


2014-01-01

# Slavocracy's Collective Atlantic: Utopian and Dystopian Discourse in Contemporary Narratives of Slavery

Jalaine Nicole Weller

University of Texas at El Paso, [jalaineweller@gmail.com](mailto:jalaineweller@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open\\_etd](https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open_etd)

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [African Studies Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Weller, Jalaine Nicole, "Slavocracy's Collective Atlantic: Utopian and Dystopian Discourse in Contemporary Narratives of Slavery" (2014). *Open Access Theses & Dissertations*. 1374.  
[https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open\\_etd/1374](https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open_etd/1374)

SLAVOCRACY'S COLLECTIVE ATLANTIC: UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN DISCOURSE  
IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF SLAVERY

JALAINÉ NICOLE WELLER

Department of English

APPROVED:

---

Marion Rohrleitner, Ph.D., Chair

---

Ezra Cappell, Ph.D.

---

Maceo Dailey, Ph.D.

---

Charles Ambler, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

Copyright ©

by

Jalaine Nicole Weller

2014

## **Dedication**

I lovingly dedicate this to my family:  
Your steadfast support from across the water is invaluable and inspiring.

SLAVOCRACY'S COLLECTIVE ATLANTIC: UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN DISCOURSE  
IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF SLAVERY

by

JALAINE NICOLE WELLER, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2014

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Utopia and Dystopia: A Pivotal Proximity in the Collective Atlantic and Fred D’Aguiar’s <i>Feeding the Ghosts</i> .....	13
Chapter 2: Inhabiting Others Through Narrative: The Intersubjectivity of the Lifeworld in Charles Johnson’s <i>Middle Passage</i> .....	37
Chapter 3: A Global Chorus of Local Voices: The “Chorus of a Common Memory” in Caryl Phillips’s <i>Crossing the River</i> .....	66
Conclusion: Why the Collective Atlantic?.....	93
Works Cited.....	105
Vitae.....	111

## Introduction

The seemingly bottomless sea, sometimes calm and other times churning, encompasses the landmasses of the earth. It connects continents, islands, nations, and peoples, even as it separates them. Understandings of the sea may move along a continuum of views of its integration and division. The sea's ability to both unify and disjoin exists in a fluid reality akin to its shifting tides. It exists as a space that allows for a plethora of experiences—both utopian and dystopian—and recurrent interpretations of those experiences, as it fascinates, inspires, and haunts humankind.

This haunting and shifting sea undergirds Fred D'Aguiar's novel, *Feeding the Ghosts*. The novel begins by declaring, "The sea is slavery," and it closes by suggesting, "The past is laid to rest when it is told" (3, 230). In contrast, its epigraph provides an excerpt from Derek Walcott's "The Sea is History," which states, "The sea. The sea / has locked them up. The sea is history" (3-4). Together, these statements suggest an intersubjective relationship among the sea, slavery, and the told or untold/ "locked up" narratives of history. While this may appear to be an obvious connection in light of the historic triangular slave trade, the novel seems to suggest a more profound, or less overt, meaning through its consistent mantra that the sea *is* slavery. Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* introduces another refrain via its invocation of the "chorus of a common memory" (1). In both of these novels, the past is said to "haunt" the main protagonist, whether it be *Crossing the River's* common chorus haunting a father who sold his children into slavery, or *Feeding the Ghosts's* sea of slavery and its ghosts haunting the one slave who survived a slave ship massacre. Finally, Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* introduces the rogue Rutherford Calhoun, a freed slave employed on a slave ship, who feels an intense "compulsion" to "transcribe and thereby transfigure," or reimagine and reconstruct, all that he experienced

upon the *Republic*, including a slave insurrection (190). Each of these narratives is rooted in rethinking and re-presenting the history of the triangular slave trade, and the Atlantic Sea, specifically, is either the literal or metaphorical stage of this reimagining.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, *Feeding the Ghosts*, *Crossing the River*, and *Middle Passage* envision the Atlantic as a space that simultaneously connects and disconnects as it bears the ghosts, hi(stories), and memories of slavery.

This re-presentation or re-envisioning of the history of slavery is common among the genre termed “contemporary narratives of slavery.” Arlene Keizer defines this genre as literary works that “theorize about the nature and formation of black subjects, under the slave system and in the present, by utilizing slave characters and the condition of slavery as focal points”; in short, slavery serves as a “touchstone for present-day meditations on the formation of black subjectivity” (1, 4). Accordingly, these texts respond to the dominant historical metanarrative by inserting the silenced, obscured, and often overlooked voices of the Atlantic slave trade era. Furthermore, they do not limit their narrative exploration to the voices of slaves, Africans, African-Americans, or oppressed minorities. Instead, they engage a more general and diverse pool of narratives that engages both utopian and dystopian relationships and varied experiences. Examples of dystopian realities may include: Africans enslaved against their will, Africans sold into slavery by their families, African-Americans and freed slaves who work as enslavers or slave-holders, and African-Americans working to convert Africans in the colony of Liberia. On the other hand, examples of more utopian actions may include: whites who compassionately assist and protect blacks, individuals who create new families after diaspora, and sailors who fight for the lives and rights of slaves. Of course, such realities are rarely so easily categorized,

---

<sup>1</sup> The Atlantic is the literal stage in *Middle Passage*, metaphorical in *Crossing the River*, and both in *Feeding the Ghosts*.



and are not limited to the aforementioned classifications, as will be illustrated in this study. For example, interracial romantic relationships may be utopian or dystopian, depending on whether they are forced or chosen, and who is forcing or choosing. In addition, these novels and their characters often break the fourth wall and speak directly to a present day audience. In so doing, they cross temporal, national, geographical, and racial boundaries in order to highlight the collective nature of slavery's historic experiences, contemporary resonances, and multicultural ramifications.

The Atlantic serves as the space that enables these crossings, connects the triangular slave trade's ports, and facilitates the routes that disperse peoples of the diaspora. In these works, the Atlantic represents more than the African-American hybridity, tradition, modernity, and cultural legacy that Paul Gilroy addresses in his concept of the Black Atlantic. According to Gilroy, the Black Atlantic mediates the African-American polemic concerning the importance of African tradition versus African-American modernity through a stereoscopic examination of responses to the effects of the African diaspora. Gilroy notes that the Black Atlantic theory is applicable to a more general audience beyond that of the diasporic, hybrid African. Shortly before the close of the eponymous text, *Black Atlantic*, Gilroy clarifies, "The history of blacks in the West and the social movements that have affirmed and rewritten that history can provide a lesson which is not restricted to blacks. They raise issues of more general significance" (223). Yet, following this and other similar statements, Gilroy fails to go into any great detail concerning this more general applicability. Gilroy cannot be faulted for stopping short of any exposition on this statement, for clearly his work is rooted primarily in the history of African Americans. Gilroy's general suggestions mark the entry point of the Collective Atlantic study.

The “chorus of a common memory,” or collective memory, of *Crossing the River* speaks to an Atlantic and a world that exists beyond the Black Atlantic (1). In *Feeding the Ghosts*, *Middle Passage*, and *Crossing the River*, the Atlantic points to a collective legacy of slavery as these texts look beyond the African and African-American experience in order to interrogate the greater system of slavocracy. The term “slavocracy” is often employed simply to refer to slaveholders as a ruling class that dominated the plantation society and economy. My use of the term, however, is meant to encompass the slaveholding dominant class, as well as its widespread political order and often “lawless” sense of governance (Stuart 24). Slavocracy is more than a people in power. It is also an economic system spanning the Atlantic that is “invasive” to its commodified victims and exists along a “power line” of “increased . . . rigidity” (A. Mitchell 56, Bassard 414). As the novels interrogate this system, they depict the Atlantic as a collective contact zone of the slavocracy system’s transcultural experiences and heterogeneous interpretations. The narratives’ movement beyond the “Black” of the Black Atlantic promotes a more multifarious or kaleidoscopic,<sup>2</sup> rather than stereoscopic, investigation of slavocracy’s (1) utopian and dystopian experiences, and (2) its historic and contemporary reverberations, which are often manifest in the novels’ engagement with the Atlantic Ocean.

---

<sup>2</sup> By “kaleidoscopic” I mean texts that “emphasize and value the *unimaginable number of ways* that Africans and their descendants lived, thrived, and died as they used their will and knowledge to shape the history of the Americas” (Gonzales 12, emphasis added). This contrasts the dualist approach of Gilroy’s stereoscopic study. A kaleidoscopic view of slavocracy is more inclusive, even as it is more diverse or refractory. It is inclusive in that it seeks to view *all* of the peoples and experiences impacted by, or impacting, slavocracy; hence, it is more diverse as the many views refract off one another within the intentionally heterogeneous grouping. Scholars such as Rhonda M. Gonzales have publicly called for more texts that will strive to take on “the heavy lifting of recovering more of their [Black’s and Mulatta women’s] stories,” and contemporary narratives of slavery are both responding to that call and going beyond it as they recover the stories of further peoples and communities (12).

In light of the genre's expanded and more inclusive historic and fictional focus, I seek to expand Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" to a "Collective Atlantic" via a discussion of the Atlantic as a space that embodies both utopian and dystopian experiences and as a medium through which the slave trade's transcultural ramifications and experiences can be explored. This expanded term is not, of course, meant to imply that the concept of a Black Atlantic should be done away with, for Black Atlantic signifies something crucial. Nevertheless, I propose the term Collective Atlantic so that studies of slavocracy may continue to move forward and may acknowledge, learn from, and scrutinize the perpetual effects of a muddy past in which "black" was not and is not a monolithic framework of identification. A Collective Atlantic seeks to validate the complexities of race, experience, self-identification, and the history of a contemporary cosmopolitan world. As James Clifford has previously and importantly specified, "[B]lack South America and the hybrid Hispanic/black cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America are not, for the moment, included in Gilroy's projection. He writes from a North Atlantic / European location" (267).<sup>3</sup> The Black Atlantic sought to explore a specific geographical area, route, roots, and people of African origin. This study seeks to move beyond that focus in response to a literary genre, contemporary narratives of slavery, that engages and explores slavocracy through a wider geographical, ethnic, and racial scope.

Therefore, I extend the use of "black" to "collective" for three specific reasons. First, the use of "collective" is a move beyond black, for the use of black limits Gilroy's study to a racialized experience, whether for better or for worse. By replacing "black" with "collective," I seek to disrupt binary constructions of race and encourage a focus on slavocracy's "issues of

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information on this crucial history, see: McKnight, Kathryn Joy, and Leo J. Garofalo, eds. *Afro-Latino Voices: Narratives from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World, 1550-1812*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009. Print.

more general significance” that Gilroy mentions but fails to explicate (223). In so doing, I do not mean to imply that issues of race are not or should not be important. Issues of difference, including racialized difference, continue to exist as central questions, but, as Ramon Salvádar stresses, they are “no longer defined exclusively in shades of black or white, or in the exact manner we once imagined” (574). The beginning of this century has already seen “profoundly shifting racial demographics” that have established a “critical difference” between “contemporary American social and cultural politics” and those of the twentieth century (Salvádar 575). In light of this, Salvádar reimagines and reapplies the term “post-race” to describe contemporary America.

Salvádar’s use of the term “post-race” departs from the more common use that is meant to connote a society devoid of racial categories, preferences, or prejudices—one that is without racism or is a colorblind environment. The idea of a society that is “beyond race” is not what is being evoked here. Similarly, the move from black to collective is not meant to imply that society is somehow past race, beyond blackness, or without racism. The Black Atlantic and understandings of blackness remain of import, of course. The use of collective is intended to reflect the stark shift that has occurred in the move from the racial binary of the twentieth century to the plurality of racial constructs in the twenty-first. The extension from black to collective is intended to move forward from the temporal and racial binaries of the Black Atlantic—traditional/ modern and black/ white—in response to a changing world.

This acknowledgement of a changing world, and not just a changing America, leads to the second reason for “collective.” Generally speaking, a “collective” is “formed by [a] collection of individual persons, or things; constituting a collection; gathered into one; taken as a whole” (“Collective”). Subsequently, the employment of this term is meant to emphasize that the

Collective Atlantic engages with slavocracy as an issue of humankind with global effects, a community issue with local effects, and an individual issue with personal effects. In so doing, it will challenge limiting notions of identity and “closures of nationalism and civilizopolism with a more rhizomatic or network conception of political culture” in order to appreciate a more intersubjective experience and existence in which concentric circles of identity and “political culture are complicated and compromised by numerous crosscutting allegiances, connections, and modes of collaboration” (Connolly 603).<sup>4</sup> The goal of this Collective Atlantic is that, by validating the effects of slavocracy on and across all levels, potentially stagnant and clear-cut notions of the system’s victims, perpetrators, guilty, innocent, etc. will be disrupted and complicated in favor of a more intersubjective and refractory understanding of experience and existence within that system.

---

<sup>4</sup> Due to the wide and varied use of “intersubjectivity” in scholarship, I want to clarify my particular use of the term. Connolly’s notion of crosscuttings, connections, and collaboration provides a useful starting point, for I employ the term in response to the connections, overlaps, and refractions that naturally occur among groups and between individuals. My understanding of intersubjectivity is largely informed by Charles Johnson’s fiction and non-fiction. His interview with Johnathan Little provides a succinct summary of the concept: When one person sees, encounters, or experiences some thing and then shows or shares it with another “[t]hen you have intersubjectivity. If you have three people, it’s even better. That’s what I believe in far more than objectivity. Intersubjectivity is shared meaning, a shared vision” (“Interview” 164). In such intersubjective lived experience, persons are “viewed as parts of larger wholes,” or a larger Lifeworld, in which persons are “[a]lways linked to others” in their negotiation of the world, whether or not they realize or acknowledge it (Joseph 11). In an attempt to offer a more composite definition, I turn to Kenneth J. Gergen. In my utilization of intersubjectivity, “the locus of understanding” of society, the self, and the other is not rooted solely in “the heads of individual persons,” but is “placed within a relational space. . . . Relational units are formed as individuals coordinate their actions with each other; however, the individual in this case is viewed as the intersection of a range of relational units” (Gergen 602). Moreover, I suggest that these “coordinated actions” among individuals are not necessarily active and intentional interactions. They can be, and perhaps often are active, but they may also be passive or may occur simply as a result of proximity among groups or individuals. In short, intersubjectivity refers to the interconnected nature of humankind, society, and, necessarily, consciousness.

Finally, “collective” is used to emphasize that the Collective Atlantic “gather[s] into one” a diverse body of both utopian and dystopian experiences, and it does so in a way that values their complex proximity instead of seeking concrete delineations. In other words, the goal is not to break apart and categorize the whole of slavocracy’s history.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the goal is to approach the study of slavocracy via the “mediated *action*” of “collective *remembering*” (Wertsch 119). In so doing, the Collective Atlantic serves as a lens to negotiate a collective past and the haunting, collective memory of that past.

Contemporary narratives of slavery are, of course, works of fiction and not formal historiographies. Nevertheless, their authors’ motivation to revisit and re-present a collective history is contemporarily utopic, for it, as is the nature of utopia, “explores the space between the possible and the impossible” (Claeys, *Searching for Utopia* 15). As Marc Steinberg explains, literary efforts to reimagine, honor, and commemorate history do so “primarily to reveal, not conceal, truth about nineteenth-century America. . . . [they] do not create history; they re-create historical possibility, plausible scenarios omitted from historical documentation” (385). While these works may contribute “imperfect” or reimagined interpretations of the Collective Atlantic’s personal and communal experiences of slavocracy, they still contribute a valuable refiguration of

---

<sup>5</sup> This study of slavocracy is limited within the space of the Collective Atlantic. It encompasses the land and peoples involved in the transatlantic slave trade. Of course, slavery is not unique to the slave trade investigated via the Collective Atlantic, but the “Europeans who settled in the New World [did] give the institution of slavery what the historian David Eltis calls ‘a new scale of intensity’” even as “they also established a particularly noxious form of slavery” (Stuart 75). This “noxious form of slavery” was “one in which race established a hierarchy of human life and decided which people were expendable and which were not, those who could be transformed into commodities and those who could never be” (Stuart 75-76). In short, enslavement of African Americans in the New World gave rise to a bifurcated society rooted in racism, making it a particularly “noxious” or dystopian system. In so doing, the American colonists developed “a type of slavery that had never existed before,” and “the demands of the New World would prompt the largest forced migration in recorded history, as twelve and a half million souls (some historians believe the number to be closer to fifteen million) were transported from Africa to the Atlantic world” (Stuart 76). This is the slavocracy the Collective Atlantic study engages.

experience to the global and local metanarrative and, consequently, to the narrative history of the Lifeworld.

I borrow this concept of a “Lifeworld” from Charles Johnson who developed it to counter the notion of racial categorization. Johnson points out that, in terms of genetics, every person “shares a common ancestor with every other person on this planet” if you go back fifty generations or so (*Being and Fiction* 43). While this notion that we exist in an ancestral proximity to one another is intriguing, I am more invested in Johnson’s connection of the Lifeworld to a greater global history. As Johnson defines it:

[W]hat we have, from the standpoint of phenomenology, are not different worlds but instead innumerable perspectives on *one* world; and we know that, when it comes to the crunch, we share, all of us, the same cultural Lifeworld—a world layered with ancestors, predecessors, and contemporaries. To think of this world properly is to find that all our perspectives take us directly to a common situation, a common history in which all meanings evolve. (*Being and Race* 44)

In sum, Johnson’s Lifeworld suggests that rather than different worlds (read: nation, class, people, race) only one world exists, but with “innumerable perspectives” of that one world. Novels like *Middle Passage* depict this potential Lifeworld, for if the *Republic* is read as a microcosm of the world, then the novel’s narrative layers prove to be multiple perspectives of the events and experiences of that one world.

The Collective Atlantic, then, takes the world to a common history of the triangular slave trade, which is a global history in the sense that it had and has global effects. At the same time, the Collective Atlantic affirms the innumerable perspectives and narratives of that multivalent history, and it may be employed to illuminate a variety of fictional and historic representations of

that history, such as those found in contemporary narratives of slavery. In other words, just as the Lifeworld unifies the many people of the world, the Collective Atlantic unifies the world around the shared history of slavocracy. Subsequently, it acts as a mediating space enabling the exploration of a multiplicity of interpretations of slavocracy. The purpose of these explorations is to illuminate the proximity of utopian and dystopian realities in a seemingly anti-utopian period.

The utilization of the term Lifeworld may risk the appearance of a preference for the global effects of slavocracy. Of course, the global resonances are important, for as Anthony Giddens affirms, “We all experience the larger problems of the world” (qtd. in Haslett). Yet, Giddens quickly adds that these “larger problems” are experienced “in some part in personal terms [and] in the context of our own life situations” (qtd. in Haslett). I would add that in addition to personal terms, these global problems have “regional variations,” local particularities, and communal intricacies (Walkowitz 927). I employ the term Lifeworld intersubjectively in order to support the Collective Atlantic as a mediating space or locus connecting both the global and local world and, thus, as an effective lens to explore slavocracy’s integrative and diffusive effects on the world within the system’s diverse manifestations.

As a mediating space connecting the global and local world and enabling both utopian and dystopian experience, the Collective Atlantic serves as a lens through which the slave trade’s ramifications can and must be evaluated and explored with the goal of increasing understanding of a collective and haunting history. W. J. T. Mitchell employs this concept of a lens or medium and proposes that, in an allegedly post-racial world, race cannot be ignored, for it is crucial to the understanding of society, the self, and the other. Subsequently, he proposes a theory of race *as medium* or as something that should be *seen through* rather than *looked at*; as such, he argues that race is the medium by which one can diagnose the disease that is racism. Mitchell adopts the



term medium in “the most straightforward sense of the word—that is, as an ‘intervening substance’ that both enables and obstructs social relationships” (4). With the idea in mind that the medium is an “intervening substance” that affects social experience, I use the term “Atlantic Experience” to signify the Atlantic’s role as the medium that intervenes between worlds, specifically in terms of the resultant utopian and dystopian realities that arise from the convergence of those worlds. To clarify, the medium itself does not obstruct social relationships; instead, it acts as the lens by which an obstructive disease can be diagnosed. Hence, just as race is the medium by which the disease of racism can be diagnosed, the Atlantic Experience is the medium by which the disease of despotic slavocracy can be diagnosed.

Therefore, the Collective Atlantic serves as an interpretative tool that can illuminate the individual and communal experiences, histories, and ramifications of despotic slavocracy as represented within contemporary narratives of slavery, particularly those invested in the Atlantic Ocean. A commitment to move beyond the commonly too narrow explorations of slavocracy’s diasporic experiences is key to the Collective Atlantic and the Atlantic Experience it interrogates. These diasporic experiences are often “centered on the ways in which enslaved peoples were oppressed and victimized within hegemonic societies that an elite stratum [the slavocracy] controlled” (Gonzales 1). The Collective Atlantic lens does not intend to overlook or minimize the trauma of slavocracy’s diffusive diaspora. Rather, it seeks to reveal the ways in which people sought not only to survive in the midst of diverse contexts, but also to create their own forms of integrative sociability and communal healing despite a despotic system. Rhonda Gonzales stresses that studies of slavocracy’s oppression and victimization, “while relevant,” must also be “interwoven and examined as part of an *mélange* of disparate and unique diasporic realities [sic] in which diasporic people, too, shaped their life’s course and those of others” (2). Moreover, a

“breadth of representations [must be] recovered and the analyses and conclusions they generate must themselves be the scaffold that leads us to develop relevant theories built from and across their multifarious realities” (Gonzales 2). The Collective Atlantic seeks to meet these needs by illuminating how existent fictional texts are already reimagining, and thereby exploring, the “dynamic milieu” of slavocracy in which “multiple, variable identities collided, merged, emerged” and were negotiated within a system of intersubjective experience that was much more than a simple cause and effect relationship between masters and slaves (Gonzales 2).

The Collective Atlantic, then, emerges as a hopefully relevant theory in response to a fictional scaffolding that is already responding to Gonzales’s call, as it seeks to re-present a past that is significantly richer than it may commonly be understood to be. Yet, rather than a theory, I prefer to think of the Collective Atlantic as a hermeneutic, for it serves as a lens that mediates between the past, present, and future. Jonathan Culler notes that a hermeneutic “may value the text for the way in which . . . it engages and helps us [the readers] to rethink issues of moment today” (92). The Collective Atlantic is meant to explore how narrative engagement with the history of a particular space and time—the Atlantic slave trade—may enrich the present moment by reimagining the past and, perhaps, subsequently reimagining and reconstructing the future. For the purposes of this study, that examination will be rooted in three contemporary narratives of slavery, *Feeding the Ghosts*, *Middle Passage*, and *Crossing the River*, for the genre is founded upon and explores slavery through diverse narratives that encounter, merge, and/or redirect one another. Thus, the Collective Atlantic departs from the Black Atlantic by way of its commitment to a body of work that re-presents and gives voice to a heterogeneous array of peoples and voices, thereby disrupting traditional binaries of race, nation, class, space, and time.

## **Utopia and Dystopia: A Pivotal Proximity**

### **In the Collective Atlantic and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts***

In response to the disruption of binaries, as well as the crossing of artificial borders, the Collective Atlantic focuses on the proximity of peoples, and their experiences and interpretations, as a result of the increasingly globalized and connected world that emerges alongside the construction of slavocracy. Within this system, people of heterogeneous races, classes, and nations experience both utopic and dystopic moments in response to the pursuit of utopian ideals often accompanied by dystopian realities.

Traditionally, the concepts of utopia and dystopia have been viewed as polar opposites in which the existence of one means the absence of the other. Beyond this fundamental delineation, definitions of the two span a spectrum of interpretations. In response, Gregory Claeys seeks to establish composite definitions of “utopia” and “dystopia” that reconcile the variety of existent understandings. Claeys suggests utopia and dystopia are rooted in a “proximity [that] is much closer than their semantic juxtaposition indicates” (“News” 171). While there are “important differences between the expressions of each phenomenon,” utopia and dystopia “are not polar opposites” (“News” 171). Of course, fundamental differences do exist: “[U]topias function chiefly as models which demonstrate a society based upon enhanced friendship and trust, while dystopias alienate individuals from each other, and destroy ‘society’ by undermining institutions of moral support” (Claeys, “News” 156). The proximity of the two exists in terms of their “promise or threat . . . of intensified sociability,” whether that sociability is of a gratifying or destructive nature (Claeys, “News” 146).

In *Feeding the Ghosts*, *Middle Passage*, and *Crossing the River*, the Atlantic is the space facilitating the slave trade, and it is also the space where utopia and dystopia coexist in a fluid

manner in which one can evolve into the other in an endless exchange. In these novels, utopia often exists as compassionate, loving, and friendly or familial relationships characters self-create in response to or despite circumstance. Simultaneously, dystopia often emerges as loss, violence, and fractured relationships inflicted by diaspora, slavocracy, and racism. Nevertheless, the lines are rarely so clear-cut. The notion of proximity and the blurring of lines that proximity instigates may be further illuminated by a discussion of the Atlantic's connotations as a body of water, both materially and figuratively. While such analysis may seem reductive, it is actually significant because of water's importance as both element and symbol in the genre, and it proves fruitful due to the revelatory language it contributes to the interpretative capabilities of the Collective Atlantic.

Materially, or scientifically, water is constrained by osmotic and diffusive movement. The literal, scientific definitions of these processes provide a basic starting point for an understanding of the material utopian and dystopian realities of the Atlantic. Osmosis is "the process by which molecules of water . . . pass through a semipermeable membrane into a region of greater solute concentration, so as to make the concentrations on the two sides of the membrane more nearly equal" ("Osmosis"). Material diffusion is the permeation of a liquid between that of another placed in contact with it in which the two are mixed together without chemical combination ("Diffusion"). In reimagining these processes in terms of their human application, I suggest osmosis is the bringing together of an array of races, cultures, and nations, which concentrates diversity. On the other hand, diffusion is the spreading abroad of the same array of races, cultures, and nations, but in a way that maintains separation based on difference. In terms of the Collective Atlantic experience, osmosis is representative of an integrative utopia of increased diversity and diffusion is representative of a diasporic dystopia of maintained

discrimination. The Atlantic may be viewed as a space of osmotic integration and diffusive diaspora.

However, the figurative definitions of the terms provided by the Oxford English Dictionary carry less positive connotations that would seem to contradict the scientific and inferred definitions. In a figurative context, osmosis is defined as “a process resembling osmosis, *esp.* the gradual and often unconscious assimilation or transfer of ideas, knowledge, influences, etc.” (“Osmosis”). As the first part of the definition indicates, figurative osmosis could resemble its scientific process and the former application. On the other hand, the second definition implies a passivity that contrasts the relational agency of utopia. Similarly, while most of the definitions of figurative diffusion are somewhat related to the definition previously provided, they are much more general and are not necessarily negative. For example, the OED defines figurative diffusion as “[s]preading abroad, dispersion, dissemination (of abstract things, as knowledge)” (“Diffusion”). As such, this diffusion could be positive, negative, or neutral; it is not limited to a dystopic expression.

The point of this otherwise didactic juxtaposition of definitions is to illustrate the fluidity of these distinct, yet closely related terms and processes. Both osmosis and diffusion can mean similar but different things depending on the context. Thus, I have chosen to use “osmosis” and “diffusion” as key terms in the Collective Atlantic because their scientific definitions, and the figurative application of those specific definitions, contribute an effective way to think about the utopian and dystopian movement of the Collective Atlantic. Even though every available definition of osmosis and diffusion may not equal the way in which they are used—osmotic integration and diffusive diaspora—I argue this makes their employment only more appropriate, for utopia and dystopia also connote a variety of processes, experiences, and realizations. These

semantics serve as reminders that the concepts of integrative utopia and diasporic dystopia are merely useful delineations. Although I may use the terms in these pairings quite regularly, I do not mean to imply that they are mutually exclusive. In short, increased diversity is not necessarily utopian and diaspora is not necessarily dystopian. Instead, these seemingly opposite realities are in constant interplay; they coexist in an ambivalent proximity in which dividing lines are blurred and largely indiscernible.

The history and experience of diaspora conjures a similar ambivalence. While diaspora may readily invoke certain connotations, it cannot be qualitatively demarcated, for its impacts are as varied as they are constant. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall labels the inconclusiveness of diaspora a paradox. He writes, “The paradox is that it was the uprooting of slavery and transportation and the insertion into the plantation economy (as well as the symbolic economy) of the Western world that ‘unified’ these peoples across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past” (396). The paradox of diaspora is that it can disperse *and* unify a people. Acknowledging that such unification and dispersion can be positive, negative, or neutral serves only to further complicate the paradox. The diaspora of the triangular slave trade, in all its manifestations and ramifications, speaks to the complex relationship of utopia and dystopia, for the two move about in a liminal space of proximity that is in perennial flux.

Fred D’Aguiar’s novel *Feeding the Ghosts* illustrates this variability of diasporic experience through its reconstruction of the Zong slave ship’s infamous eighteenth century voyage and the concomitant massacre. Prior to its departure, the owners of the Zong purchased insurance to protect their “investment,” specifically protection from the loss of slaves. Therefore, when the crew faced navigational and health issues at sea, they decided to throw slaves

overboard in expectation that the insurance reparations would annul any monetary losses they would have otherwise incurred. D'Aguiar's novel recovers the voices of the 131 slaves who were thrown overboard in exchange for presumed compensation. In addition, it reimagines the historic episode through its inclusion of a 132nd slave, Mintah, who successfully climbs back aboard the ship after being thrown into the sea. Mintah serves as the mouthpiece for the other 131 slaves, as she composes a book detailing the crimes and horrors of the *Zong*. In so doing, she creatively commemorates every slave's life by carving sea-like wooden statues to represent each murdered man, woman, and child thrown overboard.

D'Aguiar's narrative of the *Zong* is preceded by two epigraphs that point to ties between the ocean and history. As previously mentioned, the first epigraph is extracted from Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea is History" and it emphasizes the eponymous statement that the sea *is*, or is equivalent to, history. The second epigraph is a line from Kamau Brathwaite's poem "Calypso," and it reimagines the creation of the Caribbean islands as landmasses formed from the "arc'd" trail of a "skidded" skipping stone (1). The larger poem of each work explores the history of colonial sea exploration and a globalization fueled by the inter-continental trade in men, women, and children. These two specific excerpts note the explicit ties between this imperial history and the sea that enabled its capitalist endeavors. Immediately thereafter, the opening line of the prologue declares, "The sea is slavery" (*FG* 3). Such an opening quickly draws connections between the sea, history, and slavery, as well as the Caribbean landmasses and societies that were transformed by the racial intermixing and intensified sociability that followed the forced diaspora. The remainder of the prologue and the subsequent chapters continue to highlight these connections by illustrating the loss of untold numbers of individual

and communal voices, lives, and histories as a result of the horrors of the slave trade, its ships, and its masters, such as those that took place aboard the *Zong*.

Juxtaposed against this sea that is slavery and the “grey vault” of history, D’Aguiar presents Mintah: a young woman that climbs out of this sea in order to bear witness to those unrecorded others who have been lost to it (Walcott 3). Through Mintah and the layered narratives and interpretations she invokes from other characters, the novel simultaneously and imaginatively unlocks the “locked” sea of Walcott’s poem and bears witness to the “monuments . . . battles, martyrs . . . and memory” that are otherwise lost, unrecorded, and unaccounted for (4, 1-2).

Much of the existing scholarship on *Feeding the Ghosts* does make note of this “space of remembrance” that the novel “open[s] up,” as Stefanie Craps describes it (467). In particular, scholars often address the layered and recursive nature of the narrative and emphasize how this form is more true to the nature of history, be it oral, written, or remembered, than is the more common, linear understanding of history. Craps discusses how historical losses are “constantly re-examined and re-interpreted” throughout the novel; similarly, Carole Froude-Durix addresses the “circularity of the narration” and how that circularity “reflects the repetitive re-telling of history in societies where orality was the only means of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next” (467, 53). Furthermore, both scholars explore the effects of loss, trauma, and mourning. However, these studies fall short of looking beyond the dystopia of the traumatic present to the possibilities, whether dystopian or utopian, of a coming future. For example, Froude-Durix appropriately recognizes the connections D’Aguiar draws in the opening of the novel, but then proceeds to proclaim, “For D’Aguiar, the sea is a negative image; it is endless and unpredictable” (53). Herein lies one of the most significant gaps in the existing scholarship,



for the value of a sea that is slavery and history is qualified; a need emerges to define the sea as positive or negative, as one or the other. I argue that the sea is most significant when its connotations are not limited to mutually exclusive binaries, and it is free to be valued as indicative of both positive and negative images, or, better yet, as enabling moments of both utopia and dystopia. Choosing between the two is not only unnecessary, but is also debilitating to the novel and its impact, as well as to a well-rounded and comprehensive understanding of history. Confining the sea only to the imagery presented in the novel's epigraph and beginning risks overlooking the possibilities of change, redemption, and hope that arise toward its close when Jamaica passes its Emancipation Act, the next generation "play[s] in the sea disarming it of its past," and the "sea no longer haunt[s] her [Mintah]" (FG 224).

The language of haunting, disarming, and redeeming is key to the novel, and it speaks to a relationship between the past, present, and future. It is in the present moment that the past may haunt and that active attempts may be made to disarm that haunting in hopes of redemption. Haunted by the ghosts of those thrown overboard from the *Zong*, Mintah spends her life seeking "to redeem herself to herself" by writing an account of the events of the *Zong* and all of its passengers, aiding slaves on the run to freedom, planting 131 coconut trees, carving wooden spirit sculptures, and the like (FG 224). Much scholarly attention has been given to Mintah's traumatic experiences and their ramifications,<sup>6</sup> and rightfully so, but this focus on trauma does not account for the possibilities of Mintah's redemption or healing, freedom, and eventual peace in its various forms throughout the novel. Instead, it tends to look at what *has been* rather than what *could be*.

---

<sup>6</sup> For an example, see: Craps, Stef. "Learning to Live With Ghosts: Postcolonial Haunting and Mid-Mourning in David Dabydeen's 'Turner' and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*." *Callaloo* 33.2 (2010): 467-475. *Project Muse*. Web. 20 October 2013.

Rather than focusing on trauma, I propose a focus on the ghosts of the novel, particularly their acts of haunting as well as attempts to “[feed]” and “assuage” them (*FG* 222). Avery Gordon clarifies and affirms a turn in focus from trauma to haunting:

Haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a *something-to-be-done*. Indeed, . . . haunting [is] precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away. (xvi, emphasis added)

Haunting is unsettling, for it exposes the truth that realities do not align with sociological or political norms, expectations, or structures of feelings. Because it is unsettling, haunting can lead to a desire to do something to redress the haunting. In other words, haunting can inspire action, change, and a different future, but some measure of discomfort precedes that new future.<sup>7</sup> In the case of this novel, haunting emerges when the narrative exposes the realities of the slave trade, when the loss of the *Zong* slaves are exposed as murders, when Mintah refuses to remain thrown overboard, and when the disturbing feelings that slavocracy arouses cannot simply be ignored. These recovered ghosts engage “the dialectics of visibility and invisibility” and they “involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows” (Gordon 17).

In light of this, the ghosts of *Feeding the Ghosts*, as well as Mintah—the “ghostly” narrative voice of a reimagined historical figure—serve as what Avery Gordon calls “the ghost as a *social figure*” (25). Such ghosts are “often a case of *inarticulate experiences*, of symptoms

---

<sup>7</sup> As Derrida notes in *Specters of Marx*: “Given that a *revenant* is always called upon to come and to come back, the thinking of the specter, contrary to what good sense leads us to believe, signals toward the future. It is a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived—from the *arrivant* itself” (245).

and screen memories, of spiraling *affects*, of *more than one story at a time*, of the traffic in domains of *experience that are anything but transparent and referential*. It is a case of modernity's violence and wounds, and a case of the haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which we live" (Gordon 25). Specters of society may, of course, emerge from traumatic events, but, as Gordon argues, their role then is to mediate between "the public and hidden transcripts" in order to uncover "contradictions, tensions, and immanent possibilities" (210). Hauntings emerge from gaps in society, such as gaps in power, equality, wealth, reparations, etc.—they represent the sorts of sociological gaps that are known, that sometimes make themselves very apparent or hyper-visible, and other times are ignored or fade into the background and become invisible. That is why ghosts and haunting prove to be an especially effective trope in contemporary narratives of slavery, for slavery is one of society's most persistent and omnipresent social hauntings and, as Gordon puts it, when you are haunted "you have been notified or your involvement. You are *already* involved, implicated in one way or another" (207).

The Middle Passage is the historical, sociological, and geographical fissure that has contributed to one of society's greatest social hauntings. *Feeding the Ghosts* speaks to the grave nature of the events of the Middle Passage, such as the Zong's voyage. Through its narrative of murdered slaves, Mintah's return to the ship, her haunting of the ship's crew following her surreptitious reboarding, the dead's haunting of Mintah, and the unrecorded ghosts' haunting of the reader, the novel blurs temporal boundaries and conflates the past, present, and future. Much like the Collective Atlantic hermeneutic, this is a novel of proximity of time, experience, and effects. Even as the novel's subject matter may appear inherently dystopian and definitively traumatic, the novel does not stop there; rather, it looks ahead to future possibilities. This is what

the Collective Atlantic does: it enables the audience to recognize nuances and slight shifts between utopia and dystopia, hope and despair, integration and exclusion, and stagnation and change (such as those that may be glimpsed in this text).

*Feeding the Ghosts* is perhaps more emblematic than some novels of the import of proximity in favor of distinct poles, for it is deeply rooted in opposites as it portrays a character caught *between* worlds on the Middle Passage and between her life and that of those who haunt her. However, rather than affirm a Manichean, dualist worldview, this text highlights the intricacies of the Collective Atlantic, for it illustrates that one is not limited to either this or that, but can live and experience life, even as a slave, on a continuum of both/and. Because Mintah exists in a liminal space, and because she is a ghost of the social gap, *Feeding the Ghosts* exhibits the fluidity of a Collective Atlantic experience that represents a collective history with global effects, local or communal nuances, and individual or personal intricacies. In the case of Mintah, the Collective Atlantic experience exists on continuums of power, subjectivity, humanity, and the limits or possibilities of the present.

The novel's first description of the subjectivity of its enslaved characters is impersonal and statistical. The slaves are viewed as no more than bodies:

Over three days 131 such bodies, no, 132, are flung at the sea. Each lands with a sound that the sea absorbs and silences. Each opens a wound in this sea that heals over each body without evidence of a scar. Two hundred and sixty-four arms and 264 legs punch and kick against a tide that insists all who land on it, all who breaks its smooth surface, must succumb to its swells, tumbles, pushes and pulls.

(*FG* 3)

The castaway, generic bodies open a wound in the sea—the sea that *is* slavery—and that sea then closes over them, leaving no trace of their absorption into oblivion. Interestingly, although Claeys composite definitions of utopia and dystopia are essential to this study, Claeys actually argues that slavocracy, taken as a general system, is not necessarily dystopic, for it did not aim “at the eradication of individuality as such, while, by contrast, modern totalitarianism [which he does categorize as dystopian] proved far more all-encompassing in its ambitions” (“News” 163).

In light of the objectifying and statistical treatment of slaves, such as that indicated above, I have to disagree with Claeys and assert that slavocracy, as a general system, did seek to eradicate individuality and, overall, denied any possibility of human likeness between slavers and the enslaved. In fact, I argue that slavocracy effectively strives to kill and destroy any notion of a Lifeworld that seeks to connect all humankind. Slavocracy signals out a vast group of people due to skin color and supposed inferiority, it attempts to reduce them to something less than human, and, subsequently, it constructs a theory of race to justify its economic system.<sup>8</sup> In response to his study of the *Zong*, and the logs of other slave ships, Ian Baucom affirms, “Indeed what we know of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is that among the other violences it inflicted on millions of human beings was the violence of becoming a ‘type’: a type of person, or, terribly, not even that, a type of nonperson, a type of property, a type of commodity, a type of money” (*Finance Capital* 11). Much of the history of slavery exists in such terms. Many of the records that exist from that time, particularly those from slave ships, are ledgers of numbers—numbers quantifying slaves and other cargo. Names are less common, except those indicating who buys and sells particular slaves. Thus, the power to name and to record details becomes important. In

---

<sup>8</sup> For more on how the concept of a bifurcated, racialized society emerged out of slavocracy, see: Stuart, Andrea. *Sugar in the Blood: A Family’s Story of Slavery and Empire*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012. Print.

response, writers of contemporary narratives of slavery reach back into those records and reimagine the narratives of those who may or may not be recorded. Moreover, they often call into question the validity of those records, as D'Aguiar does when he provides a numerical correction for the *Zong*: "Over three days 131 such bodies, no, 132, are flung at the sea" (3). It follows, then, that a complex interplay arises between numbers, bodies, names, power, subjectivity, masters, and slaves in pursuit of the reaffirmation of every complex personhood and the inclusion of all in a collective Lifeworld.

In *Feeding the Ghosts*, D'Aguiar complicates notions concerning what powers are or are not available or effective to various individuals within the system of slavocracy; what is power for the master is not necessarily power for the slave, and vice versa. This is especially apparent in Mintah's complex relationship with Kelsal. Mintah first encounters Kelsal at a white missionary compound near her homeland. Mintah and her mother leave Mintah's father and move to the compound when Mintah is a young girl in order to worship the missionaries' God and learn their trades, such as farming and western medicine. Mintah's "prolonged contact with missionaries" during this time "amounted to a familiarity with whites" (FG 31). This familiarity is so extensive that Mintah is on a first name basis with many of the whites on the compound, including Kelsal. Mintah meets Kelsal when he arrives at the compound with an illness that leads to delirium. She is the only person Kelsal will allow to nurse him, and his illness is such that he "did not know his name and had to be told who he was time and again" (FG 187). Mintah is the one to remind Kelsal who he is—to name him "Kelsal." When Kelsal first begins to improve, he confuses his name with hers, and, every time, Mintah names him "Kelsal." In his delirious state, Kelsal relies on Mintah for his verbal identity and, initially, the words "Kelsal" and "Mintah" are

seemingly interchangeable in his mind. Gender, racial, and verbal differences carry no weight when his life depends on Mintah.

During his time at the missionary camp, Kelsal becomes “acquainted . . . with the way of Africans. [He] saw Africans when they were not slaves,” or were outside of the Western slavocracy system (*FG* 146). At the time of this encounter, Africans were Africans—they were a people, rather than slaves reduced to “stock” (*FG* 12). Despite being nursed back to health by a young African woman and working alongside Africans on a first-name basis, Kelsal never lets go of his supposed white privilege once he is healthy again. Following his recovery, Kelsal shirks his work and duties at the camp and runs away at his the first chance, claiming he “earned [his] freedom and left the mission on good terms with everyone” (*FG* 146). Although he experiences compassionate humanity during his illness, when in his “right” mind, Kelsal cannot reconcile Mintah’s power of healing and naming with the power of his body and supreme skin color. In other words, while Mintah’s ability to nurse Kelsal back to health may be read as a form of agency, Kelsal refutes that agency when he clings to the power of his white skin over her black body.

When Mintah encounters Kelsal for the second time aboard the *Zong*, she again names him, screaming “Kelsal” as he orders slaves to be thrown overboard. Mintah recognizes Kelsal and knows that he is alive due to her care. She names him again in hopes that Kelsal will remember her and validate the humanity of her and the other slaves as more than “cargo” with exchange value (*FG* 13). However, this naming by a piece of what he categorizes as simply “cargo” or “stock” threatens to undermine Kelsal’s power (*FG* 13, 12). What is important to Mintah in these moments is that she and Kelsal were once on a first name basis, but what is important to Kelsal is “the sanctity of *property* and the necessity of absolute submission”

(Hartman 556, emphasis added). Compassion and naming, or the means by which Mintah was once able to save Kelsal's life and restore him to his right mind, prove to be ineffective means of saving the lives of her fellow slaves. When integrated at home in the missionary compound, Mintah's ethics of healing enable a measure of utopian integration, but when she is forcibly thrown out into the Middle Passage, Mintah's attempts at ethical reparation by way of naming invoke dystopian responses from Kelsal. A change of context has shifted the power dynamic in such a way that this "master" is unwilling to extend mercy to those whose lives are in his hand, for they are not viewed as man, but stock and, therefore, "anything could be done to [them] that [was] judged 'necessary' by those in charge" (*FG* 174). As punishment for her violation of the power structure, Mintah is forced to perform a dance, is nearly raped, and is severely beaten. Whereas Mintah's power was once demonstrated by her ability to heal, Kelsal's power is demonstrated by "an index of ultimate and extreme possession" (Harman 555).

Along this master-slave power continuum, Mintah's power once lied in her ability to recall to life Kelsal and his body to his mind. Contrastingly, Kelsal's power aboard the ship lies in his ability to sever Mintah's body from her mind via a commodification of that body to the master's capitalist purposes: in this case, Mintah belongs "to the sea . . . the *Zong* . . . the captain of the *Zong* . . . to everyone but [Mintah]" (*FG* 200). Both Mintah and Kelsal may exist along the same Collective Atlantic continuum, and yet they chose to utilize the forms of power available along that continuum in different manners. For example, rather than rebuking Mintah, Kelsal could have responded positively to Mintah's cry for help, and could have contemplated what he could do to assist her and the other slaves. Likewise, when Kelsal was ill, Mintah could have chosen not to nurse him back to health, instead of restoring him to life. In other words, similar forms of power and interpretations thereof are available to the masters and slaves within various



contexts. How one chooses to use those available powers then determines the utopian or dystopian ramifications of such power and agency over bodies and names/individuals.

It must be stressed that the audience present within the novel during such attempts at agency plays a part in the success or failure of such attempts, as in the case of Mintah and Kelsal, and especially in written or testified attempts. Literacy is often discussed in terms of a form of power, agency, and subjectivity for slaves because it was forbidden; thus, literate slaves provide a rare and unique view into the personal world of slavery. Scholars such as Froude-Durix tend to emphasize Mintah's agency in terms of her ability to read and write, and thereby fashion a detailed account of the events that occur aboard the *Zong*. Conversely, Bénédicte Ledent keenly points out that "literacy is usually conflated with freedom in traditional narratives, [but] that link is much less clear in [Caryl] Phillips's and [Fred] D'Aguiar's novels" where literacy is "potentially a source of freedom and awareness but also of alienation and even death" ("Remembering Slavery" 276-277). In this, contemporary narratives of slavery depart from the tradition of early slave narratives, for in those earlier narratives, agency was starkly and positively rooted in literacy and autobiographical testimony. In contemporary narratives of slavery, such as *Feeding the Ghosts*, literacy may be a form of expression and even subjectivity, but it does not automatically or necessarily equal power or agency, as is evident in Mintah's dismissed account of the murders aboard the *Zong*.

Mintah's detailed account of the *Zong* voyage is ultimately dismissed in the courtroom. During the court proceedings, it is specified that "[t]he woman thought to be responsible for its authorship was nowhere mentioned in the captain's ledger" (*FG* 169). When juxtaposed against the captain's "honest ledger," Mintah's diary is viewed as "the equivalent of showing [the court] proof of the existence of ghosts" (*FG* 48, 173). Her "the ghost-book" of the social gap is scoffed

at and the captain's falsified record is taken as the official record (*FG* 173). In this scene, *Feeding the Ghosts* raises the question of the reliability of the generally accepted historiography of slavocracy, as one account is dismissed in favor of another that the reader knows to be fabricated. It simultaneously illustrates that within the Collective Atlantic there exists a continuum of power rooted in the proximity of utopia and dystopia, for although Mintah is literate, she is further excluded and alienated from mainstream society via her written account. In other words, she is wholly dismissed as a ghost unworthy of engaging.

By dismissing Mintah's written account of the Zong, the court also rejects both Mintah as an individual and the community she and her account represent. The proximity of the individual and the communal is key to the Collective Atlantic. The individual is tied to a greater community, and the greater community is made up of individuals. More specifically, the history of slavocracy is a global history; that global history is comprised of local experiences; and those local ramifications are comprised of individual experiences. To delineate one from the other would be impossible and, frankly, debilitating, because the history of the transatlantic slave trade intertwines nations, cultures, communities, and individuals. Isolating one from the other would limit the study of that "one," because proximity is rooted in one's intersubjectivity or relationship to something(s) else.

In *Feeding the Ghosts*, the challenge is to reimagine an obscured history through a main character while validating both the recovered one, Mintah, and the many, or the other enslaved and the Zong crew. It is worthwhile to extrapolate an imagined individual subjectivity or 132nd slave from the 131 aboard the Zong, and it is also important to stress that the slave is only one of many. The one slave, in this case the character of Mintah, is unique to the creative narrative. The challenge becomes maintaining that uniqueness and not generalizing the one's experience of

enslavement and applying it to all. Reflecting on this challenge, Andrea Stuart writes, “And there is always a danger when documenting [slaves’] stories of turning them into mere symbols of what this terrible system could do to people. (As Orlando Patterson has argued, it ‘is impossible to generalize about the inner psychology of any group.’)” (213-214). This tension points to the proximity of the Collective Atlantic experience. A continuum exists in which one slave’s experience may be very similar to another’s and very different from yet another’s. The key is that the writer, reader, and audience affirm the validity of one and all by recognizing the proximity, fluidity, and intersubjectivity of the global and local, cultural and communal, and group and individual.

The layered narrative of *Feeding the Ghosts* proves effective in displaying the complex proximity of experiences and interpretations. As Ledent describes it: “Far from opting for a simplistic refocussing [sic] on the slave, then, the two novelists [Phillips and D’Aguiar] have multiplied the narrative viewpoints which complete and contradict each other in a crisscrossing dialogue, thereby providing a kaleidoscopic and complex picture of their entangled past” (“Remembering Slavery” 277). The use of the term “kaleidoscopic” is particularly enriching, because it emulates the concepts of mixing, refraction, and proximity that are all key to the Collective Atlantic. Contrastingly, Paul Gilroy’s adherence to a “stereoscopic” view emphasizes the merging of two into one (in his case tradition and modernity). Gilroy’s term is indicative of dualism, whereas kaleidoscopic is indicative of the complex and shifting experience of a multivalent human experience. Furthermore, while stereoscopic lends itself more so to conceptions of polar opposites, kaleidoscopic lends itself more so to conceptions of interconnected relationships and proximity—like that of the Collective Atlantic.

In *Feeding the Ghosts*' kaleidoscopic narrative, three of the narrative layers that are provided beyond Mintah are those of Simon, Kelsal, and the Captain. Notably, these other voices are "white" voices, but each voice provides a different entry point into the white crews' interaction with its enslaved. The Captain represents the indifferent white master who views the slaves as nothing beyond their exchange value. Simon represents a young man who is the cook's boy and possesses little more power than the slaves. Mintah is the first person to show love to Simon and she arouses in him reactions and feelings "he did not know were housed" within him (*FG* 175). Simon feels compassion for Mintah and the other slaves; he recognizes that "[t]hey were human yet any necessary thing could be done to them" (*FG* 174). Even though the courtroom defines the slaves as "stock," Simon believes they had, without a doubt, "proven their humanity" (*FG* 174). Kelsal, then, is caught somewhere between these views. He had seen Africans when they were not slaves, he knew Mintah on a personal basis, but he is also required to obey the Captain's orders and maintain his position of power over the rest of the crew. Consequently, Kelsal, like much of the crew, shifts along a continuum that exists somewhere between the views of slaves as stock and as fully human.

Beyond these three characters, much of the novel is propelled through the main protagonist Mintah. The singling out of a specific and unique identity is key, for it serves to depict the slaves' humanity by allowing an intimate view of Mintah's consciousness. In so doing, the enslaved aboard the *Zong* become more than merely a "tangled mass of humanity. A sea of eyes, flesh welded into one body of complaints, on occasion separating into distinct entities of mankind, but mostly indistinguishable one from another as anything but a sound, a movement" (*FG* 19). Notably, Mintah's experience also speaks to the danger of allowing one to stand for all, or the danger of singling out one slave experience out of 132. This risks losing Mintah in the

crowd and the crowd in Mintah. Indeed, Mintah has a nightmare about this in which her singular Zong experience gets lost as a general placeholder for the group:

Not bound. Mintah. Not thrown. Mintah. Jumped. Mintah. Come and get us.  
Mintah. Here we come. Ready or not. Mintah. Make room for us. Mintah. At the  
bottom of the sea. Mintah. Our bones adding to a road of bones. Mintah. Our cries  
in the wind. Our bodies in the sea with a sea-sound falling soundlessly. Mintah.  
Spears of rain breaking on our bodies and the spears buried with us in the sea.  
Mintah. Those chained in pairs helping each other over the side. Mintah. (FG  
213)

Here, Mintah's subjectivity is occluded, and the name "Mintah" comes to represent the entire enslaved group. At the same time, this nightmare can also provide a vibrant, kaleidoscopic picture of an intersubjective humankind. The name "Mintah" can be viewed as one colorful entity amidst a stark variety of others, and as the viewer turns the kaleidoscope in order to reveal its intricacies and allow for other interpretations, the colorful shape of "Mintah" moves about among those experiences. Mintah exists in proximity to others, and those others of the group exist in proximity to her. In short, this kaleidoscope of humanity, slavocracy, and the Collective Atlantic, sheds light on the shifting proximity of the individual, communal, and, ultimately, the propinquity of the human experience.

A kaleidoscopic reading of *Feeding the Ghosts* points back to the Collective Atlantic lens as the proximities of Mintah's personal journey necessarily reveal the complex nature of a diaspora that is neither inherently utopian or dystopian. At the onset of her journey from Africa to the Americas as a newly enslaved woman, Mintah views her forced diaspora as undoubtedly dystopian, for she and the other enslaved have been stolen from their familial communities in

order to be sold as chattel across the Atlantic. In the forced exchange from free human to stolen property, their bodies “had gone from strokes of love only and the labour of love, to lashes and cuts and bruises, chains and collars. And from dances in the arms of lovers, from dances at harvest, at births, from drums, strings, flutes and horns, they had come to this: a confined hole” (FG 26). This uprooting severs Mintah and the others from their families and their homes, from humane treatment and conditions, and even, in the eyes of many of the enslavers, from their inclusion in the human species.

Initially, Mintah does not view this disruptive relocation as a new beginning; rather, she views it as a forced “end without ending . . . in which they [the enslaved] would be lost forever but not dead” (FG 27). As Mintah describes the journey:

I am on a ship that is going nowhere. From these decks there is only the sea. And the sea is worse than nothing. The sea is between my past and my future. I float on it in the hope that my life can resume at some point in time. I float in the present. . . . I remain between my life that is over and my life to come. The sea keeps me *between* my life. Time runs on the spot, neither backwards nor forwards. (FG 199)

In other words, while the forced diaspora may mark the end of the slaves’ home lives, the diaspora does not kill them, but suspends them in a liminal state of forced bondage that is neither life nor death. The “end without ending” of slavery and its diaspora connotes images of an eternal hell, which would seem to be the antithesis of utopia. Yet, because slavery and its diaspora are “without ending,” the end is not immutable; some measure of possibility is maintained between the space of life and death. The slaves’ experiences may point towards one or the other at any given point. Similarly, according to Ruth Levitas, dystopia “is not necessarily

anti-utopianism: anti-utopianism actively opposes the imagination and pursuit of alternatives. Much hangs on whether the dystopia points to unremitting closure or to another possible future” (110). If a dystopia is interminable, then it may be considered anti-utopian. However, if a dystopia is not conclusively permanent, then it cannot be anti-utopian. The dystopia still exists in relation to, not against, utopia; proximity and the possibility of change are maintained.

While capture by the Zong may mark the “end without ending” of Mintah’s pre-diaspora life, it also marks the beginning of that diaspora life—a life birthed of the Collective Atlantic and full of varied utopian and dystopian possibilities. When faced with these possibilities, Mintah strives toward forms of utopian intensified sociability such as solidarity, life, freedom, loyalty, and justice. Consequently, her narrative becomes “a shifting series of utopian moments within the shifting configurations of the possible” (Levitas 109).

Even as Mintah believes that she is “on a ship that is going nowhere,” she maintains hope that her life “can resume at some point in time” (*FG* 199). As the novel progresses, Mintah comes to recognize that her life will resume only if she chooses to renew it. Subsequently, rather than allow the diaspora to consume her, she chooses to be a “loose plank,” instead of “part of the deck,” and chooses to “bend” (*FG* 134). Although the forced diaspora severs Mintah from her past, she may still choose her response to that dystopian rupture. In her own words, Mintah decides, “I will be grain . . . Grain around this knot of a voyage” (*FG* 42). She commits to adapt and survive the experience of the Zong, and she continues to do this in her life of slavery until, in time, she is able to buy her freedom and, later, a new home in Jamaica.

During both her enslavement and her freedom, the sea, the Zong, and its ghosts continue to haunt Mintah. In an attempt to cleanse herself of a traumatic past and “bear witness” to those who were lost, Mintah aids runaway slaves on their journey north toward freedom, writes a

detailed account of the Zong massacre, plants 131 coconut trees, and memorializes the murdered slaves by carving all 131 of their spirits into wooden sculptures (Taylor-Guthrie 4). Gordon clarifies that “ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation” (*FG* 208). Accordingly, Mintah’s actions on behalf of the Zong’s castaways transform those haunting, broken lives by bearing witness to them. Through such diligence, Mintah “feed[s] the ghosts” of the Zong and, finally, “[t]he past is laid to rest when it is told” (*FG* 230).

Mintah’s homage to those killed along the Zong voyage also serves to “redeem herself to herself” as it frees Mintah of the haunting past (*FG* 224). While her hands had once been busy feeding the ghosts, they later want to be idle once those ghosts have been assuaged and, at that point, “the sea no longer haunted her” (*FG* 224). Therefore, though the “sea is slavery” in the opening of the novel, “the sea that is slavery will become freedom” in its close (*FG* 3, 211). In this new freedom, “Sea and land are joined now . . . To sail from one and walk on the other is the same journey. At least here [in post-Emancipation Act Jamaica]. And in Maryland before too long. I [Mintah] believe that soon the sea will join Africa and America, though now it divides them, just as it has united Africa and Jamaica” (*FG* 211). The sea that was slavery divided lands. It existed as a geographical boundary that separated men and women from their pre-diaspora freedom or homelands, and the passengers/enslaved aboard the ships that sailed this sea were often stolen from one land and sold as slaves in another across the sea. Even as it divided lands, the sea also served as a waterway that connected colonial powers to bodies for sale, and as a Middle Passage that enabled a forced dispersal of people.

Post-Emancipation Act, however, Mintah imagines that the sea could reunite those lands and serve as a tie between people and their ancestors. The dystopian history of the Atlantic could



be redeemed by the possibility of a more utopian future, and the ghosts that emerge from its Middle Passage could serve as instigators and conductors of this redemption. The social ghosts call for a form of utopia as a method that “necessitates [that society think] about the connections between economic, social and political processes, our ways of life, and what is necessary to human flourishing” (Levitas xiv). In the case of Mintah and *Feeding the Ghosts*, bearing witness to the ghosts of the past marks the first step in moving to a renewed human flourishing and a redeemed Atlantic.

In these hauntings, *Feeding the Ghosts* reminds its readers of the dystopian history of “grievous social inequality and exploitation” that existed aboard many slave ships, particularly the Zong (Claeys, “News” 149). It also highlights the utopian “need to envision a more hopeful future” through Mintah’s commemoration of the 131 lost slaves, as well as through the novel’s fictional re-envisioning of a historic event that has limited written and detailed record (Claeys, “News” 160). The novel seeks to honor this past by representing its dystopian horror, reimagining “a series of utopian moments” created in the midst of oppression, and finally giving a voice to those destroyed by slavocracy and silenced by the written historical record (Levitas 109). The unacknowledged individual ghosts of the past may be somewhat “assuage[d]” and put to rest when they are honored rather than forgotten, and a key component to honoring them is bearing witness to their complex personhood along a detailed continuum of power, subjectivity, humanity, and the limits or possibilities of the past, present, and future (*FG* 222). As Mintah promises Ama before she is discarded, “I will remember you!” and, thereby, “Others will remember you!” (*FG* 127). Mintah’s diary attests to Ama’s life and her remembrance of Ama is represented by way of the novel’s layered form and testimonial details. A similar construction of

remembrance exists in the form of logbook entries written by the roguish main character, Calhoun Rutherford, in Charles Johnson's transatlantic novel, *Middle Passage*.

## **Inhabiting Others Through Narrative:**

### **The Intersubjectivity of the Lifeworld in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage***

Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* is another narrative of remembrance in which one of the sunken slave ship *Republic's* few survivors, Rutherford Calhoun, overwrites the captain's logbook with his own narration of the ship's fateful journey. Rutherford's nine dated logbook entries detail his journey directly leading up to, aboard, and immediately following the ship's final sailing. Like Mintah's narrative of remembrance, Calhoun bears witness to those aboard the *Republic* who might not have otherwise been included in the captain's log, or, if so, would likely have been included as a number or type, rather than by name or complex personhood.

Calhoun's testament to a *Republic* community more inclusive than that represented by Falcon is indicative of the novel's investment in interpersonal connectivity. In addition, because Calhoun re-presents the *Republic's* journey directly over Falcon's log entries, the interplay of Calhoun's narrative and Falcon's narratives epitomizes the novel's intersubjectivity within its very form. Ultimately, the novel's structure is a celebration of the intersubjective nature of individual and communal experience and history, for the reader would never know the other slaves' and sailors' stories, nor hear their voices, if Calhoun did not record them. Through the logbook, he gives them a narrative presence, and he serves as the intersection of their relational experiences as well as the mediator of the utopian and dystopian realities of those experiences. However, Calhoun does not always interact with others so respectfully. The beginning of the novel shows a Calhoun who ignores, if not deeply denies, the value of intersubjectivity among family, friends, and strangers.

This denial is evident in the opening of the novel, which presents Calhoun in flight from others. Calhoun boards the *Republic* as a freed man, recently manumitted by a "reluctant"

slaveholder, but in flight from a woman, Isadora, who seeks to settle all of his gambling debts in exchange for his hand in marriage (*MP* 111). Having only recently fled to New Orleans from his brother in Makanda, Illinois, and unwilling to enter into another form of “bondage,” Calhoun sneaks upon the *Republic* as a stowaway (*MP* 19). As a man who claims he has “no past,” he settles into a “long and narrow” launch boat on the deck of the *Republic*, “cross[es]” “both hands . . . on [his] chest,” and drifts off to sleep to the sounds of the ship “moan[ing] with memory” (*MP* 160, 21). As the coffin and death-like imagery suggests, the *Republic*’s departure initiates a rebirth for Calhoun. His sea journey marks a split from his life of enslavement, “parasit[ic]” struggle, and individuality (*MP* 2).

Out at sea Calhoun encounters community, history, and memory beyond himself. The *Republic*, a ship or place “moaning with memory,” exposes Calhoun to the memory of a community and history that is greater than any he has ever known, or at least greater than any he has ever acknowledged. The *Republic* may symbolize many things, but for the intents and purposes of this Collective Atlantic study, the *Republic* will be viewed as primarily allegorizing slavocracy. The *Republic* signifies slavocracy as a slave ship embodying the memory of the many enslavers and enslaved it has transported over its lifetime, as well as the memory of the American Republic it microscopically expresses. Notably, this American republic the ship connotes is a nation whose construction is deeply rooted in the slave system and, arguably, largely built upon the backs of slaves. When Calhoun encounters this memory—a memory that is not cognitive, but nonetheless real—life becomes more than a thing or an “experienc[e]” that can be narrowly defined and understood (*MP* 3).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Paul Connerton discusses a level of memory that is not cognitive, but very real. His concept of “habitual memory” points to this often inexpressible form of memory—a form of memory that is difficult to discuss because it is so deeply ingrained/embodied and necessarily not cognitive. For

This memory-laden ship travels the seas of the Atlantic. Therefore, in *Middle Passage*, as in the Collective Atlantic hermeneutic, the Atlantic exists as a collective contact zone of slavocracy's intersubjectivity as it serves as the space of the *Republic's* journey. The *Republic* sails across the Middle Passage, which symbolizes one of the greatest social gaps of modern history, toward the Windward Coast of Africa. Calhoun's metaphorical death, marked by his stowing away aboard the ship, allows him to be the reader's guide throughout the *Republic's* voyage. In so doing, he serves as the medium of exploration of this Atlantic Experience. His voice rises out of the Middle Passage as if he were a haunting ghost of that social gap, much like Mintah's in *Feeding the Ghosts*. His journey, and recorded narrative of that journey, embodies the narrative exploration of slavocracy that the Collective Atlantic enables.

Through Calhoun, the reader is exposed to largely dystopian external plot events such as forced diaspora, frequent death due to inhumane conditions, mutiny, rampant disease, cannibalism,<sup>10</sup> manipulated loyalties, division along race and class lines, and the sinking of the ship. Yet, these events are narrated in the midst of, or in proximity to, internal, utopian moments of intensified sociability as Calhoun encounters new ways of thinking, experiencing the world, and interacting with others. Through this growing awareness of and integration into the positive intersubjectivity of life, Calhoun enters a process of rebirth from preferred self-isolation to communal participation in the collective Lifeworld. The intersubjective nature of individual and communal existence, experience, and history is key to Calhoun's rebirth, and an exploration of the novel's depiction and valorization of connectivity within the Collective Atlantic points to its commentary on the legacy of slavocracy. By way of enslavement, slavocracy reduces individuals

---

more information see: Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print.

<sup>10</sup> This is worthy of its own study on embodied memory, which I intend to explore in a future paper.

and communities to numbers, “chattel,” and types of “stock” that are not included even as a part of the human species, much less humanity. Contrastingly, the Lifeworld affirms the complex personhood of all men and women and stresses the significance of solidarity in light of the inherently interpersonal nature of consciousness and reality.

The structure of Calhoun’s narrative is indicative of the novel’s investment in the intersubjective nature of experience and history. Of course, Calhoun’s reflections on his *Republic* experience do include and are informed by his interactions with others, particularly his flight from Isadora prior to his stowing away on the ship; his impactful encounters with the Allmuseri aboard the ship; and his life-sustaining aid by Squibb, Baleka, and the *Juno* (the ship that saves the sunken *Republic*’s few survivors) following the collapse of the *Republic*’s material and immaterial infrastructure. Moreover, the actual physical act of writing upon the logbook is, itself, intersubjective, for Calhoun is writing upon the “salvaged” and “dried” pages of Captain Falcon’s logbook, whose pages were already filled with Falcon’s recordings of the *Republic*’s journey prior to Calhoun’s inscriptions (*MP* 189). Thus, Calhoun’s *Republic* experience, his narration of that experience, and its written record are all interconnected as they are informed by, respond to, and play off one another.

Although Calhoun and Falcon may be recording the history of the same journey, their narrative of that journey differs, for their interests and interactions (and thereby experiences) differ. Furthermore, their goal in writing differs, which affects what events they choose to focus on and what details they may or may not embellish. Even though Calhoun’s log entries may present the dominant narrative, it is safe to say that Falcon’s are not wholly erased, for Calhoun’s are literally written over Falcon’s; Calhoun does not “clean” or erase the pages before beginning his own tale. In light of this, Falcon’s records must, to some degree, impact Calhoun’s—the

narrative is neither wholly or purely one or the other's. The narrative is a result of their refracted interpretations and renderings of the *Republic's* last journey. As such, it is an exemplary fictional depiction of the goals of the Collective Atlantic.

If the Collective Atlantic seeks to illuminate the refractory nature of the history of slavocracy, this text seeks to animate the refractory nature of interpreting that history. Through its narrative layers, the novel complicates notions of historical truth, particularly in terms of fiction writing. According to Charles Johnson, fiction is not "transcribing experience"; rather, it is "creating experience" ("Interview" 169). Johnson clarifies that even if "you [the author] talk about the African-American past in your work, you're obviously interpreting an experience" ("Interview" 169). So, the novel itself is a creation constructed upon an interpretation, not an infallible truth. Likewise, both Calhoun and Falcon's log entries are also creations, and not transcriptions, constructed upon interpretations, and Calhoun's interpretation is directly informed by the logs that precede his.

The primary layer of *Middle Passage's* serial narrative is Falcon's, for his is the first layer of the logbook. Falcon's entries are written with a reputation and legacy in mind. First, Falcon keeps a "rough" log that embellishes the facts of the *Republic* (MP 64). This log is kept to maintain Falcon's reputation, albeit a falsely constructed one, and it is "edited to produce a more polished book for his employers," akin to the fabricated log Captain Cunningham constructs in *Feeding the Ghosts* (MP 64). Second, Falcon keeps a log of the "precious" and "exotic" plunder he has attained in hopes of leaving his mark upon the world as an "empire builder" (MP 48, 29). The empire Falcon seeks to build is the "fledgling" American empire, as represented by the *Republic* (MP 50). As Calhoun describes it, "the man who emerged in [Falcon's] journal entries possessed a few of the solitary virtues and the entire twisted will of Puritanism," an "eager[ness]

to push back frontiers,” and a dream for an “American utopia,” all for the sake of the “expans[ion]” of the empire (*MP* 50-51). Falcon’s history, as recorded in the logbook, is representative of the often-told positivistic history of the American republic in which brave explorers expanded borders, valiantly pursued “perfection,” and returned home with marvelous artifacts (*MP* 51). However, Calhoun’s reviewing and rewriting of the logbook re-presents Falcon and his “American Republic” in a new light. This “re-presentation” causes “to reappear that which has disappeared” from the logbook, as Lévy-Bruhl might describe it, or repoliticizes Falcon’s logbook, as Walter Benjamin might describe it (Connerton 69). Rather than valorize Falcon’s efforts, Calhoun suggests that he, as well as “his species of world conquerers,” simply “thrive upon” the “desire to be fascinating objects in the eyes of others” (*MP* 33). This desire to be fascinating leads Falcon and other empire builders to steal the history and culture of others by “divid[ing] and conquer[ing],” “bullying others,” and “taking, if need be, what was not offered” (*MP* 58, 50).

Part of what is taken, but not offered, is the lives and subjectivities of the enslaved. Historically, the captains of slave ships, by way of their buying, transporting, and selling of slaves, participated in the dividing and conquering of peoples, communities, and families, and thus perpetuated slavocracy. In fact, enslavers often endeavored to destroy the memories of the newly enslaved as they pursued “any number of measures—amulets and herbs, potions and incantations—[in attempt] to make the captives forget their past and render them more pliable” (Stuart 76-77). They even “hired medicine men to make concoctions to erase memories of home” (Stuart 77). Novels such as *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts* respond to this empire building rooted in stolen lives, and they do so by engaging the records and facts that formally detail the history of expansion. Mintah’s diary engages Captain Cunningham’s logbook of the



*Zong*, providing a counter story to his falsified numerical records. Similarly, Calhoun's overwriting of Falcon's logbook provides a counter narrative to Falcon's glorified records and embellishments that obscure the facts of the ship's voyage. In response to the captains' dishonest records and falsified facts, both Mintah and Calhoun seek to reinscribe the very real presence of the many who have been buried or lost in the cracks of the transcribed past.

While part of Falcon's empire building, specifically, is predicated upon his participation in the slave trade as a slave ship captain, a second part of it is rooted in Falcon's "standing order from his financiers, powerful families in New Orleans who underwrote the *Republic*" to seize cultural artifacts, both secular and sacred, in order to "stock Yankee museums and their homes with whatever of value was not nailed down in the nations he visited. To bring back slaves, yes, but to salvage the best of their war-shocked cultures too" (MP 48-49). These truths Calhoun unearths and foregrounds from the traditional, positivistic historical narrative results in what Günter Lenz calls a "confrontation" between the two mutually inscribed logbooks "about the meaning of the 'American Republic'" (240). Whereas Falcon believes himself to be contributing to a republican empire, the history books, and knowledge, Calhoun views him as desiring a fascinating "personal empire" that is achieved by the machinations of capitalism, not only in terms of the trade in Africans, but also including stealing the history of others (MP 103).<sup>11</sup>

This confrontation between Falcon's words and Calhoun's understanding of those words would make it seem that Falcon is the privileged master aboard the *Republic*, served by Calhoun and the other sailors, and owner, at least by proxy, of the purchased slaves. In this view, power is

---

<sup>11</sup> While these contrasting views may appear to establish a binary, the truth likely resides somewhere between the two views. The reality of Calhoun and Falcon's views, and the interplay between those views, would be more evident if the concrete logbook, with its complex transcriptions, were available. Viewing the writings in their true proximity would provide a more comprehensive picture. Of course, this is not possible due to the fictional foundation.

rooted in economic capital. Yet, after the Allmuseri overtake the *Republic*, the fragility of Falcon's power and mastery is revealed when he tells Calhoun: "[T]hey [his financiers] won't see nothing 'cept that I took their money—a lot of money, lad—and they'd just as soon see us drown, if I sail home empty-handed, as hear me report their fixed capital seized control of this brig and swung her back to Bangalang" (*MP* 147). In matters of capital and wealth, Falcon's financiers are the true masters and he is merely the servant, or "pawn in a larger game of property," who took their money and failed to deliver. If Falcon fails to deliver a return on his financiers' investments, any measure of human empathy will be thrown by the wayside (*MP* 150). In light of this, Calhoun ruminates, "[W]as Ebenezer Falcon telling me that he, at bottom, was no freer than the Africans?" (*MP* 147) In this, the novel and its narrative layers complicate simple constructions of American empire, enslaver, and enslaved.

As the experiences, dialogue, and logbooks of Falcon and Calhoun confront one another, clear-cut dichotomies dissolve, and the master-slave dialectic, in particular, is complicated. Falcon is no longer simply the power-hungry enslaver, but is also enslaved to those with more power and capital than he possesses. Similarly, Calhoun is no longer the voice of supposed moral judgment over Falcon, as he is reminded of his debts to Papa Zeringue, his rejection of Isadora, and his own existence as a pawn in a larger system of capital even as he, a freed slave, now works on a slaver. Neither character is either this or that; both characters play a number of roles within a larger system. Even the ship itself is simply one gear or "pawn" in the larger system of slavocracy, and the American republic is one player of the many involved in the slave trade.

These revelations complicate notions of master and slave or free and enslaved, and they highlight the importance of interpreting and understanding the novel's characters and the *Republic* society intersubjectively. A dualistic approach proves to be insufficient when analyzing

Calhoun and Falcon, just as Gilroy's stereoscopic approach proves insufficient when engaging the broader history of slavocracy. Things, people, and events are not simply this or that, but exist in proximity to one another and in proximity to other entities. Hence, a kaleidoscopic approach must be employed in order to illuminate that things, people, and events can be *both* "this" and "that," and even possibly "that over there" as well. Calhoun's logbook makes it clear that existence aboard the *Republic*, and afloat on slavery's Middle Passage, is a form of "hyphenated being" that is "always open-ended" and always in relation to others' interrelated perceptions (Little 163).

Through his interactions with Squibb, Falcon, Baleka, Ngonyama, the Allmuseri, the Allmuseri god, and the other sailors, Calhoun is exposed to a diversity of beliefs, worldviews, and narratives, as well as some encounters that are seemingly beyond understanding. For Calhoun, "so many profiles [are] disclosed and revealed for the meaning of the world" that he "humbly" moves away from supposed objectivity, or even subjectivity, and towards intersubjectivity in terms of a "shared meaning" or "shared vision" of life rooted in collective interpretation (Little 164). In short, his Atlantic Experience leads him to recognize life as inherently connected, as proximity of the individual and communal, and the self "as a verb and not a noun" or as "a process but not a product" (Little 162). To be reborn into the communal Lifeworld, as Calhoun is at the end of the novel, is to "inhabit" the interpretations or consciousness of others; it is to Be or to exist in proximity to the lives of others (Johnson, *Being* 39). It is a state of being that celebrates and values the interconnectedness of life and the mosaic reality of the Lifeworld.

Prior to Calhoun's journey on the *Republic* and subsequent rebirth, he did not know what it was to like to share life with others in an intersubjective manner. It was only through stealing that Calhoun communed with and inhabited the perceptions of others. As he puts it, he was a

“petty thief” whose life consisted of “living off others, of being a social parasite” (*MP* 2). During these moments of thievery, Calhoun experiences a visceral, bodily reaction. For example, after secretly slipping into Falcon’s chamber, Calhoun “felt the [usual] change come over [him],” which he describes as a “familiar sensual tingle that came whenever I broke into someone’s house, as if I were slipping inside another’s soul” (*MP* 46). These self-centered acts are the only way Calhoun initially is able to inhabit another’s consciousness, but these inhabitations are not respectful. These inhabitations are a form of intensified sociability that is invasive and diffusive because they are not mutually agreed upon or allowed between the involved parties. Therefore, Calhoun’s actions are dystopian actions that actually separate him from others. In such moments, Calhoun often defiantly scrawls on the walls of the rooms he invades, writing, “I can enter your life whenever I wish” (*MP* 48). Despite his prideful taunting, such moments are, in fact, the closest Calhoun ever comes to intersubjective relations; he does not know what it is like to exist in the realm of relational unity. While in the act of stealing he feels “all parts of [him] flowing as a single piece,” it is only in these stolen moments that he ever feels a true sense of unity (*MP* 46). Apart from thievery, he speaks and feels “as if [he] were no one—or nothing—in [his] own right” (*MP* 47). “[T]ruth be told,” Calhoun admits, “theft . . . was the closest thing I knew to transcendence” (*MP* 46). Initially, it is only by imaginatively and invasively *seeing through* the eyes of others that Calhoun can come close to an encounter with the connected Lifeworld.

Calhoun’s intrusion into Falcon’s room aboard the *Republic* initiates a series of changes in his previously self-centered and self-isolating existence. His failed attempt to come and go from Falcon’s quarters without being discovered highlights this turning point. Although he does manage to steal a few minor items, he does not depart unnoticed. Falcon discovers Calhoun in his room and then proceeds to enlist Calhoun as his spy or, as Calhoun puts it, begin his

“courtship” of Calhoun as his metaphorical “shipboard bride” (*MP* 46). Therefore, Calhoun’s flight from a legal union with Isadora on land leads, ironically, to an intimate union with the captain at sea—a union in which Calhoun is secured as Falcon’s confidante and protector. In addition, this union is initiated on the eve of Falcon’s purchase of forty Allmuseri slaves, which changes the atmosphere aboard the *Republic*. Even prior to loading the newly purchased slaves, the Allmuseri impact the sailors, as their foreboding “moaning and sharp cries such as only Negro women can make drifted on the wind from the warehouse” to the ship (*MP* 58). These cries of separation give the sailors the impression that “each parting [was] like an amputation or flaying of skin” (*MP* 58). According to Squibb, the Allmuseri clan-state was “as close-knit as cells in the body” (*MP* 58). This close-knit Allmuseri body or community soon epitomizes the Lifeworld upon the *Republic*. As Calhoun develops relationships with them, he begins to see the world through their eyes. In a mere twenty-four hours, Calhoun fails to come and go as he pleases from another’s life/private room, is unified with the captain, exposed to the unity of the Allmuseri tribe, and, soon after, given the responsibility of feeding the enslaved. Through all of this, proximity to the communal is significantly heightened. As the novel continues, this intersubjective exposure begins to have profound effects upon Calhoun, and thus begins his shifting relationship with the Lifeworld from invasive, dystopian interactions to more respectful, integrative, and utopian acts.

Calhoun’s first face-to-face encounter with the Allmuseri is marked by impressions of history, embodied memory, and community. Calhoun is struck by the “antiquity” he feels in their “presence”; they seem physically to embody history or to carry the past within them (*MP* 61). Their historical presence is so strong he considers that “they might have been the Ur-tribe of humanity itself” (*MP* 61). In awe of their unique and striking unity, Calhoun calls them “a clan

of *Sphaeriker*” and declares, “Indeed, what I felt was the presence of countless others *in* them, a crowd spun from everything this vast continent had created” (*MP* 61). What is key to the Allmuseri in this moment is that they are everything, and yet they are one unified whole that exists beyond or outside of categorical representations. In other words, as a clan of *Sphaeriker*, they are by definition “the totality or wholeness of many in whom all polarities, such as mind and emotion, spirit and soul, are unified” (“*Sphaeriker*”). In the Allmuseri, dualism is overcome, and the community exists as individuals embodied by a kaleidoscopic mosaic. Subsequently, the Allmuseri can be understood only by *seeing through* their unity, and not merely by *looking at* it. This reality is particularly evident in their language, as Calhoun comes to learn shortly thereafter.

Through his interaction with Ngonyama, Calhoun learns that the Allmuseri’s language, and likewise many of their ways of thinking and understanding, was not “a good language for doing analytic work, or deconstructing things into discrete parts, which probably explained why the Allmuseri had no empirical science to speak of, at least not as we understood the term” (*MP* 78). In Falcon’s eyes, this “made them savages” (*MP* 78). For a man steeped in the capitalist world market and the purportedly progressive world of modernity, such as Falcon, the prototypical, recurrent, or timeless is of no value. To him, the Allmuseri Ur-tribe of unity pales in comparison to modern, capitalist diversity. As Paul Connerton explains, “The operation of this system [the capitalist world market] brings about a massive withdrawal of credence in the possibility that there might exist forms of life that are exemplary because prototypical. The logic of capital tends to deny the capacity any longer to imagine life as a structure of exemplary recurrence” (64-64). Thus, modernity and its empiricism forget or overlook the ontic, embodied memory held intersubjectively among a community like the Allmuseri and within its language. Integration is not of value for people such as Falcon who would prefer the disintegration that

enables classification. However, for a community whose notions of wholeness are fundamental to their way of life, such deconstructive categorization would be a deeply dystopian experience.

Calhoun, on the other hand, is awed by the inherent unity of the Allmuseri existence. He respects them, feels “shamed” for his individualistic way of life, and desires “their ageless culture to be [his] own” (*MP* 78). Rushdy points out that the Allmuseri “impress the anthropologist with what can only be called their *accumulatedness*” (“Phenomenology” 373). This accumulatedness similarly attracts Calhoun, a man who has felt dissociated from society and wondered how “you could *have* anything” or belong “if circumstances threw you amongst the *had*” (*MP* 47). When confronted with the Allmuseri, Calhoun longs to have something others already have and have had, as he once longed in New Orleans and Makanda. The difference in the face of the Allmuseri is that, while he may feel excluded and alone in a modern society of multiplicity, he would always belong and be a part of the Allmuseri’s unified society of accumulation in which everyone is part of the integrated, greater whole.

Calhoun’s reverence for and desire to be a part of the Allmuseri community marks the beginning of his intentional movement away from isolated individuality and towards intersubjective unity. Yet, Calhoun initially misunderstands the Allmuseri as a static people. During his first encounter with them, he is struck by their embodiment of “antiquity” that emanates from them and subsequently believes “they had run the full gamut of civilized choices, or played through every political and social possibility and now had nowhere to *go*” (*MP* 61). However, the Allmuseri do *go*, and Calhoun is one of the sailors who helps facilitate that act of going via the *Republic* and through the Middle Passage. In so doing, he is part of the cause of their dystopian diaspora. Overlooking this fact, and ignorant of the decisive rupture that is the Middle Passage, he expects the Allmuseri to remain the same. This expectation persists even

after he learns that the Allmuseri consciously inhabit the present, as evidenced by the dominance of their predication “is,” “which granted existence to anything, [and] had over the ages eroded into merely an article of faith for them” (*MP* 77). Verbs and the concept of being dominate their language and structures of understanding: “[n]ouns or static substances hardly existed in their vocabulary at all” (*MP* 77). Nevertheless, even after learning this, Calhoun continues to, as he puts it, “[s]tupidly, [see] their lives and culture as timeless product, as a finished thing, pure essence” (*MP* 124).

Notably, in Calhoun’s first impression of the Allmuseri, he recognizes a key element of their existence—their connection to a shared Lifeworld—for it is such a stark contrast to his original view of reality through the dualist Western lens that he had been inculcated with while a slave in Makanda, Illinois. His exposure to the kaleidoscopic Allmuseri impacts the worldview instilled within him through the dichotomous system of his own slavery. As previously discussed, the Lifeworld is a history of the world that connects and is shared by all. It is “a world layered with ancestors, predecessors, and contemporaries”; and to think “properly” about this world is to understand that “all our perspectives take us directly to a common situation, a common history in which all meanings evolve” (Johnson, *Being* 44). Calhoun is cognizant of this historical unity in the Allmuseri, for he registers that they were a community “spun from everything this vast continent had created” (*MP* 61). They were comprised of not only what they had created, but of everything that had been created and existed. This makes them the prototypical “Ur-tribe,” not necessarily because they are the first tribe, but because they are connected to and embody the first tribe. What Calhoun then fails to recognize is that, as the prototypical tribe, they *must* be recursive. As Connerton notes, the prototypical is connected to “a structure of exemplary recurrence” (65). This recurrence is not simply repetition, but is a dynamic relationship between



the past and present that is rooted in an active present—a present that emphatically “is,” as the Allmuseri language emphasizes, not merely a past that “was.” Therefore, the Allmuseri community is built upon an active intersubjectivity or communal existence that is a dynamic process. That process is linked to, and informed by, the past, but because it inherently *is* in the present, it is “not fixed but evolving,” and it is “vulnerable to metamorphosis” (*MP* 124). This recurrence is necessary for humankind’s knowledge, memory, and understanding—and arguably its survival—for it is particularly and precisely the circumstances of the present that gives meaning to the past, as the present serves as the lens to the past.

A significant contributor to the evolving present is the Allmuseri’s exposure to the greater Lifeworld that includes an exchange with other cultures beyond the African continent, and the nature of this change may fluctuate along a utopian and dystopian continuum. Lenz stresses that the Middle Passage serves as the “crucial experience of cultural rupture and change in African and African-American history and [is] the very site and symbol of the clash of cultures and processes of radical transculturation” (239). Calhoun is confronted with this transculturation when he is called upon by Meadows to help him and Ngonyama throw overboard the deceased and decaying body of an Allmuseri boy. The stark physical difference in the deceased and decaying boy primes Calhoun to then recognize the “difference” in the rest of the Allmuseri (*MP* 124). In “Ngonyama’s eyes [he then] saw a displacement, an emptiness like maybe all of his brethren as he once knew them were dead. To wit, I saw myself. A man remade by virtue of his contact with the crew” (*MP* 124). Both Calhoun and Ngonyama are remade by their contact with the crew, one another, and their distance from “home” (*MP* 125, 124). The nature of those changes varies, and the Collective Atlantic seeks to uncover them.

Following their exposure to the Middle Passage, the Allmuseri suffer dystopian disintegration, and “subtl[e]” forms of intensified sociability become recognizable among those aboard the *Republic*; neither man or group remains the same (*MP* 125). Calhoun expounds upon these transcultural exchanges and changes in the following passage, which I will quote at length because I think it is worthwhile in its full form:

Ngoniyama and maybe all the Africans, I realized, were not wholly Allmuseri anymore. We had changed them. I suspected even he did not recognize the quiet revisions in his voice after he learned English as it was spoken by the crew, or how the vision hidden in their speech was deflecting or redirecting his own way of seeing. Just as Tommy’s exposure to Africa had altered him, the slaves’ life among the lowest strata of Yankee society—and the horrors they experienced—were subtly reshaping their souls as thoroughly as Falcon’s tight-packing had contorted their flesh during these past few weeks, but into what sort of men I could not imagine. No longer Africans, yet not Americans either. Then what?  
(*MP* 124-125)

Two things are particularly significant to Calhoun’s rumination on these changes. First, much of this change and exchange is embodied in language. In sharing language, as the Allmuseri and *Republic* sailors do, cultures begin to shift into a closer, more intertwined intersubjectivity. In light of this shift in proximity, Johnson affirms, “[I]n words we find the living presence of others, that language is not—nor has it ever been—a neutral medium for expressing things, but rather that intersubjectivity and cross-cultural experience are already embodied in the most microscopic datum of speech” (*Being* 38). The language of a people points to the group’s embodied memory—its culture, values, and structures of thinking. By sharing language, people exchange

fundamental ways of viewing, understanding, and remembering the world and their shared experiences of that world. In this moment, Calhoun recognizes that the Allmuseri are no longer simply Africans, and the *Republic* sailors are no longer simply Americans. They are not two distinct groups. Instead, their exposure to one another via the Middle Passage results in an exchange of language and, thereby, life and memory, and this exchange occurs in multiple directions. It is not that only one group impacts the other, but rather the two impact one another simultaneously. There is a mutual exchange.

This leads to Calhoun's second recognition: that the Allmuseri and Americans have changed intersubjectively. They have all influenced one another, and they have done so in different ways. The way Ngonyama has changed is not exactly the same as how other Allmuseri have changed. Similarly, the way Calhoun has changed is not exactly the same as how other Americans, such as Tommy, have changed. Each individual has changed, but has done so in relation to the rest of the group. In other words, each individual has not changed on his own or within a vacuum, but intersubjectively, and the transformations can only be understood in terms of exchange among the greater group and the transcultural Lifeworld.

To understand this intersubjectivity most effectively, the Collective Atlantic lens must be utilized, for the Collective Atlantic does not stress hybridity or multiplicity. This exchange among the Allmuseri and Americans is not mere hybridity, and it is not an exchange simply between two groups. Instead, it is an exchange between those two groups as well as between the diverse interpretations of the Middle Passage experience that comprises the relational existence of those groups. This exchange is intersubjective in nature, for each group is composed of a collective proximity of individual interpretations and communal connectivity. The exchange among communities within a greater Lifeworld, then, compounds that intersubjective collectivity.

In short, the transcultural exchange of slavocracy's experiences and interpretations is refracted in nature, and yet every piece is key to comprising the most detailed, inclusive, and kaleidoscopic version of a shared Lifeworld. Every piece is key to the unified whole.

Of course, even as that unified whole is not static, it also is not perfect, as evidenced by the Allmuseri's murderous revolt and the deconstruction of the *Republic's* society into divisive factions struggling for control. As the men aboard the ship begin to split into competing, mutinous groups, Calhoun comes to realize that he does not have to attempt to "have," possess, or be a part of something others already have "had," such as when he "wanted their [the Allmuseri's] ageless culture to be [his] own" (*MP* 78). He is already a part of that which "is"—a present that exists along a Collective Atlantic continuum of exchange that is individual and communal, integrative and disintegrative, utopian and dystopian. This becomes evident to Calhoun as different groups seek his alliance, including Captain Falcon and his loyalists, Cringle and the other mutinous sailors, and Ngonyama and the revolting Allmuseri. Rather than choosing to align himself with one competing group, Calhoun attempts to remain a loyal part of each group. He makes pacts with and assists every faction on the *Republic* with the safety of himself and all groups in mind. He enacts a blood pact with Cringle and the mutinous sailors, then tells Falcon of the plan and pledges his loyalty to the captain, only then to provide Ngonyama with a key he believes may unlock the Allmuseri's shackles.

Perhaps such duplicity is a result of Calhoun's cowardice, lack of loyalty, or survival instinct. While there may be some measure of truth to those possibilities, I think it is more fruitful to consider that this range of commitment to a number of groups is indicative of Calhoun's deep desire to belong, to be needed by others, and to be an integral part of a community. More specifically, it illustrates his attempts to self-create his own utopia of

integrative sociability, even as those attempts threaten contentious conflicts aboard the ship. Now that Calhoun has been exposed to the communal, he has no desire to exist apart from it. In addition, because Calhoun is privy to every group's divisive plan, he is more aware than anyone of the risks posed to the *Republic*—risks ultimately rooted in the *Republic* ship's and America's perpetuation of slavocracy. Calhoun recognizes that everyone is in danger and, subsequently, remains on everyone's side and/or is unwilling to commit to any single side. Plus, frankly, Calhoun is concerned for his own safety. As Calhoun explains to Cringle, "I'm not on *anybody's* side! I'm just trying to keep us *alive*! I don't know who's right or wrong on this ship anymore, and I don't much care! All I want is to go *home*!" (MP 137) Calhoun's concern is both for the group and for the self. He wants to keep everyone alive, wants to go home, and also recognizes that his desire for home is likely a general desire: "I desperately dreamed of home. I'm sure the Allmuseri did the same" (MP 179). As Calhoun insinuates, there is a universality to the desire for home. While the place or vocabulary of home may be different, the value of home may be similar amongst diverse groups. As is evident in this case, returning home may invoke a utopian sensibility, whereas being away from home (whether due to force or choice) may invoke a dystopian sensibility.

After revolts pitch the *Republic* into disarray and confusion at sea, Calhoun is one of the few characters to continue to value the safety and wellbeing of the group. Despite rampant disease and decay amongst the passengers, Calhoun intentionally visits those aboard and does his best to assure them that all will be well. In this act, Calhoun truly moves beyond himself, for he does not focus on the possibility that he, too, may fall ill. He recognizes that "perhaps all would *not* be well" and "perhaps only disaster lay ahead of us," but the "'useful fiction' of this lie" that all would be well "got the injured through the night and gave the children reason not to hurl

themselves overboard” (*MP* 162). Nevertheless, even as Calhoun fights against dystopian despair among the *Republic*’s people, he does continue to “doub[t] whether [he] truly had anything of value to offer the others” (*MP* 162). He feels as though “[e]verything of value lay outside me. Beyond” (*MP* 162). This leads Calhoun to search within and beyond himself for things of value that may provide communal, rather than merely individual, comfort. In so doing, the man who once claimed he has no past, successfully taps into a source of language, memory, and solace that is indebted to those before and beyond him, and embodied within him:

And to comfort the weary on the *Republic* I peered deep into memory and called forth all that had ever given me solace, scraps and rags of language too, for in myself I found nothing I could rightly call Rutherford Calhoun, only pieces and fragments of all the people who had touched me . . . The ‘I’ that I was, was a mosaic of many countries, a patchwork of others and objects stretching backward to perhaps the beginning of time. (*MP* 162-163)

In pursuit of the comfort, health, and safety of the group, Calhoun finally inhabits others and a world beyond himself in a shared, rather than stolen way. He transitions from a dystopian invasion of the Lifeworld to a utopian, integrative sociability within the Lifeworld community.

Calhoun is able to connect to the greater Lifeworld as he comes to recognize that the memory of the group is embodied within the memory of the individual. Connerton explains this phenomenon: “The narrative of one life is part of an interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity” (21). I would add to this definition that one’s identity is derived from his/her intersubjective experiences and interpretations. Johnson valorizes intersubjectivity to such an extent that he suggests there is no individual identity, but only intersubjectivity. Johnson argues that individual identity, and the

“existence of the ego,” is merely “a theoretical construct” for which “[t]here’s no empirical verification” (“Interview” 161). Instead, the self can only be understood in relation to others and understanding can exist only in relation to others’ understandings and interpretations.

Furthermore, Johnson suggests that “all knowledge, all disclosure, all revelation from the past, from our predecessors, black, white, and otherwise, is our inheritance, and most of the time we just don’t know it” (“Interview” 166). Calhoun directly encounters this inheritance in the Allmuseri. Although he may not be able to cognitively understand or express this memory, he feels its “presence” and knows it exists (*MP* 61).

During this time when community is disintegrating aboard the *Republic*, Calhoun shoulders the responsibility to remind people of their connection to something larger, in hopes that it will give them hope for a future. He looks within himself in search of that inner inheritance, the larger “mosaic” that he is a part of, so that he may then serve as a “conduit or window” that will transmit scraps of knowledge, language, and solace to those who feel cut off from the world, “drifting aimlessly like men lost in the desert,” and “buffeted about by contrary winds” (*MP* 162, 152). Although Calhoun initially fears that tapping into the “value” that “lay outside of him” and “Beyond” is perpetuating his “parasit[ic]” ways, he finds, instead, that this new form of inhabiting provides him with “urgent belief” and “peac[e]” in the midst of weariness” (*MP* 162, 163). This new form of inhabitation marks a high point in Calhoun’s rebirth from a self-isolating individual to a member of the intersubjective collective.

Calhoun’s shift along the continuum of community climaxes shortly thereafter when it is his turn to feed the Allmuseri god kept in the hold of the ship. Via his encounter with the Allmuseri god, Calhoun also encounters his father, the one man he has always yearned to know. In this moment, the Allmuseri god allows Calhoun to experience a personalized history within

the greater history of the Lifeworld. Simultaneously, through the Allmuseri god's shape-shifting, Calhoun also sees how his father, and subsequently him, are part of a much greater, collective history in which the personal and individual are next to impossible to differentiate from the communal history of the Lifeworld (*MP* 167). As Calhoun gazes upon his father as depicted by the god, he hears a "mosaic of voices within voices, each one immanent in the other, none his but all strangely his," akin to the "chorus of a common memory" of *Crossing the River* (*MP* 171, *CP* 1). The Allmuseri god reveals to Calhoun that life—the experiences, interpretations, voices, and people of the Lifeworld—all exist in a proximity to one another. That proximity is not one of this or that, but of both/and; it is a proximity beyond dualism. Calhoun visually encounters the truth that "[d]ualism is a bloody structure of the mind"; it is a structure of thinking or a way to comprehend reality, but it is not Real, in the Lacanian sense (*MP* 97). In Lacan's Real, everything is inherently intersubjective, and functions of delineation, such as race, are nonexistent and revealed for the "greatest of all fictions" that they are. The Allmuseri god, then, exposes Calhoun to the Real, or to that outside of language, beyond categorization, and impossible to express. Later, reminiscing on his encounter with the absolute integration of the Real, Calhoun writes:

I could only feel that identity was imagined; I had to listen harder to isolate him [his father] from the We that swelled each particle and pore of him, as if the (black) self was the greatest of all fictions; and then I could not find him at all. He seemed everywhere, his presence, and that of countless others, in me as well as the chamber. (*MP* 171)

As a result of this encounter with the Allmuseri god and the glimpse of the Real of existence that it provides Calhoun, he comes to recognize how everything is connected, and not divided along



artificial constructs, as well as how he is both a part, and composed, of the collective “all” of being. Finally, Calhoun has a past, both personal and communal, and his place in the communality of the present is cemented, thereby marking the denouement of his rebirth.

The Lifeworld that Calhoun encounters via the Allmuseri, their god, and on the sea of the Middle Passage is the very essence of the Collective Atlantic. The Allmuseri expose Calhoun to the necessarily communal and intersubjective qualities of life. Their god reveals that the Real dimension or ideal experience of life exists beyond categorization and individual identity. The voyage across the Middle Passage only reiterates these truths as the men are at the mercy of a “chaosmos” outside of their control (*MP* 183). Calhoun emphasizes that, in the face of such potential destruction—a natural destruction that will not discriminate amongst a species, or in which man is simply man—“your duty was always to insinew your ship; if you hoped to see shore, you must devote yourself to the welfare of *everyone*” (*MP* 187; emphasis added). To further this idea in regard to the *Republic*’s symbolic representation of America: the nation and democracy will not survive if it is not innervated by every man, indiscriminately.

This truth is made especially clear to Calhoun as the *Republic* sinks after being thrown into internal chaos by divisive factions that refuse to validate the humanity of others, even when their best chance at reaching shore hinges upon their ability to work cooperatively. These prideful and ignorant claims to power erase any desire within Calhoun to “possess or dominate” (*MP* 77). The voyage and its destruction due to discriminatory wills to power “transform the world into a fleeting shadow play” and, in Calhoun’s eyes, society remains in Plato’s cave, entrenched in “fragile, artificial pattern[s]” of life on land (*MP* 187, 33). Contrastingly, “the voyage had irreversibly changed [his own] seeing,” for it exposes him to the intersubjectivity of his existence within the transcultural Lifeworld and makes of him a “cultural mongrel” (*MP* 77).

It also affirms his inclusion in the unity of being—the simultaneous experience of, and proximity to, the past and present, individual and communal—thereby leading him to “appreciate” the “ever extended present” (*MP* 187). As it is for the Allmuseri, the value of the present, of “is,” becomes akin to “an article of faith” for Calhoun as well, for it enables a connection to the intersubjective nature of being.

Similar to the sort of rupture the Middle Passage marks in history, Calhoun’s experience of the Middle Passage marks a rupture in his own thinking and being. After the *Republic* sinks and Calhoun is rescued by the *Juno*, he is often “paralyzed” by formerly simple, but now crippling decisions due to their utterly inconsequential nature (*MP* 187). For example, when Calhoun is asked to choose between “white bedspreads or blue,” he is incapable of making a choice, because, as he puts it, “I could see no difference between the two choices after our travels, or how the distinction mattered in the Grand Scheme of things” (*MP* 187). Following his voyage on the *Republic* and his Atlantic Experience, Calhoun is in tune with this “Grand Scheme,” or a Lifeworld that exists in a Real in which all is unified and categories are pointless. Consequently, he feels deeply estranged by those on the *Juno* “who hungered and hated, plotted and schemed over a thousand inconsequentials” (*MP* 188). Prior to his Atlantic Experience, Calhoun was one of the many who “plotted and schemed,” particularly in terms of gambling and stealing, but following his experience he seeks to honor others’ lives, particularly those he lost on the *Republic*’s journey. Like Mintah, he still feels connected at the very core of his existence to those he lived life with while at sea: “By surviving, I sometimes felt I’d stolen life from Cringle, or was living on time belonging to Ngonyama and the other mates; I felt like a thief to the bitter end” (*MP* 188). The connection Calhoun continues to feel between his life and those who were lost is indicative of the extent of intersubjectivity he has and continues to experience. Although he may

feel like a thief, he no longer is a traditional thief, for he no longer seeks to inhabit other's lives surreptitiously or in a violating manner. Rather, he seeks to inhabit and connect with others out of respect, honor, and deference. He has moved forward from dystopian invasion to utopian integration. This is most evident in Calhoun's approach to completing his log entries and his union with Isadora.

Calhoun initially begins writing the log entries as a means to keep himself "steady" after the traumatic and dystopian experience of mutiny aboard the *Republic*, being lost at sea, struggling to stay afloat after the *Republic* sunk, and then being rescued by a luxury cruise liner and thrown back into a world of decadence and inconsequential (MP 190). In order to achieve some measure of equilibrium, Calhoun writes in the logbook in an attempt to "free [himself] from the voices in [his] head" (MP 190). The writing serves as a cathartic act that enables him to release his pain so that, "at the end of each evening, after writing furiously and without direction, [he] at last felt emptied and ready for sleep" (MP 190). However, once the initial shock begins to subside, Calhoun begins to approach the logbook "with a different, stranger compulsion" (MP 190).

When addressing Calhoun's reasons for writing the log entries, many scholars focus on the fact that, after Falcon asks him to complete his log and tell "the truth of what happened on [the *Republic's*] voyage," Calhoun's admits, "I promised myself that even though I'd tell the story . . . it would be, first and foremost, as I saw it since my escape from New Orleans" (MP 146). Such a statement does raise issues regarding the narrator's integrity, the validity of his interpretation, historical truth, and more. But what I want to highlight is Calhoun's use of "first and foremost." Calhoun does not assert that he will tell the story *only* from his perspective; rather, he states that his perspective will be the foundation of his tale. After reading Calhoun's words,

we must also look at what he actually does and not only what he says. What he *does* is focus on the intersubjectivity of the voyage. The “different, stranger compulsion” that ultimately drives Calhoun’s writing process, is, as he says, “a need to transcribe and thereby transfigure all *we* had experienced” (MP 190, emphasis added). It is only when reflecting on the collective experience of the voyage, or the “we” of all those aboard the *Republic*, that Calhoun calls the serial narrative the “Word” or gospel (MP 190). In other words, it is only in paying homage to and respectfully inhabiting his shipmates by writing their collective experience that Calhoun’s narrative is elevated to a gospel; without them, it is simply a “story” (MP 146).

Calhoun utilizes the logbook for a second transformative purpose: to secure the future freedom of those who survived the *Republic*. Once Calhoun learns that Papa Zeringue is on board the *Juno*, he confronts him and threatens to reveal Zeringue’s slave trade involvement unless Zeringue promises to provide a full endowment for the three surviving Allmuseri children. In so doing, Calhoun transforms the power of the logbook that once notated that slaves’ exchange from freedom into money. Now the same, but transformed, logbook reaffirms their freedom and insures that they are monetarily provided for. Their humanity is reasserted and protected. In addition, Calhoun takes advantage of the full weight of the logbook’s contents and utilizes it to secure his and Isadora’s freedom from Zeringue. While a debt-canceling deal with Zeringue and a union with Isadora once led Calhoun to the sea, his Atlantic Experience changes him, and the plot comes full circle. Now, Calhoun desires an intensified sociability with Isadora in the form of a marriage union, and he is capable of arranging his own debt-canceling deal with Zeringue.

A changed man after his time aboard the *Republic*, Calhoun lives a life that is intertwined with others and invested in community. He envisions a family that includes Baleka, Squibb, and

possibly even Zeringue's bodyguard, Santos, and, most importantly at the close of the novel, he longs for a union with Isadora. During their first moments alone, Calhoun is not focused on a physical or sexual union with Isadora. This is not to say that his desire for her is platonic or chaste, but rather his focus is simply elsewhere. Calhoun's desire for Isadora is to connect on a fundamental level of being, to exist with her in the powerful "is" of the "ever extended present," and to intertwine inextricably their present so as to unify their past and future (*MP* 187). Calhoun describes his desired union in the following way: "I wanted our futures blended, not our limbs, our histories perfectly twined for all time, not our flesh. Desire was too much of a wound, a rip of insufficiency and incompleteness that kept us, despite our proximity, constantly apart" (*MP* 208). In this moment, Calhoun views sexual intercourse as a union that will erect a barrier between him and Isadora, for it will "merely perpetuat[e] separation into male and female" (Byerman 119). Instead, he prioritizes a union with Isadora that is rooted in their shared humanity. Keith Byerman stresses that "[a]bstention here is not a moral principle but a moment of stillness in the present. It is a means of connecting not merely in private but as a part of a larger human history" (120). The union Calhoun desires with Isadora will not only intertwine their intersubjective existence in the past, present, and future, but will also enable them ultimately to be "forgetful of [themselves]" and to connect to the greater intersubjectivity of the collective Lifeworld (*MP* 209). As the two "[drift] toward rest," "nestled snugly" together at the novel's close, their union, rooted in and paying homage to a shared humanity, provides a glimpse of the restoration that is possible on the other side of the Middle Passage and its "countless seas of suffering" (*MP* 209).

The power of this ending is the power of the Collective Atlantic as a whole. By returning to, remembering, and sharing his Atlantic Experience, Calhoun honors those with whom he

shared the journey. His narrative also calls into question clear-cut notions of the history of slavocracy. More specifically, it complicates overly simplified notions of those involved in the grunt labor of the slave trade. Through Calhoun, the reader is provided a glimpse into how the commercial enterprise of slavery impacted many as it forced disintegration, at times enabled integration, and, quite often, indiscriminately dehumanized its participants in contradictory and intersubjective ways. Thus, in *Middle Passage*, Calhoun and his layered logbook serve as the Collective Atlantic medium through which the reader can explore the mosaic history of slavocracy and its complex intersubjectivity. The logbook “gather[s] into one” the Collective Atlantic’s manifold individual and communal histories, interpretations, experiences, and ways of being (“Collective”). Calhoun’s own “post-slavery” journey back and forth across the Middle Passage and his subsequent rebirth into a collective Lifeworld, emulates how our own “post-slavery” society can be enriched if, upon a foundation of solidarity, we return to, inhabit, and study slavocracy’s Atlantic Experience via fiction.

As Calhoun’s journey and serial reflections upon that journey reveal, the Collective Atlantic does not encourage a final, definitive meaning for slavocracy, but instead it facilitates the uncovering of innumerable perspectives on a historical process that ruptured communities and ways of life across the Atlantic. This rupture led to one of the defining social gaps of the Lifeworld and its shared history. The one, same cultural Lifeworld remains, but the Collective Atlantic recognizes that slavocracy has opened a social gap with perpetual ramifications and it encourages an endless process of vocalizing and interpreting that shared history. The Collective Atlantic of the novel—the Middle Passage—is no exception. As Johnson makes clear: “I’m trying to say, ‘Yes, the sea is this, as so and so said, yes, the sea is that, as so and so said, but it’s also *this*’” (“Interview” 166). Thus, Johnson’s approach to creating such a novel, and the

experience of reading it, is akin to the approach of the Collective Atlantic. Both seek to illuminate the refractory and intersubjective nature inherent in an Atlantic Experience that involves utopian and dystopian destruction, integration, stagnation, process, individuality, and collectivity, as illustrated in *Middle Passage* through the medium of Calhoun. Even though remembering and reimagining the diverse and lasting effects of slavocracy does not change the past, it can bring some measure of peace as it unites readers around a common and fundamental humanity, as Calhoun's narrative of remembrance unites him and Isadora. Caryl Phillips's novel, *Crossing the River*, seeks a similar unification among its diverse characters and, subsequently, its readers in pursuit of an uplifting "chorus of a common memory" that crosses the borders of the Atlantic Ocean as well as the borders erected by way of a transatlantic slavocracy (CR 1).

## **A Global Chorus of Local Voices:**

### **The “Chorus of a Common Memory” in Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River***

The contemporary narratives of slavery *Feeding the Ghosts* and *Middle Passage* are invested in the Atlantic Ocean physical space and the concrete reality of the slave ship. *Feeding the Ghosts* explores slavocracy as a haunting social gap through an Atlantic Sea that *is*, or that embodies, slavery. *Middle Passage* explores the Atlantic as a space that embodies a historical collective memory through intersubjective encounters that supersede traditional boundaries of difference. These two texts are rooted in depicting the Atlantic Experience, particularly the proximity of its utopian and dystopian realities, as experienced aboard a slave ship at sea. The Atlantic Ocean, undoubtedly, is a concrete facilitator of the Collective Atlantic narrative in these texts. The landed portions of the narratives are not unimportant, but they bookend, or introduce and then later reflect upon, the dominant sea portions of the narratives.

Contrastingly, Caryl Phillips’s novel *Crossing the River* moves beyond a slave ship’s time at sea. A slave ship and a journey across the Middle Passage do engender the layered narratives of the text, but the novel’s overarching primary narrative movement then expands across the Atlantic Ocean. By way of the novel’s layered presentation of intersubjective relationships, a common history, and both historical and contemporary realities spanning the characters’ self-created utopias in the midst of disruptive dystopias, *Crossing the River* speaks to a collective experience of the Atlantic slave trade, and that collective experience is one of crossings, connections, and divisions all enabled by the Atlantic Ocean, or, more appropriately, the Collective Atlantic. These Atlantic Experiences illustrate a connected form of local and global existence that the Collective Atlantic may enable on all sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In so doing, *Crossing the River* moves beyond the physical Atlantic space in order to provide a



kaleidoscopic view of the historical and contemporary ramifications of slavery in the lands and nations that are haunted by their historical involvement in the “peculiar institution.”

*Crossing the River's* narrative form is key to a Collective Atlantic study of the novel, for it emphasizes the refractory nature of the ramifications and interpretations of slavocracy through its foundational exploration of the system's effects in different locations and time periods, and in light of various routes and roots. The transatlantic slave trade was key to the development of the institution of slavocracy, and the slave trade served to disrupt local communities and separate individuals and groups from their homelands; yet, it also led to the establishment of new forms of communities as well as the exposure to and development of new global routes.

The Atlantic Ocean provided primary routes for this trade. It served as the body of water that could both connect and disconnect. It connected imperial powers to other countries and, thereby, facilitated the slave trade. Simultaneously, it disconnected the newly enslaved, as well as the perpetrators of the slave trade, from their homeland and communities of belonging. The Atlantic Ocean continues to connect or disconnect to this day. Contemporarily, it can serve as a semipermeable membrane that allows for osmotic integration and connects various peoples, nations, and cultures on a global scale. Or, it can serve as a physical boundary that maintains attempted geographical separation and metaphysical isolation of the same peoples, nations, and cultures. However, in terms of a Collective Atlantic, the Atlantic should serve, both historically and contemporarily, as a semipermeable membrane that enables various levels of global connections and local preservations, or relationships of propinquity. This is the role of the Atlantic in *Crossing the River*. It separates geographically and locally the four internal narratives, as each narrative is set in a different location and time period. It also unifies globally those internal narratives via the prologue and epilogue's “chorus of a common memory” (CR 235).

Prior to further explicating the significance of the novel's narrative form, it is important to provide a foundational summary of that form. Phillips's *Crossing the River* foregrounds the diasporic lives of the main characters Nash, Martha, and Travis as they exist across space and time. A newly freed slave, Nash's narrative takes place in the United States colony of Liberia during 1839; Martha's westward journey in pursuit of freedom and family occurs during America's antebellum era; and Travis's experience is that of a soldier's biracial romance during World War II. In fact, Travis's narrative is narrated by Joyce, the woman with whom he has an affair. Joyce is, in a sense, adopted into the nuclear family that is spoken of in the novel's prologue and epilogue.

In staging such a variety of experiences and contexts, the novel highlights the multiplicity of black subjectivities, rooted in diverse intersubjective encounters, and the individuals' struggle to self-create a utopia within and without the dystopian reality of enslavement. A variety of Eurocentric experiences in relation to the system of slavery are also given voice on two levels. First, the white experience that uproots blacks by way of enslavement is given voice in the form of narrative disruptions. Part III of the novel interrupts the narratives of the main characters with the logbook of James Hamilton, the captain of the slave ship who buys the three main characters as children in order to sell them as slaves. Similarly, Nash's epistolary narrative is regularly interrupted by the narrative of his previous master, Edward, which records the details of Edward's journey to Liberia in search of Nash. Through such disruptions in the narrative form, *Crossing the River* broadens the experience of slavocracy by inserting the voices of those who perpetuate the system.

On the other hand, the novel introduces the experience of whites that engage in compassionate and loving relationships with blacks, and so depicts the positive encounters

among races that can still arise out of a racialized society. These sections contrast the aforementioned form of narrative disruption as they are gracefully woven into the main narratives in a form of coexistence. Together, these disruptive or inclusive interruptions indicate that slavocracy was an intersubjective experience in which formally delineated races could not help but engage in intensified sociability on some level. As a result of this intensified sociability, each narrative, at its root, explores the dystopian effects of diffusive diaspora and the personal struggle to create utopian experience through intentional social integration. These intertwined narratives are then unified in the bookending prologue and epilogue that present the father of Nash, Martha, and Travis, which gives voice to a man who loses his children to the system of slavery. The father's omnipresent, ancestral voice unifies the historical, internal narratives, giving a contemporary, global voice to the interior narrative's localized geographic spaces that are connected to one another *across the water*.

The Collective Atlantic exists as the medium of understanding through which the characters' utopian and dystopian experiences of slavery and its effects can be explored within the four parts of the novel. The internal narratives illuminate the various routes, movements, and experiences of the main characters after they have been dispersed across the globe following their enslavement—they illustrate the dynamic proximity of utopian integration and dystopian diffusion. Echoing the focus of James Clifford's classic study *Routes*, the novel invests in exploring human difference, but also likeness and intersubjectivity, in terms of "displacement, tangled cultural experiences, structures and possibilities of an increasingly connected but not homogenous world" (2). At the same time, the text does not abandon an interest in the homonym roots or an "interes[t] in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness," for the main characters are simultaneously connected, even as they are displaced, by their ancestral father and

familial roots as evidenced in the prologue and epilogue (Gilroy 19). As the prologue and epilogue unite the internal characters in a common history, they also contemporarily unify the local and global ramifications of the slave trade that initiates the novel's narrative, particularly via their historical intertextuality. The roving, omniscient eye of this opening and close emphasizes that, even in the midst of unity, "[c]ross-culturality is not a mosaic of different, strictly delimited areas but an uninterrupted and always incomplete process of fusion" (Ledent, "Overlapping Territories" 57). Thus, the overarching novel form is indicative of a disruptive diaspora that results in achronological narratives, but it also unifies those narratives through the transcendent, intersubjective, and kaleidoscopic view of the prologue and epilogue. A "chorus of a common memory" then arises out of the novel's narratives and their discussion of the greater history of slavocracy (*CR* 235).

The Atlantic Ocean is key to this common memory and kaleidoscopic chorus, for the Atlantic is the instrument that carries the chorus from one nation and its people to another. This chorus is present in both the prologue and epilogue. For the chorus to move from the beginning of the text to the end, it must pass through the internal narratives, and thereby establish those narrative voices as contributing participants of the greater chorus. As a whole, the novel establishes a choral ode that crosses and surpasses boundaries—including, but not limited to, the Atlantic—and becomes the means of unifying the Lifeworld on a local and global level.

One of the first crossings of the novel takes place in Part I, "The Pagan Coast," when Nash crosses the Atlantic from the American south to Liberia. This crossing is, in part, a crossing over from slavery to freedom because Nash is liberated from his enslavement on Edward's plantation as he is sent to Liberia on a Christianizing and civilizing mission. Although Nash is freed from the direct bonds of slavery, he is not completely free from forced labor, for he has

been sent to Liberia with the sole purpose of “try[ing] to fuse in their [the natives’] souls the values of American civilization” (CR 31). The Liberian space reveals the fractured relationship between Nash and Edward, but it also is its own convergent space of utopia and dystopia. The American experiment of returning slaves to Africa is intended to “repatriate” slaves in return for their “faithful service” to their masters with the ultimate, purportedly benevolent, goal of redeeming the “native African” (CR 8, 9, 8).

The spearhead of this movement, The American Colonization Society, believes “benefits would accrue to both nations,” for America “would be removing a cause of increasing social stress, and Africa would be civilized by the return of her descendants, who were now blessed with rational Christian minds” (CR 9). Although such a view is undoubtedly patronizing, particularly when viewed in light of the fact that not every slave would have originated from this one small country in a very large continent, the ACS professes a goal of reconnecting what they view as one people for the mutual benefit of both those who cross from America and those to whom they cross. As Claeys points out, a “utopian mentality” may seek “to impose rational norms of organization upon the world, and to order it more satisfactorily. In proportion as the present is deficient, we might say, we invest in the future, or the concept thereof” (“News” 150). This is the supposed mentality of the Liberian experiment in which the widespread and despotic master-slave rule is mitigated as America facilitates “faithful” slaves’ renewed relationships with their “native” land and people in pursuit of what the benefactors believe to be a positive utopian reintegration and uplift (CR 9).

However, underneath this thin utopian surface exists a dirty dystopian secret, for even as America reintegrates slaves by way of the Atlantic, it also diffuses them as it continues to enslave the people of Liberia. The ACS claims that Africa is a continent “belonging to the native

African, and to nobody else,” and yet it asserts a claim to Africa as it not only attempts to set up a Liberian society in its own image but also maintains the slave trade of its people (CR 8). Once Nash recognizes American’s involvement in this practice, he is disgusted that the slave ships “have been afforded protection by the unfurling of the Star Spangled Banner, ” and he declares, “[T]his American protectionism is a disgrace to our dignity, and a stain on the name of our country” (CR 41). This discovery leads him to realize the duplicitous nature of the Liberia experiment that purports the creation of a relational utopia while also perpetuating a dystopian slave system. Still, this recognition comes after Nash has been in Liberia for six years. Upon his initial arrival he is eager to further the missionary cause. This motivation begins to decrease only as the years pass without any word from Edward and, consequently, Nash’s community is increasingly limited to the Liberians he interacts with on a daily basis.

In America, Nash was Edward’s favorite slave. In one of his early letters offering praise to Edward, Nash reflects, “[Y]ou [Edward] were kind enough to take me, a foolish child, from my parents and bring me up in your own dwelling as something more akin to son than servant” (CR 21). In regards to similar situations, Orlando Patterson explains, “There was an almost perverse intimacy in the bond resulting from the power the master claimed over his slave. The slave’s only life was through and for his master” (50). Thus, Edward’s silence is initially devastating to Nash for his life and mind were intertwined with that of Edward’s. As Nash’s letters to Edward continue to go unanswered and as a sense of intimate rejection permeates his mind, the earlier friendship and trust Nash feels for Edward breaks down into a state of dystopian loss that is best illustrated in a letter to his father figure in which he laments, “Why have you forsaken me?” (CR 42).

This lamentation is similarly echoed throughout the novel, and each time its presence highlights the complexities of diffusive diaspora and a subsequent longing for reunion—whether that diaspora is driven by a desperate choice as in the case of the ancestral father and his three children, forced separation as in the case of Martha and her daughter, or something in between as in the case of Joyce and her son Greer. Akin to the messianic Biblical figure this lamentation alludes to, each character is faced with a dystopian, relational loss, cries out in desperate, isolated lamentation, and then makes a decisive shift in his or her attempts to reconcile that loss and create a new form of positive sociability. For Martha, her lamentation marks her decision to submit to death and a reunion with her daughter in the afterlife. In the case of Joyce, it can be inferred that her son has voiced a similar lament, or at least considered similar questions prior to his decision to seek her out and learn about his family history.

Concerning Nash, this marks a turning point in his thinking as he moves forward from accepting the knowledge Edward had poured into him and, instead, begins to cross over into knowledge he discovers and makes for himself, such as his recognition that the slave trade continues in Liberia and that his relationship with Edward is not one of fulfilling reciprocity. Consequently, Nash chooses no longer to write home to his fellow slaves in praise of master Edward and he requests that Edward never visit him. He lets go of the past he mistakenly viewed as fulfilling sociability and begins to self-create a personal utopia in Liberia by intentionally choosing his own family based on self-knowledge. Nash makes his greatest strides when he takes a non-Christian wife who he asserts is “a native woman, and one of the best in Africa” and when he moves inward toward the “heart of the country” of Liberia (*CR* 38, 23). In the interior of the country, his mental boundary crossing is secured as he comes to recognize his new life within the heart of Liberia as the “opportunity to open up [his] eyes and cast off the garb of ignorance

which has encompassed [him] all too securely the whole course of [his] life” (*CR* 23, 62). Nash comes to see Liberia as a place of “liberty” and opportunity where “everything has still to be created,” particularly in terms of the self (*CR* 18, 61). Despite his initial aim to mold Liberia into a utopia for the natives, he comes to view Liberia as the opportunity to develop a utopia of his own through an intensified sociability of mutual love and trust with the natives.

Similar to the way in which the first six years of Nash’s attempts at creating a utopian Liberia are delayed and disrupted by the loss of a relationship with Edward, his epistolary narrative is interrupted by Edward’s narrative of his journey across the Atlantic in search of Nash. Accordingly, Edward is a generally dystopian force as he continually fractures lives and families. The first of Edward’s destructive acts is his role as slave-owner. Despite his claim that he “hate[s] the system,” he continues to perpetuate it. Moreover, although he attempts to divest himself of “*part* of the [slavery] burden,” specifically in sending Nash to Liberia, he only does so out of pride (*CR* 13, emphasis added). He later dismisses Nash’s letters on the grounds that they are “full of the usual childish requests for tools, seeds, money, and other necessities of life” (*CR* 7). Even as he denies provisions, Edward writes to Nash to remind him that he is “fortunate in that your former master [Edward himself] was of a progressive persuasion” (*CR* 11). However, that “progressive persuasion” exists only insofar as Nash’s Liberian efforts contribute to Edward’s status within the ACS. The only time Edward ever takes up pen to write Nash is to express his “disapproval” of a minor disobedience and to reprimand Nash: “Do not disappoint me” (*CR* 11). While Edward prides himself on repatriating Nash, he simultaneously perpetuates the master-slave relationship as he tries to control Nash from afar in order that he may not be looked down upon within his own societal circle. In other words, Edward perpetuates a dystopian system and its relational hierarchy in order to maintain his personal status.



Edward's despotic rule over Nash is, perhaps, more prominent in Nash's life while he is in America, even though part of this rule is only alluded to in the novel. Edward's broken marriage with his wife, Amelia, reveals that Edward had a sexual relationship with Nash. Saidiya Hartman stresses that violence within slavery, particularly sexual violence, was repressed under the guise of a benevolent institution that claimed to exist within an equilibrium of "affection, family, and reciprocal obligations" (550). Accordingly, Edward leads Nash to believe that their sexual relations are rooted in familial affection when, at their root, they are actually another level of domineering rule over the young man. This dystopian relationship that, as Hartman discusses, was likely founded upon fear of the repercussions of disobedience, leads to Edward's estrangement from his wife.

And yet, in all of this, Edward refuses to take responsibility for his destructive actions. He claims that "the boy [Nash] . . . force[d] on him all the [sexual] pain and confusion which finally proved too much for Amelia to bear," thereby displacing his own sexual agency and dominance onto "the alluring, if not endangering, agency of the dominated [Nash]" (CR 58, Hartman 546). Similarly, Edward refutes his role in Amelia's humiliation: "That she had subsequently chosen to flee his home, then her mind, then this mortal world at the instigation of her own hand, was a tragedy the responsibility for which could not reside at Edward's doorstep" (CR 56). In sum, Edward acts with a blind eye to his own motivations, which are, more often than not, rooted in his pride and domineering nature. At the close of Part I, Edward finds himself "alone" and narcissistically laments that "[h]e had been abandoned," rather than admitting that he had abandoned Nash (CR 69). Unfortunately for Edward, his alienating effect on others results in his own alienation and the close of his narrative presents an Edward finally confronted with the results of his pernicious nature: his self-created dystopian reality. Therefore, while

Nash's crossing of the oceanic river ends in a holistic and utopian gain, Edward's ends in utter and dystopian loss.

The crossings in Part II of the novel, "West," are manifold as Martha crosses west over the Missouri, refuses to cross the Missouri again to return east, crosses into freedom, repeatedly crosses the indeterminate boundary between utopia and dystopia, and, in the end, crosses the river separating life from death. Martha's narrative begins with the dystopia of a family fractured by capitalistic slavery. Upon their master's death, Martha's family is sold for profit to three separate slaveholders. Reflecting on the inhumaneness of the auction, Martha lists the items for sale: "Slaves. Farm animals. Household furniture. Farm tools" (CR 76). Ian Baucom specifies that such a moment in which humans and animals are deemed equivalent is "an apocalyptic stripping away of the exceptional quality of person in their transit from humanness to money"; in short, a person is reduced to property that possesses nothing more than exchange value ("Specters" 67). This is the capitalistic rendering of the human within dystopian slavocracy in which the slave loses not only her family, but also her human value.

The auctioneering of Martha has two profound effects upon her. First, it divides her from her daughter, and yet this physical separation serves only to strengthen Martha's mental connection to Eliza Mae. She constantly thinks of her, always dreams of their reunion, and often imagines the appearance of someone else to be Eliza Mae returning to her. Second, the Hoffmans buy Martha at auction and soon take her across the river to begin a new life in the near west. Even though crossing the Missouri river is often a joyous moment for slaves, Martha views it as a "miserable December day," for she is not crossing as a freed woman, but as an enslaved woman recently severed from her daughter (CR 78). For Martha, the crossing of the Missouri does not represent the breaking forth of a utopia, but the continuation of dystopian loneliness.

Later, the Hoffmans decide to sell Martha back across the Missouri in order to finance their trip farther west, but, this time, Martha refuses to be nothing more than a piece of property of only monetary worth in slavery's capitalistic game. Instead, she reasserts her inherent human worth, runs away, and stakes her own course. Her refusal to cross the Missouri again marks her agency in creating her own utopian freedom. When she runs away while the Hoffmans sleep, Martha mentally turns over a mantra asserting, "Never again would she stand on an auction block. (Never.) Never again would she be renamed. (Never.) Never again would she belong to anybody. (No sir, never.)" (CR 80). This reclamation of her freedom inspires Martha to continue to forge her own path in pursuit of a self-created utopia. Like Nash, the main thrust of this pursuit is rooted in choosing and creating her own family. Martha first chooses a sister-figure in Lucy, and together the two erect a clothes-washing business to provide for themselves. Thus, Martha no longer earns money for another, but earns money for herself. In so doing, she fashions her own form of agency and provision. Later on, Martha chooses a companion in Chester, and she comes to love him because, as she puts it, "For ten long years, this man has made me happy. For ten long years, this man has made me forget [my pain] – and that's a gift from above" (CR 84). However, these ten years of purposeful love and friendship are disrupted when Chester is murdered and Lucy journeys west with a new husband. As Martha is, again, swept into a state of dystopian loss, she bemoans, "Such misery in one life" (CR 85).

Despite this revived and repeated misery, Martha again refuses to be destroyed by the dystopian "moment[s] of rupture" that fracture her life time and again, and she convinces a group of black pioneers to allow her to join them on their journey west, where Martha hopes to be reunited with her daughter (Rediker 153). On this trip the close proximity of utopia and dystopia becomes most evident in Martha's narrative. Claeys avows, "The desire for sociability, and for

the safety of the group . . . is a vital aspect of utopianism” (“News” 149). This desire is most evident when the pioneers decide that, in order to reach safely California and their dreams of utopia, they must divest themselves of the sickly and elderly Martha. Consequently, they drop her off on a foreign main street in the midst of a snowstorm. As Martha’s experience indicates, the safety of the group can be achieved at the expense of the individual. In other words, one person’s pursuit of utopia may be another person’s decline into dystopia. Such a reality is representative of the need to approach utopian integration and dystopian diffusion as concepts that exist in proximity to one another within the legacy of slavery. Concrete and solid definitions of the two are entirely uprooted and thrown by the wayside in such moments where one event can have such contrasting effects and meanings among those involved.

Following this abandonment, Martha decides to give herself up to death. Lying in a doorway on the street, she looks toward the sky and requests, “White snow, come quickly,” in order that it may cover her and take her to her death (*CR* 73). This desire for death is a convergence of dystopia and utopia as Martha experiences both despair and hope in two forms of crossing. The first of these is a crossing of the Atlantic that transcends time as Martha looks back “[t]hrough some atavistic mist . . . beyond Kansas, back beyond her motherhood, her teen years, her arrival in Virginia, to a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man. Standing off, a ship” (*CR* 73). This moment reunites Martha with her African origins, but this memory also leads her to express her despair over her first fractured family as she cries, “*Father, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (*CR* 73).

The second of these crossings occurs in the house a white woman has provided Martha for shelter from the storm, and this crossing spans the western frontier as well as life and death. Here, Martha relinquishes her life in favor of a spiritual reunion with her daughter. In her final

moments, “A dream began to wash through her mind. Martha dreamed that she had travelled on west to California, by herself, and clutching her bundle of clothing. Once there she was met by Eliza Mae, who was now a tall, sturdy colored woman of some social standing” (CR 93). This reunion is a utopian experience for Martha because it effectively transcends physical and geographical boundaries as it reunites her with her daughter and, thereby, reaffirms Martha’s humanity. For many traditional African clans, “a person was a person only insofar as he or she was a member of [a] kinship group”; in other words, “to be alienated from the collective wealth, power, and protection of the natal lineage group was tantamount to social death, a virtual erasure of one’s personhood” (Sweet 33). Rather than allow her geographical isolation to define her in her death as less than human, Martha spiritually secures a social reunion with her familial clan via this vision of her daughter. Even though Martha may not have secured the concrete community of reunion and freedom she yearned to build, she fashions a utopic moment of pride, hope, and rebirth through her vision of her daughter as a woman who has achieved some measure of stability despite a difficult personal history. Through this intentional creation, Martha “restore[s] balance and cohesiveness” to herself and her daughter, spiritually reasserting their collective kinship despite their geographical diffusion (Sweet 33).

Just as Martha is not alone in the memories or visions of her narratives, she is not alone in the present moment within which she reflects on those past experiences. The whole of Martha’s narrative is presented in an achronological form in which her memories transport her to a variety of lived moments and temporalities before she finally crosses the river into death. This non-chronological narrative organization is present in all three of the novels of this study, and it is key to the refractory nature of Collective Atlantic experiences and interpretations. The history of slavocracy cannot be boiled down to a simple left-to-right timeline of chronological events,

ramifications, and interpretations, and it is not a history of a “homogeneous time” (Clifford 263). Instead, events, realities, experiences, and voices from slavocracy are still being uncovered and they are also being continually reimagined, reinterpreted, and re-presented. Hence, the events, voices, and memories interact in a refractory relationship in which one impacts the other in an endless array. The nature of each experience can be subsumed by following its thread within the greater historical tapestry of slavery and by exploring how that one thread is impacted intersubjectively by others along a continuum of utopian and dystopian interactions and ramifications. In Martha’s narrative, her seemingly present moment in Denver is the foundation that weaves together her non-chronological reflections. In the first, present episode of Part II, a nameless white woman approaches a shivering Martha and offers to provide her shelter. Countering Edward’s presence in Nash’s narrative, this woman neither interrupts Martha’s narrative nor disrupts her memories; instead, she hovers around the margins of this part of the novel and exists in terms of her attempts to provide Martha with water, shelter, and warmth. After offering Martha her hand, the nameless woman promises, “I’m not here to harm you. I just want to help. Truly” (*CR* 75). Her noninvasive actions appear to attest to the truth of that promise. This woman displays an alternative, compassionate reality that has an entirely different effect than Edward’s, for she facilitates the quiet and sheltered setting of Martha’s final utopian construction: her reunion with her daughter.

Some scholars suggest this nameless white woman approaches and assists Martha in a “patroniz[ing]” manner (Ledent, “Overlapping Territories” 57). They hone in on the moments when the woman’s extended hand is described as “insult” and the woman tells Martha she “must expect to receive [her] in the morning” (*CR* 75, 89). It cannot be argued that the white woman accommodates Martha out of pure compassion without a tinge of condescension, for it simply

cannot be proven. Simultaneously, it also cannot be established that the white woman is entirely patronizing. The truth likely lies somewhere between the two and is more akin to the typically complex motivations (this does not necessarily mean contradictory) of the average man or woman's actions.

What can be argued in regard to this woman and the moments she and Martha share is that it is a step; the two women move into a closer proximity to one another and, it appears, the white woman is the one to initiate that step or to extend the hand of compassion. This moment cannot merely be reduced to perpetuated racism and static discrimination. The women's charitable interaction is emblematic of process, if not progress, for it illustrates a moment of female, or at least human, solidarity. As the third wave feminism movement indicates, solidarity can exist among and even include difference. bell hooks argues, "Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression" (65). In a similar vein, Judith Butler argues against unity as "a prerequisite for political action," and suggests, instead, that "[p]erhaps a coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions and take action with those contradictions intact" (20). These theorists, and others of the movement, consider that waiting for comprehensive and holistic unity risks never achieving any progress, whereas, valuing and "affirm[ing] solidarity" that "allow[s] for conflict and difference" will sooner begin a process of "revolutionary change" that effects some measure of "transformation, individually and collectively" (Weir, 130, 130; hooks 64, 64). In light of this, even though Martha and the white woman have not experienced the same forms of oppression, do not move in the same social circles, and are of different races, both are human and both are women, and this truth can establish a firm foundation for solidarity. Their largely

positive interaction—for I define as positive providing shelter from a snowstorm—if not perfect, is a moment of solidarity and human kindness.

It is important to note that, following her death, Martha's narrative closes with the white woman musing, "They would have to choose a name for her [Martha] if she was going to receive a Christian burial" (*CR* 94). Viewed through the Collective Atlantic lens, this narrative occasion is particularly emblematic of the refractory nature of slavery's experience, ramifications, and interpretations. Earlier in her narrative, as she ran away to secure her own freedom, Martha declares, "Never again would she be renamed"; yet, here, another white woman prepares to name her (*CR* 80). This narrative close could be interpreted in a number of ways. Such a close could support the reading that the white woman is simply patronizing Martha, or that, in being cared for after so many years of self-preservation, Martha loses some measure of her dignity via her death in this woman's shack. However, I suggest that such readings would be too reductive, and would fail to take stock of the complexity of this ending and, subsequently, of Martha's narrative as a whole. As the Collective Atlantic lens indicates, experience within the system of slavocracy exists along a continuum rooted in the proximity of utopian integration and dystopian diffusion. Furthermore, the details of those experiences can only be revealed intersubjectively and, thus, their interpretations are inherently refractory. Analyzing the close of Martha's narrative through this lens and these tenets reaffirms Martha's utopic crossing into spiritual reunion and bodily death. Therefore, the woman's decision regarding Martha's burial does not negate the positive value of Martha's death. More specifically, and perhaps more importantly, it is not anti-utopian.

Similarly, the opening of Martha's narrative presents a Martha who is ready and willing to die, even outside of shelter. Martha's lack of concern for the place or physical accommodations of her passing makes it clear that the woman's provided shelter cannot strip



Martha of her dignity. Perhaps what is most problematic about the close of this section of the novel is the intention to rename a woman who declares she would never again be renamed, but this does not necessarily mean the white woman intends harm by the naming. Rather, the white woman's burial plans could be nothing more than a way of paying respect to Martha by offering her a "proper Christian burial," as the woman puts it. Such an action could indicate that the woman is extending respect and honor to Martha in a way that is in accordance with the woman's beliefs. The act of burial, undoubtedly, is a form of intensified sociability between two or more people, but whether the act is of a gratifying or humiliating nature in this case is unclear. What *is* evident is that the white woman does not know Martha's name. Likewise, neither Martha nor the reader know the white woman's name. The absence of a name for the white woman may have a number of effects, but what is, perhaps, most compelling is the effect that the reader likely desires a name for the white woman. The lack of a name reifies her stranger status, too. Names are usually provided for characters in novels, and, when they are not provided, they are often desired nonetheless. The reader's desire to name or know the name of the white woman may echo the white woman's desire to give Martha a name for a traditional Christian burial. The desire to name Martha is not the white woman's initial response to Martha's death. First, the woman "wondered who or what this woman was"; she responds with questions of identity and naming (*CR* 94). This suggests that the woman's active naming of Martha is secondary to her interest in Martha's given or chosen name and subjectivity. Ultimately, the white woman's intention to provide a name for Martha very well could be nothing more than a basic human desire and, concurrently, a marker of solidarity.

Part IV of the novel, "Somewhere in England," provides a second form of human solidarity. While Part II depicts female solidarity, Part IV depicts biracial solidarity. Part IV

presents a white character, Joyce, who offers compassion and love to one of the main characters, Travis. This part of the novel differs from that of the second because it is told from the perspective of the white woman and foregrounds her experience, while Travis is only depicted through the eyes of Joyce. Even though Joyce is a white woman, her race does not guarantee her absolute acceptance by white society. In fact, similar to the three main characters, Joyce is excluded from mainstream white society and, simultaneously, experiences abject loss, suffers a violent domestic rule, and, in response, strives to construct a personal utopia. Consequently, Joyce's narrative comes to echo those of the other main characters, even if her color would set her apart from them in a racialized society.

Joyce most echoes the previous characters in her determination to choose freedom and chart her own path and, as it was for them, this determination is instigated by a deep loss. As a young woman, Joyce experiences her first relationship of intensified sociability when she falls in love with an older man named Herbert. After giving herself to Herbert, she becomes pregnant and he disappears. In time, Joyce gathers the courage to locate him and learns that he already has a wife and two kids. In the middle of their discussion, Herbert gets up under the pretense of buying more drinks, but never returns. Thus, before Joyce could even imagine a new family of three, the man she loves abandons her, leaving her alienated and afraid. In this loss of a loved one, Joyce experiences something akin to that of Nash and Martha. However, most of her subsequent losses are significantly different from theirs, for she *chooses* the later losses. Nevertheless, Joyce chooses her future losses or disintegrations in an attempt to secure her freedom from dystopian situations, assert her agency, and erect her own utopia of relationships built on trust and love.

The first of these choices is to abort her and Herbert's baby, and Joyce commemorates this moment as a break with her past and a chance to start anew. The second loss occurs when she chooses to marry Len at the expense of her relationship with her mother. Although this is a loss for Joyce, she considers it worth the cost, for she views marrying Len as a step in the right direction because it will "get her out of this [her mother's] two-up, two-down dump" that makes her "[want] to scream," and she believes it will lead to a utopia of loving integration (*CR* 132).

Unfortunately, soon after her marriage to Len, Joyce comes to view her marriage as a mistake, for Len begins to control her time, forces her to work long hours in the store, and beats her at his whims. Such an experience, although of a different magnitude and impact than slavocracy, is a form of domestic violence and dystopian totalitarian rule. In spite of her situation, Joyce, like Martha, refuses to submit to the whims of her "ruler," so when Len is released from prison and intends to leave town with her for a fresh start, Joyce protests, "He'll have to go by himself, I reckon. He can't expect me to follow him around like some silly puppy. No, if he wants to go, then he can go" (*CR* 148). Following this self-assertion of freedom, Joyce crosses a river in the form of a racial divide when she begins a relationship with Travis and later gives birth to his baby. By personally creating a biracial family that is rooted in free love, Joyce intensifies her experience of sociability in a manner that encompasses both utopian and dystopian experience. In the utopian sense, Travis is the first man to love her and not abandon her. When he returns from the war on compassionate leave to marry Joyce, all she can think when she sees him is, "He'd come back to me" (*CR* 226). This is the sort of reunion that Nash and Martha can only ever dream of, but, while they die before their desired reunions are realized, Joyce's reunion later leads to renewed loss when Travis is killed in action.

A choice of Joyce's that does not echo another character is her choice of a utopian sociability with a man of another race, and many within the society of her narrative disapprove of this choice. Even though Travis and Joyce's relationship is their source of love and trust, outsiders attempt to instill them with fear rooted in violence and alienation. The violence is executed at the end of their first day together after Joyce and Travis are late in returning to the military camp. To punish Travis, not so much for his tardiness but for his relationship with a white woman, the military police "beat him with their sticks [ . . . ] so hard that he thought his kidneys were going to burst" (*CR* 207). The threat of alienation comes to pass much later, after the war has ended, Travis has passed, and their son Greer has been born. In the wake of WWII, many single women were left alone, unmarried or widowed, and with biracial war babies. They were often encouraged to give up these babies for adoption at the risk of otherwise being socially isolated and ostracized due to racism. Joyce does give up her child, but not out of embarrassment. Reflecting upon her decision to give up Greer, Joyce remembers, "I had no money. Nothing. Only Greer. She [a county official] said, You're going to have to start a new life on your own. And so we were sensible, my son and I" (*CR* 230). In this decision, Joyce echoes the father of the prologue and epilogue, as both parents decide to give up their children because it is "sensible" in terms of their survival. And yet, in later years, this sensible act comes to be understood as "[a] desperate foolishness" (*CR* 2).

Although Joyce echoes the ancestral father when she gives up her child, she differs from him in that she eventually is reunited with her son. In fact, her ultimate reunion is the only one distinctly evident in the book. Even though all of the characters, including the Captain, desire a reunion with someone, Joyce is the only one whose desire is realized physically—she is the only one who experiences that level of intensified and integrative utopian sociability. This emphasis

on the physicality of Joyce's reunion is not intended to minimize the significance of Martha's spiritual reunion. Rather, the observable physicality of Joyce's reunion is stressed to indicate the more public ramifications such a reunion can imply. Joyce's reunion with her biracial son speaks to the progress, however minute, that has been made since 1752 when the Captain bought "2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl" (CR 124). While her post-WWII society is, in no way, a fully integrated, multicultural society, it has made headway since that of the 1700s. The potential for Joyce to have a renewed relationship with her biracial son speaks to the possibility that the world may continue to move toward a more integrated, multiracial society that is facilitated by crossing various rivers. In other words, Joyce's reunion experience toward the close of the novel speaks to a hope that the world is continually moving toward a more utopian reality of increased and culturally intensified sociability that effectively tears down and crosses artificial boundaries of difference.

As the fictional universe of the novel moves toward an increasingly multicultural sociability, the distance between the past and the present does not grow definitively greater; rather, a proximity between the past and present continues to exist. This reality is most evident in the novel in the characters of Captain Hamilton and the unnamed father of the main characters. The Captain's narrative is depicted in Part III, "Crossing the River," in the form of a logbook that is regularly interrupted by letters from Hamilton to his wife. These letters speak to a love for his family and to dreams of reunion with his wife, such as when he writes, "Last night I managed some two hours of sleep, and I dreamed of you. I *saw* us walking together, and discoursing on the many things which have occurred since our parting" (CR 118). Contrastingly, the log entries provide only quick facts of the capitalist voyage such as the state of supplies, the locations the ship anchors, and the number of slaves acquired per day. For example, when the Captain buys

the father's three children, he records, "Approached by a quiet fellow. Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl" (CR 124). While this transaction is allotted only two lines in Hamilton's logbook, it is an act of "desperate foolishness" that forever haunts the father (CR 237). Furthermore, as the captain sets sail away from Africa, he knows he will, in time, be reunited with his wife, whereas the father knows he will never be reunited with his children.

Ultimately, the Captain's narrative resembles that of Edward's, for it presents a white, Eurocentric narrative of the dominant and domineering class. Both the Captain and Edward are disruptive social forces in the lives of the other main characters, and their narratives interrupt those of the main characters, but the disjunctive nature of their presence is not simply dystopian or diffusive. The Captain and Edward's narrative presence in the novel enriches a kaleidoscopic reading, for it provides a glimpse into a counterpoint or counterhistory akin to Edward Said's concept of the contrapuntal. The contrapuntal "embodies the effort to bring various interpretive voices into conjunction without harmonization, to emphasize the uniqueness of each voice in contrast with other voices, and to compensate for gaps in one interpretation or interpretive perspective by placing it in conjunction with another" (Nelson). The very presence of the Captain and Edward, both as characters and as narratives, enables a richer Collective Atlantic reading of the novel. As Said explains, "[A]n idea or experience is always counterposed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light: from that juxtaposition one gets a better, perhaps even more universal idea of how to think, say, about a human rights issue in one situation by comparison with another" (Said 378). The inclusion of the Captain and Edward's narratives makes it clear that slave traders and slave owners were, despite their despotic actions, human as well, and were, at times, conflicted over their participation in the system.

Hamilton's letters to his wife speak to this internal discordance, as his letters are rife with the passion, love, and affection of a husband, despite his involvement in such an inhumane and violent practice. Simultaneously, his letters confess his confusion and concern regarding the inability for "a continued indulgence in this trade [of slaves] and a keen faith" to "reside in one breast" (CR 119). Edward's journey to Liberia in search of Nash seems to indicate a similar level of genuine care for the slave, even if his purported "aversion to the system" does not seem to ring entirely true (CR 13). Despite these latter ruminations, both narratives display a rather disinterested, or at least blinded, approach to slavery that overshadows the glimpses into the characters' leanings toward potentially positive sociability. Even as these two men do, like the main characters, exist in a relationship of propinquity to both utopian and dystopian reality, ultimately they perpetuate a system of despotic dystopia. In addition, the Captain echoes Edward in terms of his disruptive narrative.

Much like Edward's narrative interrupts that of Nash, the Captain's narrative puts a complete halt to the narratives of the three main characters as his is inserted as the standalone Part III. The Captain's stark intrusion is emblematic of the disruptive nature of the slave system as a whole, which not only fractures families, but also disrupts history. Were it not for the Captain's achronological interjection, the main body of the novel would flow in chronological order from the 1700s to the 1900s. Therefore, the disjunctive form of the novel illustrates how the dystopian reality of the system of slavery survives beyond its own time and effectively disrupts the histories that follow it, including contemporary history. In truth, the world is still haunted by the disturbing history of the slave trade and continues to deal with its destructive and diffusive dystopian effects, as made particularly clear in *Feeding the Ghosts*.

It must be stressed that *Crossing the River* is not limited to the Captain's disruptive narrative and slavery's haunting effects. The father's story, presented in the novel's prologue and epilogue, depicts alternative views. The prologue begins with the memory of the deep dystopian fracturing the father experiences when he sells his children. As he remembers this moment, like Joyce, he first thinks of the dire circumstances surrounding the "sensible" nature of his grievous decision (CR 23). Accordingly, the prologue begins: "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children. I remember" (CR 1). This memory of selling their "warm flesh" for "cold goods" "haunts" the father, and he describes this incident as a "shameful intercourse" (CR 1). Although the man and system that bought the children may view them as property, the father refuses to resign his children to defeat and, instead, vows always to "remember" them and forever listens for their voices among "the sundry restless voices" of many others who have also been subjected to a diasporan dystopia (CR 1). He recognizes that they are "beyond" the river and are diasporically "[b]roken-off, like limbs from a tree. But not lost" (CR 2). Even as the father recognizes his children's "lives [are] fractured," he maintains hope that they will strive to "[sink their] hopeful roots into difficult soil," and, as plants do, utilize osmotic integration in order to fill their lives with the nourishing sociability that will enable them to survive, grow, and find some measure of healing (CR 1).

Later, the epilogue presents the same father gazing across the ocean and expectantly waiting for music to be carried to him "across the water" so that he may listen to "the many-tongued chorus of a common memory," or the chorus of the "Lifeworld" (CR 235). The father is capable of registering the chorus comprised of the many languages spoken by people around the world because he is continually and intentionally "wait[ing]" in expectation for it to again "swell up" (CR 235). The expectation and hope allows for the recognition. As he listens to the collective



chorus, the father looks across space and time to those diasporically diffused by slavocracy among port cities once involved in the slave trade—cities located directly on an oceanic coast, surrounded by water, or constructed along a tributary leading to the sea. As the father’s omniscient eye travels the globe, he laments those who are struggling to grow in the midst of “difficult soil,” such as the “barefoot boy” in a “dying *favela*” (CR 235). He intertextually references and praises cultural, political, artistic, and local inspirations (with global reach) such as Carnival, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Toussaint L’Ouverture, Martin Luther King, Jr., Miles Davis, and “Mercy, Mercy Me (The Ecology)”—in short, people and things that have “survive[d] the hardships of the far bank” and are part of the greater, as he puts it, “All” (CR 235, 237). He declares this mass of diffused people to be “Survivors. In their diasporan souls a dream like steel” (CR 236). It is that determined dream that empowers them to fashion a life of integrative sociability out of diasporan origins.

Overall, the prologue and epilogue are perhaps *Crossing the River*’s most compelling representation of the Collective Atlantic. Through their omniscient gaze across the globe and their numerous intertextual references, the prologue and epilogue become an international narrative. They not only unify the interior narratives that supersede spatial and temporal boundaries, but they also pay tribute to the strides the world has taken, and is still taking, toward an increased sociability in the form of multiculturalism. They are not polar opposites with one focusing on integration and the other on diaspora. Instead, they echo each other as the osmotic or diffusive concept of one is intermingled within that of the other, and thereby illustrate the proximity of the Collective Atlantic’s utopian and dystopian experience, history, and effects. The novel’s opening and its close speak to the fundamental nature of slavocracy’s Collective Atlantic.

Both sections confirm: “There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return. . . . But they arrived on the far bank of the river, loved” (*CR* 237).

The lack of paths and signposts in water, specifically in the Collective Atlantic, emphasizes that there was neither a manual explaining how slavocracy should be conducted or how the enslaved, and later, freed men should approach the dystopia that is slavery, nor is there a guidebook explaining how to move forward from that historical, and yet very present, reality toward a more integrative healing. Furthermore, there is “no return” from both past and perpetuated diffusive diaspora. Nevertheless, though the past cannot be changed, the world can look ahead in hope to a “far[ther] bank” that may be reached by way of an intensified sociability of love, trust, and friendship.

Finally, the prologue and epilogue, as a pair, continually portray a father intentionally listening to “the chorus of a common memory” (*CR* 1). However, the father’s desire for this collective chorus goes beyond himself, for he wants to see it “swell” and move back and forth across the waters, across the many rivers of the novel, so that it may be heard by “All” (*CR* 1, 237). This is the essence of a collective “Lifeworld” that unifies the many people of the world just as the Collective Atlantic unifies the world within the shared history of slavocracy. The reader—of this novel and others—is not excluded from that “Lifeworld,” for as Johnson affirms, “[t]o read is to inhabit the role and real place of others” and, in this novel, to read is to become a part of the transcendent collective chorus—a chorus of local voices speaking to a global historic and present moment (*CR* 39).

## Why the Collective Atlantic?

If reading enables one to inhabit, or at least explore, the role, place, and narrative of others, then reading contemporary narratives of slavery through the lens of a Collective Atlantic should enable a fruitful exploration of a sea that is slavery, a freed slave who writes the history of a sunken slave ship, and a redemptive collective chorus. From the beginning, the interest in and goal of the Collective Atlantic has been to illuminate the genre's intricate engagement with slavocracy in terms of individual and communal experience on both a local and global scale. Throughout my initial readings of these novels, I recognized a recurrence of sea metaphors, but each metaphor appeared to depict the Atlantic in a strikingly different way. For example, *Feeding the Ghosts*' metaphor equating the sea with slavery seemed to be the complete opposite of *Crossing the River*'s metaphor equating the Atlantic, or global river(s), with a redemptive chorus. In time, I recognized that the sea was not the focus of the narratives; rather, the sea pointed to something larger: the shared history of slavocracy. The sea was merely the entry point into that history and served as a relevant and effective symbol.

Notably, while these texts inspired the Collective Atlantic, what most significantly helped to define the principles and goals of the hermeneutic was a less likely text: Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. Thus, I will now turn to a brief analysis of *A Mercy* as a means to move forward to the conclusion of this study. This fourth novel may seem a less intuitive Collective Atlantic choice, for it is less directly rooted in the Atlantic Ocean space. Yet, *A Mercy* could be considered the keystone of the Collective Atlantic, for in addition to clarifying my conceptualization of the overarching concept, the contextual focus of the novel also points to a need for a further fictional focus in contemporary narratives of slavery, or, perhaps, a need for a subgenre that adopts a historical context similar to that of this particular novel. *A Mercy* explores the early history of the

transatlantic slave trade, specifically the embryonic American colonies of the seventeenth century—a society of continually shifting borders between lands, nations, races, and masters and slaves. Here, Morrison engages the “beginnings” of the slave trade, rather than focusing, as many often do, on slavocracy at its height, in the midst of the abolition movement, or post-Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, Morrison highlights a need for more texts that courageously tackle the messy beginnings of a despotic system rife with mixed motives and intimate racial mixing. These early days of a still-emerging slavocracy system are particularly indicative of the proximity of utopia and dystopia as a New World society pursues a utopia of freedom, protection, and adventure and does so with both intentional and unintentional dystopic effects. Key to this time period is its collective experiences and ramifications as Europeans, Africans, Latina/os, Indigenous peoples, and those of the Caribbean encounter one another in a variety of fluctuating roles and in pursuit of opposing, but also often overlapping, goals. In short, *A Mercy* illustrates that slavocracy, in its beginnings, emerged from more intimate and proximate shifting relations between men, women, and children who crossed geographical, social, ethnic, and racial boundaries, particularly in the fluid, “[raw],” and “lawless” lands of North America where a man could be master one day and indentured laborer the next, or a woman could be a beloved, free daughter one day and an obliged servant the next (*AM* 13, 12).

If, as Charles Johnson suggests, to read is to inhabit the role and real place of others, then *A Mercy* encourages its readers to inhabit the many of slavocracy’s history. Its goal is not to remember or study one group, but to acknowledge all the ghosts of the haunting history, and it reimagines some of those in its diverse cast of characters. *A Mercy* presents the narrative of the

---

<sup>12</sup> The slave trade had been actively functioning since at least the mid-1400s. Thus, *A Mercy* may not be exploring slavery from the, frankly, untraceable moment it first began, but it does explore it at a much earlier time and from a much more collective and encompassing standpoint than many other contemporary narratives of slavery.

Vaark homestead: a household and farm comprised of a diverse cast of individuals who have been orphaned, sold, or enslaved, and who are brought together by the head of the estate, Jacob Vaark. The chapters of the novel give voice to each of the characters and narrate the characters' dynamic negotiations of complex acts of kindness or desperation rooted in exchanges of mercy or shame. The main character Florens's narrative weaves together those of the other characters, as it depicts her pursuit of self-awareness and understanding in the wake of what she views as rejection by those she has loved and trusted. The Atlantic Ocean does not serve as a central symbol, stage, or context in this particular contemporary narrative of slavery. Nevertheless, the Atlantic does serve as a necessary starting point or point of departure.

The narrative movement and trajectory of *A Mercy* is rooted in migration, particularly immigration to, and various settlings and movements within, an ever-changing New World involving both North America and the Caribbean. The human movement in the other three novels is predominantly rooted in the forced African diaspora of the triangular slave trade. The diffusive dispersal in *A Mercy* explores the journeys of impoverished orphans, daughters sold by their parents, exiled criminals, individuals disowned by their families, and sole survivors of decimated clans; it hones in on the forced transatlantic African diaspora only in its close. As Bénédicte Ledent suggests, diaspora and exile can “be an enriching experience both for individuals and the collectivity as a whole if taken not as a point of arrival but as a point of departure” and “in spite of its countless hazards” (*Caryl Phillips* 134).<sup>13</sup> A Collective Atlantic reading of *Feeding the Ghosts*, *Middle Passage*, and *Crossing the River* engages a kaleidoscopic view of the memory and history of slavocracy at the height of the system and amidst its gradual

---

<sup>13</sup> These types of human movement are, of course, different. This is not meant to synonymize them, but to note that the dispersal of people(s) can be viewed as a point of departure as it initiates a process that leads somewhere—geographically and/or interpersonally. As mentioned previously, diaspora is not anti-utopian, for a possibility of a future, of some kind, remains.

abolishment. A Collective Atlantic reading of *A Mercy*, however, enables a kaleidoscopic view of an emerging plantation economy during the inchoate days of New World slavocracy. When taken as a point of departure, as it is in *A Mercy*, migration becomes “the motor of social change and the leaven of culture” (Thomas Fiehrer, qtd. in Lemelle 57). Such an approach highlights the mixed experiences of integration and alienation among settlers, exiles, slaves, impoverished, and free in the New World, and thereby emphasizes that the New World was neither a straightforward utopia for landowning Europeans nor a determinate dystopia for enslaved Africans.

The orphaned, exiled, and exchanged of the novel are collected on American soil by way of crossings over the Atlantic Ocean or American rivers, but the discussion of these crossings, if present at all, serves more of a contextual purpose than it does in the others of this study. Jacob Vaark, the farmer who effectively brings together the complex amalgamation of masters and slaves on his homestead, crosses the Atlantic from Amsterdam to the New World, but the crossing is never described. The focus, instead, is on the “ratty orphan become landowner[’s]” attempts at “making a place out of no place, a temperate living from raw life” (*AM* 13).<sup>14</sup> Jacob’s English wife, Rebekka, crosses the Atlantic both “sickened by it and desperate for it,” for her crossing frees her of the family who, tired of her “rebellious mouth,” quickly responds to a proxy marriage inquiry and sells her to an unknown man across the sea largely for the relief of feeding her (*AM* 85, 86). Marked by this tainted exchange, Rebekka initially fears the nature of the unknown man who has purchased her hand in marriage, but when she discovers him to be a kind

---

<sup>14</sup> This reference to “no place” could be an allusion to the Greek meaning of the word “utopia,” and thereby the utopian qualities and possibilities of the New World that were widely advertised during this time.

man, the affection-starved woman “munche[s]” any kindness, “[h]owever slight,” like a hungry rabbit (*AM* 113).

Lina and Sorrow, too, cross unspecified rivers and seas into the unknown when, at a young age, they lose their clans and families in their entirety. Soon after, both women are rescued by kind and compassionate European settlers. Soldiers rescue Lina from the banks of a lake where her family has been decimated by disease; a sawyer’s family rescues Sorrow from the banks of the ocean where her ship and onboard family foundered. Despite these initial acts of kindness, the Presbyterian family that took in Lina later sells her, and the sawyer family that cared for Sorrow seeks to rid themselves of her once the parents take notice of their sons’ sexual interest in the mentally addled girl. Jacob purchases Lina and accepts Sorrow into his care. Later, he brings the enslaved Florens into the fold when he chooses, in response to her pleading mother, to receive her as a partial payment on the debt owed to him by her master, Señor D’Ortega. Under the protection of Reverend Father, Florens journeys on water from D’Ortega’s plantation to Jacob’s farm. This exchange deeply marks Florens, and throughout the novel she struggles with what she views as rejection and abandonment by those she loves most. Thus, through a number of exchanges, Jacob acquires women from a variety of situations, origins, and races: an unwanted English daughter, a lone-surviving female “native,” a “mongrelized” and orphaned young woman, and an enslaved girl seemingly given up by her mother (*AM* 55, 142).

Taken together, these women and Jacob comprise a motley of orphans—sold, exiled, or abandoned, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Furthermore, through these main characters’ interactions with others, the narrative reveals that the early settlers of North America were of similarly fractured and diasporic origins, such as the increasingly indebted D’Ortega’s, the outcast Widow Ealing and daughter Jane, the “exiled, thrown-away women” who travel across

the Atlantic alongside Rebekka, and the foundling Malaik (*AM* 96). These characters represent individuals and families who came or were brought to North America in pursuit of peace and plenty, but encountered loss and alienation.

This collection of characters, as well as their histories and narratives, provides a broader recovery of the peoples impacting and impacted by the early history of the Atlantic slave trade; it re-presents a more “mongrelized” cast of characters of the inchoate days of historical slavocracy. The “mongrelized” collection clearly depicts “[s]ix English” and “one native” working in the tobacco fields alongside “twelve [Africans] by way of Barbados”; and even as the novel describes Scully and Willard being strung along during their pursuit of manumission, it also presents a free black from New Amsterdam who has always worked for profit as a blacksmith (*AM* 174). In so doing, *A Mercy* depicts an early seventeenth century North American farming economy that both meets and supersedes common understandings of an emerging plantation economy. While the Black Atlantic focuses on a more specific geographical area and people closely tied to Europe and Africa, *A Mercy* seeks to move beyond the dualist ties to a more encompassing collective. A Collective Atlantic reading of the text reveals that the novel illustrates the enslavement of diasporan Africans and their descendants as it also illustrates the subordination, via labor, money, marriage, servitude, etc., of other peoples, nations, and races surrounding the Atlantic.

In the novel, this subordination is clearest among those on Jacob’s estate. While Jacob and Rebekka appear to have a loving, supportive, and affectionate marriage, their marriage is initiated via a monetary exchange and in response to Jacob’s desire for a wife who would “[see] to his needs” and fulfill “chores in a land completely strange to her”; in short, Jacob understands the act of “taking over the patroonship” as “require[ing] a wife” (*AM* 23). Simultaneously,



Rebekka's "prospects" in England are limited to "servant, prostitute, [or] wife" (*AM* 91). Her desire to be a wife (of the options available to her), her distaste for her mother's religious fervor "fueled by a wondrous hate," and her lack of protection by her father lead her to view her marriage to Jacob as a kindness and a mercy (*AM* 86). Similarly, while taking in Lina and Sorrow is, on some level, an act of mercy, and does provide some measure of security to the orphaned women, this compassion is paralleled by Jacob's expectation that the women work as servants indebted to him. Thus, these acts of compassion on the part of Jacob are also rooted in his selfish desires and needs as well as the desperate (in terms of lack of protection or provision) states of the women.<sup>15</sup>

Such a complex state is also true of Florens, and her complexity is crucial to the foundation of the novel and a Collective Atlantic reading of the text, for in her the proximity of utopian and dystopian possibility is particularly evident and it propels the narrative progression. One of the events that instigates the rising action of the narrative is Florens's exchange from the hands of Señor D'Ortega to the hands of Jacob Vaark, and this exchange is influenced, at least in part, by her mother urgently pleading to Jacob: "Please, Senhor. Not me. Take her. Take my daughter" (*AM* 30). Although Florens is not privy to these whispered words, this transition profoundly impacts her, primarily because she understands it to be a matriarchal rejection that is rooted in her mother's preference for her son. Throughout the novel, Florens sadly reflects on the moments right before the sale is settled, and she remembers that she was "peering around [her]

---

<sup>15</sup> My use of "selfishness" includes, but is not limited to, its negative connotation. Furthermore, a feminist reading or a discussion of whether or not these women are in need of such provision is outside of the scope of this project. I do not mean to suggest that male protection and provision is always a necessity; such a statement is simply in accordance with the ethos of the text. Of all the female characters in the novel, Lina appears to be most capable of caring for herself. However, fearing Rebekka's death, even Lina admits, "Sorrow, a newborn, and maybe Florens—three unmastered women and an infant out here, alone, belonging to no one, became wild game for anyone" (*AM* 68).

mother's dress hoping for her hand that is only for her little boy" (*AM* 160). Florens forever carries around this fracture within her. She views it as an active abandonment; hence, the sale disintegrates her from her family both geographically and emotionally. However, as the close of the novel indicates, her mother's plea is actually one of desperation, akin to the "desperate foolishness" of *Crossing the River*. Florens's mother, the *minha mãe*, views Jacob's deliberation over accepting a slave as her "one chance" (*AM* 195). Looking at the two men, Jacob and D'Ortega, the mother thinks, "There is no protection but there is difference" (*AM* 195). The *minha mãe* sees in Jacob a man who views Florens as "a human child, not pieces of eight" (*AM* 195). Although his acceptance of Florens will separate the child from her mother's protection, as the folklore woven throughout the novel indicates, a mother bird's protection can be thwarted by a selfish and thieving man or monkey. So, while protection may not be guaranteed in either scenario, difference is guaranteed, even if that difference is only in terms of the identity of the master. Therefore, the exchange Florens views as a dystopic rejection, her mother views as a desperate necessity; subsequently, the *minha mãe* welcomes Jacob's decision to take Florens as an act of "mercy" (*AM* 195). Yet, Jacob views the exchange as contemptible, and he accedes rather begrudgingly, thinking, "God help me if this is not the most wretched business" (*AM* 31).

Despite this reluctance and his earlier assertion that "[f]lesh was not his commodity," the close of this chapter presents a man whose appetite for slave ownership has been whet (*AM* 25). Following his time at D'Ortega's and the exchange of Florens, Jacob begins to dream of a "grand house of many rooms rising on a hill above the fog," and he begins to view "a remote labor force in Barbados" as the key to his social mobility and accumulation of wealth (*AM* 41, 40). Although Jacob finds great distaste in a local slave labor force, he comes to believe "there was a profound difference between the intimacy of slave bodies at Jublio [D'Ortega's estate] and a

remote labor force” in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean (*AM* 40). As it was for the *minha mãe*, a “difference” in context is key in the pursuit of a better future for one’s self and one’s family.

As this brief narrative snapshot indicates, one moment can be pivotal in the lives of many, even as it is interpreted in refractory ways by those involved. Only the reader is privy to the intersubjectivity and complexity of a moment that brings dystopian fracture to one, utopian hope to another, and a reluctant mercy that soon breeds a new desensitization in yet another. Such moments abound in *A Mercy* and their complexity is only heightened by their context: the “raw” lands of a new world ruled by “lawless laws” and at the mercy of “pitched battles for God, king and land” (*AM* 13, 12, 12). As the exiled, orphaned, and enslaved characters attempt to navigate and negotiate the “precarious” society of the developing New World, their choices, challenges, and experiences paint a picture in which one individual is neither wholly evil or despotic, nor wholly good or compassionate, as evident in the merciful master Jacob Vaark, who saves orphans, but keeps them as servants, and who detests the business of flesh, but then acquires a remote labor force so that he may achieve his impractical dream of a mansion rivaling that of D’Ortega’s (*AM* 12). As David Gates attests, “Except for a slimy Portuguese slave trader [D’Ortega], no character in the novel is wholly evil, and even he’s more weak and contemptible than mustache-twirlingly villainous. Nor are the characters we root for particularly saintly”—such as Lina who lavishes love and attention on a maternally-starved Florens, but who also may have drowned Sorrow’s newborn baby.

Therefore, what was and is so inspiring about *A Mercy* is that it calls into question (1) preconceived notions of an early America established by hearty settlers in pursuit of utopian ideals as well as (2) common understandings of an emerging slavocracy limited to North

America and an imported African labor force, and, subsequently, it encourages the reader to re-view that history via a more kaleidoscopic scrutiny. *A Mercy* depicts an early America settled by exiles, orphans, and servants and whose early laws encouraged, not always liberty, but also “cruelty in exchange for common cause” (*AM* 12). Similarly, it depicts an emerging slavocracy that extends beyond the Colonies, is perpetuated not only by the wealthy, but also by the “common people,” such as the Vaarks, and is built upon a labor force of Africans, English, Native Americans, orphans, the mentally ill, and others (*AM* 103).<sup>16</sup> By complicating and upending more straightforward notions of the realities and history of slavocracy, *A Mercy* encourages the reader to re-view that history in pursuit of a more collective understanding of its peoples and its complexities. Consequently, the novel inspired a similar goal in the Collective Atlantic: to remember collectively slavocracy’s haunting history via a more kaleidoscopic scrutiny of how the purportedly utopian intentions of an international history and slavocracy system were influenced by and comprised of millions of utopic and dystopic moments that fed one of the greatest social hauntings and despotic dystopias of our time.

Following the inspiration of *Feeding the Ghosts*, *Middle Passage*, and *Crossing the River*, *A Mercy* clarifies the import and values of the Collective Atlantic as its context, plot, characters, and structure illustrates the very kaleidoscopic view of slavocracy the hermeneutic seeks to illuminate and promote. In so doing, *A Mercy* demonstrates that a worthwhile application of the Collective Atlantic lens is not limited to narratives steeped into sea. While the sea was the starting point of the Collective Atlantic, the sea does not have to be its limiting end. Collectively,

---

<sup>16</sup> This collective approach is not, by any means, intended to minimize the African experience of slavocracy or subsequent African-American legacy; it is indebted to studies that have taken that history as their focus, such as *The Black Atlantic*. The Collective Atlantic, and its kaleidoscopic focus, merely seeks to add to a greater conversation. The Black Atlantic is the Collective Atlantic’s point of departure, but the Collective Atlantic is not, of course, a point of arrival.

these works are significant because of their commitment to recreate slavery's transcultural experience and ramifications in unexpected ways. These texts do not shy away from showcasing the horrors of slavery; and yet, neither do they shy away from imagining people striving to create pockets of beauty, love, and solidarity in the midst of a very dystopian reality. What I find most profound about these texts is that they represent something worth respecting, celebrating, and/or admiring within one of the world's most "shameful" and "haunt[ing]" histories (CR 1).

In light of this, I submit that the Collective Atlantic can be a useful hermeneutic for this particular genre because it encourages the reader to confront both the dystopian and, perhaps less commonly discussed, utopian realities of slavocracy at sea and on land. It encourages the reader to acknowledge that utopia and dystopia are not polar opposites, but, in fact, exist in a proximity to one another that is ever-changing and is often closer than one might expect. This analysis of the novels' utopian and dystopian actualizations should then enable the connection of diverse experiences and refracted interpretations of slavery, or a kaleidoscopic re-presentation of slavocracy's dystopian diffusion and utopian integration.

The ultimate goal of the Collective Atlantic is that it would serve as a present lens mediating between the past and future, so that present readers may collectively remember a past despotic dystopia in order to envision a more utopian future of communal remembrance, as *Feeding the Ghosts* would have it, intersubjective existence, as *Middle Passage* would have it, integration and choral uplift, as *Crossing the River* would have it, and "ruth" or compassion, as *Mercy* would have it (AM 189). In a contemporary society that is otherwise so often rooted in constructs of individuality, such as personal subjectivity and self-agency, it is important to pause, reflect, and recognize that life is, has been, and will continue to be an intersubjective experience, even if many societies have departed from the more communal kinship structures, such as that of

the Allmuseri. Nevertheless, if we are ever truly to face historical slavocracy, bring healing to one of the greatest social hauntings that has ever existed, and envision a more socially integrative society, we must, as these contemporary narratives of slavery and the Collective Atlantic illustrate, do so in greater solidarity.

## Works Cited

- Bassard, Katherine Clay. "Imagining Other Worlds: Race, Gender, and the 'Power Line' in Edward P. Jones's 'The Known World.'" *African American Review* 42.3/4 (Fall – Winter 2008): 407-419. *JSTOR*. Web. 01 November 2013.
- Baucom, Ian. "Specters of the Atlantic." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.1 (Winter 2001): 61-82. *Project Muse*. Web. 13 May 2014.
- . *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Durham: Duke, 2005. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Byerman, Keith. *Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2005. Print.
- Claeys, Gregory. "News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia." *History* 98.330 (2013): 145-173. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 07 March 2014.
- . *Searching for Utopia: The History of an Idea*. New York: Thames & Hudson Limited, 2011. Print.
- Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1997. Google Books.
- "Collective." OED Online. September 2014. Oxford. Web. 06 November 2014.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print.

- Craps, Stef. "Learning to Live With Ghosts: Postcolonial Haunting and Mid-Mourning in David Dabydeen's 'Turner' and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*." *Callaloo* 33.2 (2010): 467-475. *Project Muse*. Web. 20 October 2013.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory*. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1997. Google Books.
- D'Aguiar, Fred. *Feeding the Ghosts*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- "Diffusion, n." OED Online. September 2013. Oxford. Web. 13 May 2014.
- Durix, Carole Froude. "Anonymity, Naming and Memory in Fred d'Aguiar's 'Feeding the Ghosts': Islands of Fiction in a Sea of History." *Commonwealth* 21.1 (1998): 47-54. *Periodicals Archive Online*. Web. 20 October 2013.
- Gates, David. "Original Sins." *The New York Times* 28 November 2008. Web.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. "Social Understanding and the Inscription of Self." *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*. Ed. James W. Stigler, Richard A. Shweder, and Gilbert Herdt. New York: Cambridge, 1990. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1993. Print.
- Gonzales, Rhonda M. "No Friends in the Holy Office: Black and Mulatta Women Healing Communities and Answering to the Inquisition in Seventeenth Century Mexico." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6.1 (2013): 1-19. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 06 November 2014.
- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.



- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia, 1994. 392-403. Print.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. "Seduction and the Ruses of Power." *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. 79-112.
- Haslett, Beth Bonniwell. *Communicating and Organizing in Context: The Theory of Structural Interaction*. New York: Routledge, 2012. Google Books.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984. Print.
- Johnson, Charles. *Being & Race: Black Writing since 1970*. Bloomington: Indiana, 1988. Print.
- . *Middle Passage*. New York: Scribner, 1990. Print.
- Joseph, Suad. "Fieldwork and Psychosocial Dynamics of Personhood." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 13.2 (1993): 9-32. *JSTOR*. Web. 23 November 2014.
- Keizer, Arlene. "'The Middle Passage Never Gessed Its End': New World Slavery in Contemporary Literatures." *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2004. 1-20.
- Ledent, Bénédicte. *Caryl Phillips*. Manchester: Manchester University, 2002. Print.
- . "'Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories': Cross-Culturality in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 30.55 (1995): 55-62. *SAGE*. Web. 9 November 2013.
- . "Remembering Slavery: History as Roots in the Fiction of Caryl Phillips and Fred D'Aguiar." *The Contact and the Culmination: Essays in Honour of Hena Maes-Jelinek*. PDF. Web. 12 September 2014.

- Lemelle, Sidney. "The 'Circum-Caribbean' and the Continuity of Cultures: The Donato Colony in Mexico, 1830-1860." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6.1 (2013): 57-75. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 06 November 2014.
- Lenz, Günter. "Middle Passages: Histories, Re-Memories, and Black Diasporas in Novels by Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, and Caryl Phillips." *Crabtracks: Progress and Process in Teaching the New Literatures in English*. Eds. Gordon Collier and Frank Schulze-Engler. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2002. 235-252. Print.
- Levitas, Ruth. *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- Little, Jonathan, and Charles Johnson. "An Interview with Charles Johnson." *Contemporary Literature* 34.2 (Summer 1993): 159-181. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 October 2014.
- Machado Saez, Elena. "Dictating Desire, Dictating Diaspora: Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as Foundational Romance." *Contemporary Literature* 52.3 (2011): 522-555. *Project Muse*. Web. 13 May 2014.
- Mitchell, Angelyn. "Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of Slavery in Octavia E. Butler's 'Kindred.'" *Confronting Exiles*. Spec. issue of *MELUS* 26.3 (Autumn 2001): 51-75. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 August 2013.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. *Seeing Through Race*. Cambridge: Harvard, 2012. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. *A Mercy*. New York: Vintage Books, 2008. Print.
- Nelson, Alissa Jones. "Job in Conversation with Edward Said." *SBL: Society of Biblical Literature*. n.p., n.d. Web. 29 October 2014.
- "Osmosis, n." *OED Online*. September 2013. Oxford. Web. 13 May 2014.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1982.

Google Books.

Phillips, Caryl. *Crossing the River*. New York: Vintage International, 1993. Print.

Rediker, Marcus Buford. *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. New York: Penguin Group, 2007.

Print.

Rushdy, Ashraf, H. A. "The Phenomenology of the Allmuseri: Charles Johnson and the Subject of the Narrative of Slavery." *African American Review* 26.3 (Autumn 1992): 373-394.

JSTOR. Web. 08 October 2014.

Said, Edward. "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals." *The Edward Said Reader*. Eds.

Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin. New York: Vintage Books, 2000. Google Books.

"Sphaeriker." *The Dictionary of Philosophy*. Ed. Dagobert D. Runes. New York: Kensington

Publishing Corp., 2001. Google Books.

Steinberg, Marc. "Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*: Fictionalizing History and Historicizing Fiction." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 45.4 (Winter 2003): 375-390. JSTOR.

Web. 13 May 2014.

Stuart, Andrea. *Sugar in the Blood: A Family's Story of Slavery and Empire*. New York: Alfred

A. Knopf, 2012. Print.

Sweet, James H. *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2011. Print.

Taylor-Guthrie, D. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. Print.

Walkowitz, Rebecca. "The Location of Literature: The transnational book and the migrant writer." *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Richard J. Lane. New York: Routledge, 2013. 918-929. Print.

Weir, Allison. *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Google Books.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

Jalaine Weller is a Master's degree candidate in the English and American Literature program at the University of Texas at El Paso. Prior to pursuing her M.A. degree, she received her B.A. in English at Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, Tennessee. During her time at UTEP, Jalaine served as a Teaching Assistant for the English department, where she taught freshman-level Rhetoric and Composition; had the honor of a research assistantship with Dr. Ezra Cappell and the Inter-American Jewish Studies Program; and served as the Graduate Student English Association's Treasurer. In addition, she was the first graduate student to apply for and receive research support through the Mimi Reisel Gladstein Professorship in American Literature. Jalaine's research interests include African American literature, particularly the legacy of slavocracy in nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American literature, as well as utopian and dystopian theory in relation to that literature. Recently, she has becoming increasingly interested in the earlier, incipient days of slavery across the Americas. In the future, Jalaine hopes to study connections between visual art and African American literature. Upon her graduation, Jalaine will receive a number of awards and honors including: the Dean's Office "Centennial Banner Bearer," the English Department's "Outstanding Graduate Student in English and American Literature," and the "Outstanding Service to Inter-American Jewish Studies" honor.