto Press, 1985.

MCKITTRICK, Kathrine, "Plantation Futures", *Small Axe*, vol. 17, n°3 (42), Nov. 2013, p. 1-15.

MACKAY, Nathaniel, "An Interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite", *Hambone*, n°9, Winter 1991, p. 42-59.

MARSHALL, Paule, "Shaping the World of my Art", *New Letters*, n°40, Autumn 1973, p. 97-112.

MARSHALL, Paule, *Triangular Road: A Memoir*, New York, Basic Civitas, 2009.

MAURER, Noel, and Carlos YU, *The Big Ditch: How America Took, Built, Ran, and Ultimately Gave Away the Panama Canal*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011.

MBEMBE, Achille, "Necropolitics", Translated by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, vol. 15, n°1, Winter 2003, p. 11-40.

MBEMBE, Achille, *Brutalisme*, Paris, La Découverte, 2020.

MURPHY, Rosalie, and James VINSON, *Contemporary Poets of the English Language*, London, St. James Press, 1970.

PHILLIPS, Caryl, *The Atlantic Sound*, New York, Vintage, 2001.

PHILLIPS, Caryl, *A New World Order*, New York, Vintage, 2002.

ROTHBERG, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2009.

ROTHBERG, Michael, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory. From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Noeuds de mémoire*", *Yale French Studies*, n°118/119, 2010, p. 3-12.

SAVIN, Ada, "Harbors and Port Towns in Paule Marshall's Memoir *Triangular Road*", Vincenzo Bavaro, et al. (eds.), *Harbors, Flows, and Migrations: The USA in/and the World*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, p. 295-307.

SAVORY, Elaine, "Wordsongs & Wordwounds/Homecoming: Kamau Brathwaite's Barabajan Poems", *World Literature Today*, vol. 68, n°4, Autumn 1994, p. 750-757.

SHARPE, Christina, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016.

SILKENAT, David, *Scars on the Land, An Environmental History of Slavery in the American South*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022.

SMITH, John, "A True Relation, by Captain John Smith, 1608", in Tyler Lyon Gardiner (ed.), *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907, p. 30-71.

TORRES, Joshua M., and Reniel RODRIGUEZ RAMOS, "The Caribbean: A Continent Divided by Water", Basil E. Reid (ed.), *Archeology and Geoinformatics: Case Studies from the Caribbean*, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2008, p. 13-29.

VÁSQUEZ, Sam, "Triangular Voyages: Locating the Transnational Caribbean Woman in Paule Marshall's 'To Da-duh, in Memoriam'", *Meridians*, vol. 15, n°2, 2017, p. 464-490.

WALCOTT, Rinaldo, "The Black Aquatic", *Liquid Blackness*, vol. 5, n°1, April 1, 2021, p. 63-73, <https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-8932585>.

WALROND, Eric, *Tropic Death*, New York, Boni & Liveright, 1926.

WIDEMAN, John Edgar, *The Island: Martinique*, Washington D.C., National Geographic, 2003.

WINKIEL, Laura, "Introduction", *Hydro-criticism. English Language Notes*, vol. 57, n°1, April 2019, p. 1-10.

YUSOFF, Kathryn, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2018, <https://manifold.umn.edu/read/untitled-5f0c83c1-5748-4091-8d8e-72beba5b94b/section/5cd42c2a-f2fe-4d41-89ae-cb891dc634b5>.

## Notes

1 DOI: 10.61736/DCUZ4064.

2 Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Toronto, Vintage Canada, 2011, p. 6; p. 12.

3 Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order*, New York, Vintage, 2002, p. 305.

4 Quoted in Rosalie Murphy and James Vinson, *Contemporary Poets of the English Language*, London, St. James Press, 1970, p. 129.

5 Paule Marshall, *Triangular Road: A Memoir*, New York, Basic Civitas, 2009, p. v. Hereafter TR.

6 Sam Vásquez, "Triangular Voyages: Locating the Transnational Caribbean Woman in Paule Marshall's 'To Da-duh, in Memoriam'", *Meridians*, vol. 15, n°2, 2017, p. 465.

7 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 18.

8 See Laura Winkiel, ed., "Introduction", *Hydro-criticism, English Language Notes*, Vol. 57, n°1, April 2019, p. 1-10.

9 Isabel Hofmeyr, "Provisional Notes on Hydrocolonialism", *English Language Notes*, Vol. 57, n°1, April 2019, p. 11-20.

10 William Melvin Kelley was the other young novelist Hughes had chosen to accompany him on this European tour that promoted promising African American writers (TR 12).

11 Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* [1940], New York, Hill and Wang, 1963, p. 54. The poem was first published in *The Crisis*, June 1921.

12 Paule Marshall, "Shaping the World of my Art", *New Letters*, n°40, Autumn 1973, p. 110-111.

13 Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots, Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, p. 54.

14 "If methodologies of the nation and the postnation have been land-locked, in other words, then an oceanic turn might allow us to derive new forms of relatedness from the necessarily unbounded examples provided in the maritime world." Hester Blum, "The Prospect of Oceanic Studies", *PMLA*, vol. 125, n°3, May 2010, p. 671.

15 See Deleuze and Guattari who argued that: "One of the reasons for the hegemony of the West was the power of its State apparatus to striate the sea by combining the technologies of the North and the Mediterranean and by

annexing the Atlantic". Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London, Continuum, 2004, p. 427.

16 Kerry Bystrom and Isabel Hofmeyr, "Oceanic Routes: (Post-it) Notes on Hydro-Colonialism", *Comparative Literature*, vol. 69, n°1, 2017, p. 3. The terms "hydro-colonialism" or "hydroimperialism" had previously been used by historians and geographers or hydrologists in reference to hydropower, hydraulic management and irrigation, in the context of colonization or not.

17 In her introduction to the issue, Laura Winkiel states that, "Taken together, the wide-ranging essays that 'Hydro-criticism' comprises demonstrate the critical advantages learned from the scalar fluidity and ineluctable materiality of water. Gleaning new perspectives, ontologies, and transmaterial subjectivities from the vantage point of the seas, these essays transform critical paradigms, artistic and reading practices, and erotic pleasures as well as draw our attention to maritime ethical and political urgencies", Laura Winkiel, "Introduction", *op. cit.*, p. 9.

18 In this second publication, Hofmeyr's neologism is unhyphenated. Isabel Hofmeyr, "Provisional Notes on Hydrocolonialism", *op. cit.*, p. 13.

19 Kim De Wolff and Rina C. Faletti, "Introduction: Hydrohumanities", Kim De Wolff, Rina C. Faletti, Ignacio López-Calvo (eds.), *Hydrohumanities: Water Discourses and Environmental Futures*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022, p. 6.

20 Bystrom and Hofmeyr, "Oceanic Routes", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

21 See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p. 117.

22 Kathrine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures", *Small Axe*, vol. 17, n°3 (42), Nov. 2013, p. 2.

23 Jamestown, Virginia, founded in 1607 on the left bank of the James River, is known as "the first permanent English settlement in America" (TR 36).

24 See John Smith, "A True Relation, by Captain John Smith, 1608", Tyler Lyon Gardiner (ed.), *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907, p. 34. The quoted passage was written in May 1607.

25 Bystrom and Hofmeyr, "Oceanic Routes", *op. cit.*, p. 2.

26 Lia T. Bascomb, "Water, Roads, and Mapping Diaspora Through Biomythography", *Anthurium, A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 14, n°1, 2017, Article 10, p. 11, <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol14/iss1/10>.

27 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself*, [1789], New York, Norton, 2001, p. 42-43.

28 Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound*, New York, Vintage, 2001, p. 232.

29 Our translation: « La transformation de l'humanité en matière et énergie est le projet ultime du brutalisme », Achille Mbembe, *Brutalisme*, Paris, La Découverte, 2020, p. 15.

30 Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations*, London, Penguin, 2010, p. 100.

31 Ada Savin, "Harbors and Port Towns in Paule Marshall's Memoir *Triangular Road*", Vincenzo Bavoro *et al.* (eds.), *Harbors, Flows, and Migrations: The USA in/ and the World*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, p. 301.

32 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 5.

33 Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* [1937], London, Pluto Press, 1985, p. 133-134.

34 Eric Walrond, *Tropic Death*, New York, Boni & Liveright, 1926, p. 12.

35 See Noel Maurer and Carlos Yu, *The Big Ditch: How America Took, Built, Ran, and Ultimately Gave Away the Panama Canal*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011.

36 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics", Translated by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, vol. 15, n°1, Winter 2003, p. 27.

37 Joshua M. Torres and Reniel Rodriguez Ramos, "The Caribbean: A Continent Divided by Water", Basil E. Reid (ed.), *Archeology and Geoinformatics: Case Studies from the Caribbean*, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2008, p. 28. Marshall herself describes "Granada's tiny satellite island of Carriacou" as "a mere peak on a huge subterranean mountain range that also included Grenada" (TR 140, 141-142). She hereby alludes to the geological unity of the archipelago, and the fact that the islands are not isolated but interconnected both geographically and culturally speaking.

38 Martin Japtok, "Sugarcane as History in Paule Marshall's 'To Da-Duh, in Memoriam'", *African American Review*, vol. 50, n°4, Winter 2017, p. 1025.

39 Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000, p. 14.

40 Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity", *PMLA*, vol. 125, n°3, May 2010, p. 708.

41 David Silkenat, *Scars on the Land, An Environmental History of Slavery in the American South*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 4.

- 42 Agnieszka Lobodzic, "Literariness and Racial Consciousness in Paule Marshall's Memoir *Triangular Road* and Gloria Naylor's Fictionalized Memoir *1996*", *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, vol. 50, n°2-3, 2015, p. 58.
- 43 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2018, <https://manifold.umn.edu/read/untitled-5f0c83c1-5748-4091-8d8e-72bebca5b94b/section/6243cd2f-68f4-40dc-97a1-a5c84460c09b>.
- 44 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race. Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 78.
- 45 Valérie Loichot, *Water Graves: The Art of the Unritual in the Greater Caribbean*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2020, p. 8.
- 46 Edwidge Danticat, "Children of the Sea", *Krik? Krak!* [1995], New York, Vintage, 1996, p. 7.
- 47 Edwidge Danticat, "We are Ugly, but We are Here", *The Caribbean Writer*, vol. 10, 1996, p. 141.
- 48 Michael Rothberg, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory. From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Nœuds de mémoire*", *Yale French Studies*, n°118/119, 2010, p. 7.
- 49 John Edgar Wideman, *The Island: Martinique*, Washington D.C., National Geographic, 2003, p. xxii.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.
- 52 *Ibid.*, xxvi-xxvii.
- 53 See: Nadège T. Clitandre, *Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary*, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 2018, p. 186.
- 54 Rinaldo Walcott, "The Black Aquatic", *Liquid Blackness*, vol. 5, n°1, April 1, 2021, p. 65, <https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-8932585>.
- 55 In the same vein, Marshall's main fictional characters all embark on a symbolic journey to retrace their roots. While she was writing her third novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), portraying an African American woman traveling to the Caribbean, Marshall explained in an essay that, "Taken together, the three books will constitute a trilogy describing, in reverse, the slave trade's triangular route back to the motherland, the source. I should add here that I am not talking so much about an actual return [...]. The physical return described in the novels is a metaphor for the psychological and spiritual return back over history, which I am convinced Black people in this part of the world must undertake if we are to have a sense of our total experience and to mold for ourselves a more truthful identity." Paule Marshall, "Shaping the World of my Art", *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- 56 Ada Savin, *op. cit.*, p. 306.
- 57 Kamau Brathwaite, in Nathaniel Mackey, "An Interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite", *Hambone*, n°9, Winter 1991, p. 44.
- 58 Elaine Savory, "Wordsongs & Wordwounds / Homecoming: Kamau Brathwaite's Barbajan Poems", *World Literature Today*, vol. 68, n°4, Autumn 1994, p. 754.