SCAPES: KEYNOTE SPEECHES FROM THE 37TH ANNUAL WEST INDIAN LITERATURE CONFERENCE, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI, 2018

Shipscapes: Imagining an Ocean of Space

Dedicated to Sir Wilson Harris 1921–2018

Elizabeth DeLoughrey

UCLA, US

deloughrey@humnet.ucla.edu

On the occasion of the 37th Annual West Indian Literature Conference held at the University of Miami in 2018, Elizabeth DeLoughrey reflects on the work of Sir Wilson Harris, among others, while exploring Caribbean shipscapes, particularly how the visual and literary arts imagine an “ocean of space.”

Keywords: sacred; ships; Transatlantic; globalization; Caribbean Studies

It's a great honor to be invited to speak at this conference dedicated to exploring a global Caribbean Studies through “scapes” of the imagination. Hew Locke's installation—*For Those in Peril on the Sea*—which is on view here at the Pérez Art Museum Miami, encapsulates many of the themes I want to explore with you today in this voyage through Caribbean shipscapes, particularly how the visual and literary arts imagine an “ocean of space.”

Figure 1: Hew Locke, *For Those in Peril on the Sea*, 2011. Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami, 2011.
Courtesy of Daniel Azoulay, photographer.

If you had not already noticed from my title, I take my inspiration from the work of one of the Caribbean's most visionary writers, Sir Wilson Harris, whose work inspired my decision more than 20 years ago to pursue this field. Although he recently passed away, he continues to challenge and deepen my understanding of what he called the “unfinished genesis of the imagination,” and the “carnival twinships” that allow us to envision the generative power of “cross-cultural space” (Harris 71). I owe a great debt to him and dedicate this talk to his living memory, his ongoing presence as an ancestor in the “living fabric” of a cosmos he recognized in “*unfathomable kinships*,” (43) human and otherwise.

The canoe anchored on the beach that you see in figure two is a photo of a postcard I received from Harris

Figure 2: Wilson Harris postcard, 2002.

during a correspondence we had over a number of years in the early 2000s. I was trying to understand his concept of the ship as *temenos*, or sacred space, and today I would like to return to those questions I once posed to him and try to decipher his responses. The word *temenos* is Greek and its etymology means to cut off or sever; the concept is that the ship becomes a sacred place in an otherwise profane or tumultuous seascape. So this essay will voyage—in a nonlinear way—through multiple shipscales, from what Harris termed the “dream ship” up, eventually, to the scale of our ‘Earthship.’

This attention to multiple scales is intrinsic to allegory, as well as the complex dimensionality of Harris’ representation of space. He was unique in Caribbean thought for weaving together the historical materiality of the sailing ship (slave ship, colonial vessel) to narrative (the ship of craft), in a quantum simultaneity with the ship as sanctuary and sacrament. I want to hold all of these quantum dimensions in play, even as I am acutely aware of the way in which the ship increasingly represents an ongoing global refugee crisis which is often linked directly to climate change. While writing this paper I watched Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley’s passionate address to the United Nations, in which she dropped her prepared script to speak powerfully about the ways in which an unprecedented number of hurricanes are pummeling small island states in the Caribbean and worldwide. She left the meeting to attend to the crisis in Barbados, warning suggestively that our 20th-century concepts of national belonging, which we’ll call here the ‘citizen ship’ need to be reconfigured in an 21st-century global crisis in which vulnerable states are, quite literally, sinking.

Our conference organizers have encouraged us to think about Arjun Appadurai’s work on “scapes” as a logic to understand a global Caribbean Studies that draws its inspirations from literature. Writing in the mid-1990s at the height of globalization studies, Appadurai’s well-known book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* identified five indices of the image and the imaginary: the ethnoscape, technoscape, mediascape, financescape, and the ideoscape. I’m particularly interested in how he, an anthropologist, foregrounded the vital work of the imagination because, in this seemingly apocalyptic era of capitalist instrumentality, state violence, and ecological collapse, articulating the creative work of the arts and humanities seems all the more essential. Appadurai argued:

The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes ... the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency and globally defined fields of possibility ... The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (31)¹

Like many of the Caribbean scholars who came before him, such as C.L.R. James, Sylvia Wynter, Kamau Brathwaite, Sidney Mintz, and Harris, Appadurai was theorizing how new relations of global capital were

¹ Appadurai understood these as “fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics,” (33).

structuring, and being structured by, the image, the imagined, and the imaginary. But I'd argue that they are not as new to "global cultural practices" as he claimed. These relationships, as many theorists of Caribbean modernity have already argued, are disjunctive, overlapping, often contradictory—hallmarks of an "irruptive" modernity² (as Glissant would have it) known far earlier in the region than in other places in the world. Moreover, Appadurai's concept of the imaginary is disembodied—something I will complicate when I turn to Caribbean shipscapes that figure the ship as animate vessel or body.

"The suffix-*scape* allows us to point to the *fluid*, irregular shapes of these landscapes," (33) Appadurai has written, but the call for papers for this gathering encourages us to expand his landscapes of modernity to think in more liquid terms, which are more fitting for Caribbean ecologies and histories.³ Our organizers have suggested "waterscapes," and others presenting at this conference are theorizing "seascapes" and "stormscapes." In a suggestive turn towards the ecological relationship between people and place, the call for papers proposes that a global Caribbean "scape" might be found in Brathwaite's concept of "tidalectics," representing an engagement with the rhythmic oceanic movement between land and sea.⁴ That movement is both imaginative and material, most often depicted by Caribbean writers and artists through the image of the ship, a complex vehicle for metaphors of globalization, violence, and mourning as well as an allegory for the domestic writ large, whether as a nation or a people.

What would it mean to take Harris's theory of what he called the "cross-cultural imagination" and place it in a dialogue with Caribbean "shipscapes?" The voyage I chart here will move from the ship as a communal vehicle that ushers the past into the present, understood as a "dream ship," the ship as a vessel or body; the ship as metaphor for artistic "craft;" and the ship as *temenos*, or sacred/sanctuary space that fuels the vehicle of the imagination. Ultimately, Harris feminized the ship as female and as a goddess, ultimately bringing us to thinking of the Earth as 'Mothership.'

Harris' work is incredibly challenging because he writes in the non-linear, non-realist mode that he argued was integral to decolonizing the materialist bias of colonial knowledge production and discourse. In his words, "Progressive realism erases the past. It consumes the present and it may very well abort the future with its linear bias" (Harris 72). His ideas are not easily condensed for the extractive work of literary criticism or the materialist and human-centered work of Caribbean Studies. While he authored over 24 novels (published by Faber & Faber) and seven essay collections, won the Guyana Prize for literature, and was knighted by the Queen of England, his work remains enigmatic, not to say largely neglected in Caribbean and Anglophone literary studies. Only a handful of people attended his Edgar Mittelholzer lectures in Guyana in 1970. His challenge to the methods of materialist frames of post-plantation realism rendered his cross-cultural and quantum historical methods rather anachronistic. Along with Brathwaite, he warned that a materialist frame for reading plantation histories would be both "tool and tomb" of an interpretive method (Brathwaite 4) and argued instead to seek intuitive densities in time and space. His turn to the psyche, to a topography that "breaches the human-centered cosmos," (Harris 49) and to the resources of the *unconscious* has not been easily translatable into a context in which we are urged, with good reason, to "stay woke."

Harris would not argue with the imperative to stay woke, I believe, but he would also direct us to the intuitive, an unknowable sentience characterized by the more-than-human. He has written extensively of the "intuitive fossils" he has found in the Guyanese landscape, in the region's violent history, and in his own writing. I see his postcard as one of those fossils. I think these clues might be excavated to have a better sense of the diversity of Caribbean intellectual thought, as well as locating an important antecedent to the speculative fiction that characterizes the younger generation of the region's writers. Thus the "quantum imagination" that he pioneered—or rekindled from his historiographic and imaginative engagement with Caribbean pasts—provides a vital foundation for the imaginative trajectories of contemporary literature. To Harris, the quantum imagination is both form and content—it refers to the active distortion of linear time so that multiple events may simultaneously exist in a (narrative) space that is also moving and sentient (DeLoughrey, "Quantum Landscapes" 62–82).

² Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Translated by J. Michael Dash, University of Virginia Press, 1989.

³ In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai states, "These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would like to call the imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (33).

⁴ As I've argued elsewhere, tidalectics foreground historical trajectories of migrancy and dispersal as well as settlement and sedimentation. They engage local space in relation to temporal duration.
See DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. U of Hawai'i P, 2007.

Harris's insistence on "the necessity of cross-culturality" is best explained in an interview he gave with his fellow-Guyanese author, Fred D'Aguiar:

Cross-culturality is an opening to a true and variant universality of a blend of parts we can never wholly encompass, though when we become aware of them we may ceaselessly strive for an open unity that they offer. In this quantum way we may forestall the tyranny of one-sided being.

In this passage we see that the cross-cultural imagination is a process rather than product, engages with theories of alterity and difference, and provides what Brathwaite might call a tidalectic rather than dialectical telos, which is to say a non-linear engagement that does not synthesize into homogeneity. Although he has famously declared the revolutionary way his experience as a surveyor in the Guyanese rainforest changed his relationship to time, space, and language, I want to draw out another, more oceanic thread, in the "fabric of the imagination" that Harris wove for nearly seventy decades. He has long engaged the mutually entangled and constitutive relationship between space and language, and has perhaps written more than any other West Indian author on what he called "the unfinished genesis of the imagination." Nearly every novel Harris published features some kind of ship or voyaging vessel that may become beached, sink, and will rise again, sometimes centuries later. He wrote extensively about the allegory of the ship in the work of Herman Melville, Edgar Allen Poe, Joseph Conrad, and in epics like *The Odyssey*. With essay collections such as *The Womb of Space: the Cross-Cultural Imagination* (1983) and *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks* (1992), Harris has perhaps the most developed vocabulary of what he has variously termed the "subjective imagination," (11) the "intuitive imagination," (114) the "underworld imagination," (160) the "limbo imagination," (153) the "arts of the imagination," (11) and the "depth-imagination".⁵ Concepts of depth are thought by some scholars to arise from oceanic engagement. Here, I want to explore how the ship stands in as a vehicle for this "depth-imagination" and turn to the peopled shipscape as an allegory for Caribbean origins and a sacred, communal vehicle for the future.

Turning to Harris' work we can see the ways in which Caribbean history is spatialized, particularly in the tidalectic relationship between ocean and ship. In Caribbean literature, history, and arts, the Atlantic has long been understood as a cultural and material space, a graveyard for the ancestors, and an abyss or rupture in cultural continuity. "The parameters of renascence or the re-birth of the Imagination are steeped in the peculiarities of a shared Wound. The Wound becomes a living doorway into the past as much as into the healing Shadow and anatomy of the future" (Rowell 198). Harris refers to this as a "shared wound" and a place of the "limbo imagination"⁶ whereas poet Guyanese poet Grace Nichols has inscribed this in gendered/generative terms as the "middle passage womb" (5). Writers of the Indian diaspora such as Ramabai Espinet (Trinidad) inscribe crossing *kala pani* or the dark waters in similarly traumatic, but also transformative terms, as "a passage into death and sickness and unending labour, and into a light that was the present" (Espinet 284). The historical experience of wound and womb feminizes space and raises the possibilities of future imaginings in what Harris would call the "memory theatre" (Harris 15).⁷ In fact, one of Harris' characters asks in his novel *Dark Jester*, "How does vulnerability become a window into embodiments of eternity?" (Harris x) This is a similar question raised by Edouard Glissant in the opening of *Poetics of Relation*, in that the vulnerability and wound of history opens up a boundless relationship to time and space. It is that sense of eternal time, and the recuperation of what Harris calls a "lost body [...]" whose drift in the tides of history is likely to prove [...] of momentous significance in a renascence of the depth-imagination."⁸

As I've discussed in *Routes and Roots*, the Atlantic in this regard is understood as an unmarked grave site, and memorializing the enormity of loss for the millions who crossed its expanse has particular material

⁵ Harris, Wilson. "The Open Door". *Journal of Modern Literature* 20, no. 1, 7–12, Summer 1996.

⁶ According to Harris in "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," *Explorations, A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966–1981*, the limbo dance, "born, as it is said, on the slave ships of the Middle Passage" (157), resonates with the deity Legba, encoding a "pun on limbo as a shared phantom limb" for diasporic communities seeking to re-member the losses of the crossing. Harris, Wilson. "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas." *Explorations, A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966–1981*, Edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek. Dangaroo Press, 1981.

Katherine McKittrick more recently argues in *Demonic Grounds* that "Technologies of transportation, in this case the ship, while materially and ideologically enclosing black subjects—economic objects inside and often bound to the ship's walls—also contribute to the formation of an oppositional geography: the ship as a location of black subjectivity and human terror, black resistance, and in some cases, black possession" (x–xi).

⁷ Harris examines the "buried resources in the trauma that have afflicted the entire American cosmos" in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*. Edited by Andrew Bundy. Routledge, 1999.

⁸ Harris, Wilson. "Oedipus and the Middle Passage". *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*. Edited by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek, Rodopi, 1990.

challenges. First, the perpetual mobility of ocean currents means that we cannot localize its waters as an experienced place and thus poses ontological challenges. In fact, geographers have argued that the ocean is not so much a place than a force (Steinberg 156–169). Secondly, we have no longitudinal archive of where enslaved Africans leapt or were thrown overboard. This poses a representational challenge because of an oceanic archive that lacks the place-based narrative and rituals for memorialization. Architectures of stone, metal, or ritual cycles of return to specific places render abstract space into inhabited and even sacred place. In the wake of this spatial challenge, the Anglophone region's authors ranging from Derek Walcott, John Hearne, Patricia Powell, NourbeSe Philip, D'Aguiar, Espinet, Nichols, and others have created a place or memorial through poetic language, imaginatively peopling the seabed, the slave or indentureship, or conjuring the lost souls from the ocean floor in a process Philip refers to in *Zong!* as "*ex-aqua*" (202). So in that sense, what Harris refers to as the "dream-ship" becomes the quantum experience of history as language or the book itself.

The allegory of the ship is integral to what Glissant refers to as "melancholic transatlantic crossings" (144) that engage a novel epistemology of ocean time and space. Thus theorizing the transoceanic ship entails not only a profound spatial challenge, but an engagement with non-linear time.⁹ Harris has written of the generative possibilities of the limbo spaces of the slave ships, and he challenges the linear drive of empire that the colonial ship would initially seem to represent. But to Harris, the experience of nonconventional writing allows us "arrive backward even as we voyage forwards" due to a quantum "simultaneity in the imagination" (Rowell 180). This challenge to conventional literary form foregrounds the experience of simultaneous, generational temporality in which "future time is the mother of past time in the sense that the past never dies and may release us from an oppressive, dead hand upon us" (198).

Throughout Caribbean writing, we can interpret the ship as a material and historical object as well as an allegory for the people of diverse geographical and cultural origins. While Harris raises questions about the form of allegory, he wrote most fluidly in this genre, arguing that it was integral for the non-realist, non-linear "depth-imagination" (21).¹⁰ Allegory is known for its embeddedness in history (time), its construction of a world system (space), and its signification practices in which the particular figures for the general, the local for the global. In his work on Herman Melville, C.L.R. James argued that the ship is a world, and other Caribbean writers ranging from George Lamming to Derek Walcott would likely agree. Christina Sharpe has written powerfully that "The haunt of the ship envelops and persists in the contemporary" (Sharpe 60). Formally we might connect this to allegory, a genre that is concerned with our present relationship to the past and the rupture of modernity; this is often articulated in terms of an engagement with tradition and a search for origins (and destiny) that maps onto the transatlantic ship. But readers of any of these Caribbean texts know that the telos of the ship across space is not necessarily one of "development" and progress. Modern allegory of the slave, refugee, and indentureship often direct our attention to how narratives of progress, authority, and development are Enlightenment (and colonial) myth.

Speaking generally (and historically), the ship is also a profoundly domestic figure. Depicting the ship as a republic dates, in western history, at least back to Plato's *Phaedrus*.¹¹ In Caribbean literature this has transformed into a regional, transatlantic, and perhaps even gendered figure, a feminized vessel for the social and material transportation of men. Thus figuring the ship as a world in the works of James as well as Paul Gilroy positions it alternately as a transnational social space, a place of practiced masculinity, labor, cosmopolitanism, enslavement, and uneven fraternity.¹² In Caribbean travelers' tales, Mary Seacole posits a

⁹ The passage of transatlantic slave ships helped produce the British mastery of global time through the establishment of longitude, so that world clocks continue to be organized around a naval institution in Greenwich, London. This is discussed in DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*.

¹⁰ "Allegory is one of the ruling concepts which our civilization has imposed on many colonial peoples, victimized peoples....one can come to allegory from that side, from the victimized side and renovate it, rediscover implications in it which make it genuine and true, so that allegory is not a museum piece." Harris, Wilson. *The Radical Imagination, Lectures and Talks*. Edited by Alan Riach and Mark Williams. University of Liège, 1992.

¹¹ As I've discussed elsewhere, the ship is well known as a state and religious vessel. For instance, the fictional slave ship of Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* is called the *Republic*. Johnson, Charles R. *Middle Passage*. Atheneum Books, 1990. This section of the essay draws from arguments made in the first chapter of *Routes and Roots*.

¹² The contained boundaries of the masculine subject operate in contradistinction to the vast fluidity of the feminized sea. The ship and the sea are necessarily gendered female so that a contained group of male travelers, a homosocial community, may maintain a heterosexual tidalectic associated with ocean space. In most of these novels actual women are not imagined on the ship. Symbols of femininity are vital to sustain the men's receptivity to intercultural contact and to maintain their mobile structure of the domestic. In other words, a symbolic grammar of feminized vessels and flows enables the homosocial community on the ship to maintain porous social boundaries and to reproduce, both narratively and as agents of history.

vital alternative history of women's agency in the wake of the racial segregation of transoceanic voyaging. While male subjects who identify at the national level gain a *regional* consciousness in their transatlantic voyaging, often their imagination of Atlantic modernity uncritically position the "ship as a world" despite its absence of women. As a structure of containment, the ship, like the nation, may often reflect the architecture of gendered and racial stratification.

Ships also signify religious, epistemological, and cultural journeys. Many Black Atlantic religions have adopted a Biblical fusion of the church as a ship, enabling a structural vessel for Black cultural unity, and we might see the role of Caribbean literature and performance as enacting a Middle Passage or *kala pani* limbo. This performance and theatre also includes the production and participation in literary narrative. As Harris has written, "Not only has the journey from the Old World to the new varied with each century and each method of transport but needs to be *re-activated in the imagination as a limbo perspective*" (157).

While these shiplscapes are diverse, they share an investment in the ship as a vessel of ontological, cultural, and historical transformation. Michel de Certeau and others have observed that our ability to process space is constituted by our movement through it. Thus the transformative power of the shiplscape is rendered possible by its movement across the ocean. Yet literary representations of the containment of the hold, the stagnation of the ship in the doldrums or Sargasso Sea, and narratives of shipwreck are three powerful ways in which this telos of movement-as-progress is arrested. Thus Caribbean writers pose a challenge to linear movement as progress and render instead what Wilson Harris has called a dream ship. For instance, John Hearne's 1981 novel *The Sure Salvation*, an imaginative revision of Melville's *Benito Cereno*, depicts a slave ship's stasis, its immobility amidst a growing pool of human waste that signals the failures of linear chronologies of progress.¹³

In her work on Caribbean spaces, Carole Boyce Davies has called attention to what she refers to as "Macro-, meta- or giant Middle Passages" in history and literature, warning that "dated preoccupations with the ship and Atlantic metaphors reduce the range of imaginative possibilities to a particular Middle Passage time frame" (97). Certainly Sharpe's work on the wake and the constraints of the hold demonstrate the continuous time that links the horrors of the past to the ongoing refugee, police violence, and incarceration crisis. But turning to the dream ship, which is both a material vessel as well as an imaginative vehicle for condensing time and space, Caribbean writers have engaged allegorical modes as "a response to the sense of perpetual crisis instilled by modernity; the awareness of an unbridgeable chasm separating an incomprehensible past from an always confusing present moment" (Madsen 109).¹⁴

Some representations of the ship engage what Glissant has referred to as the "tortured sense of time" (144) of the post-plantation Americas, such as Edwidge Danticat's story "Children of the Sea" in which Haitian "boat people" are sinking into the realm of Agwé, returning to the ancestors lost in the Middle Passage.¹⁵ In their excellent article on "Botpippel" paintings, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Martha Daisy Kelehan argue that "they are first and foremost encapsulated narratives of *shipwreck*," calling attention to the lack of narrative "development" across space, and how the ship functions as mnemonic device to address "personal and collective ... traumatic memory" (127–161).¹⁶ In another example Ana Lydia Vega opens her allegorical story "Cloud Cover Caribbean" (105–111) with the protagonist escaping his home on a "makeshift vessel" on a "wretched sea adventure" that ends in a shipwreck of a kind in that they are intercepted by an Aryan-run Coast Guard Cutter, and the refugees are led to labor in "the ship's hold," a space David Scott refers to elsewhere as "conscripted modernity" (110).

Christina Sharpe has called attention to the allegorical collapse, or the part for whole relationship in which the "the ship, and its wakes, are made visible in the slave" (53), and in this sense the human body becomes vessel or ship, a concept rendered clearly in the work of Trinidadian artist Christopher Cozier and Haitian-American artist Rejin Leys in their depictions of so-called "boat people".

¹³ This argument is drawn from DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*. "An African American concept of space had its beginnings in the holds of the slave ships during the Middle Passage" (Diedrich, Gates, and Pedersen 8). The multi-ethnically constituted slave ships that crossed the Atlantic suggest a type of time-space compression prior to industrial modernity. This argument is indebted to Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The Many-Headed Hydra* and Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Verso, 2000. Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard UP/Verso, 1993.

¹⁴ Madsen's work draws from Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory and crisis. Madsen, Deborah L. *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre*. St. Martin's Press, 1994.

¹⁵ Danticat, Edwidge. *Krik?KraK!*. Abacus, 1996.

¹⁶ Additionally, in his introduction to Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, Dash suggests that "flight from an enclosed world is expressed in the images of the ship ... the journey that recur(s) in Caribbean art" (xli).

Figure 3: Rejin Leys, *The Ties that Bind IV* (1994), 19 × 26 in. From the “Ties that Bind” series.

Figure 4: Christopher Cozier, *The Castaway* (2006 and ongoing), from the “Tropical Night” series, ink, graphite and stamps on paper, 22.8 × 17.8 cm.

For Leys, the absurdity of rendering Haitians as “boat people” is suggested by the way in which five out-of-proportion feet emerge from the bottom of the hull. Dollar signs, iron chains, and the words “Industrial Revolution” frame the seascape of the boat, referring back in time to the Middle Passage in a print that dates to the mid-1990s Haitian migration crisis. For Cozier, the humanoid figure in the foreground is “cast away,” pierced through the back by a sail that represents an antiquarian print world map. These human/non-human mergers with the vessels of history suggest Harris’ argument that land, sea, and place are not simply material externalities but rather “an extension of an inner body,”¹⁷ calling attention to the ways in which the ship can become a representation of the people’s body and futurity, writ large.

This embodied ship is particularly apparent in Brathwaite’s prose-poem “Dream Haiti” which depicts the space-time collapse between the contemporary interdiction of refugees at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard and the long history of patrolling African bodies in the Middle Passage. In his “dream ship” his protean narrator is “adrift at sea” his body merges into the boat in a blurring between past and present, self and other, and human and steel ship. He experiences a collapse between narrator and soldier upheld by the speaker’s insistence that he “was supposed to be a poet not a coast guard/cutter” (Brathwaite 97).¹⁸ These shiplscapes become a commentary on the crisis of citizenship. In the wake of state violence and diaspora, the ship is rudderless, marooned, intercepted, or wrecked, standing in not so much for the republic as its utter failures to steer the people into better futures. Yet in Brathwaite, as with Harris, the protean subject is critical to the shape-shifting nature of their use of narrative form in their efforts to plumb the “depth-imagination,” leading to ontologies of the submarine.

Sharpe points out that Brathwaite’s protean narrator refers to the “ark of my naval,” bringing together both the militarism of the US Navy and its handmaiden, the US Coast Guard, as well as the association of the ship as nave, or sacred space, and ark in the sense of it carrying a precious archive of both human and non-human species. This invokes what Harris meant by the “dream ship” and by the ship as *temenos*, or sacred space. Her work has inspired me to return to those questions I first posed to Harris in the early 2000s. At the time, the materialist-focused theory of Caribbean and Postcolonial Studies was not able to answer how we could speak about the sacred in relationship to the wooden and human vessel. So in 2002, I wrote to Harris, curious about the ways in which his essays and novels repeatedly invoked gendered metaphors such as the “ship as a goddess,” and to the “womb” of space. As a feminist, I was uncomfortable with the ways in which feminized space was thought to generate meaning, but women as agents do not. This has been a long-time concern I have had with representations of transatlantic diaspora. But today, I wonder if the shift to allegory and the sacred allow for the possibilities of complicating definitions of the subject that are caught in materialist frames of place, race, sexuality, and gender. In other words, as much as he called attention to colonial legacies in place and in thought, Harris also reminded us to “forestall the tyranny of one-sided being.” His allegories perform a complex and quantum “twinship” in which one could have a simultaneous limbo ship in the Middle Passage and a mirror ship that could also represent the non-linear, numinous, and quantum ship that represented an always unfathomable “depth-imagination.” The quantum vessel is both ship and body, transformative and protean. At the surface level, it challenges the colonial will to knowledge and order as well as Cartesian models of space and time. More importantly, it envisions new representations of the subject, of time/space, and narrative form. Here is an excerpt from his response:

August 19, 2002

Regards to the vessel as a sailing temenos: This is a “quantum issue” where the writer loses absolute control of character and events that he is pursuing in one sphere or intuition, by an unpredictable arousal in the nature of reality and is moved by this to revise linearities and seek other intuitions.

The severance of absolute control is contrary to the European novel form and “has far reaching consequences” ... the characters ... develop and see their capacities differently. Linearities are altered, the psyche moves agelessly, it seems, across space and time. There can be no description of such movement except to say there is a blend of inner and outer ‘being’ that releases unfathomable life of the imagination in every grain or leaf or measure that sees through its vulnerabilities.

I saw the ship in my novels, through quantum variations, bear on a sacred temenos one needed to revise and see differently again and again.

¹⁷ Tiffin, Helen. “Interview with Wilson Harris.” *New Literatures Review*. 1979. pp. 18–29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.4180180617>.

¹⁸ I have a more detailed discussion of this work in “Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity”, *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 3, May 2010, pp. 703–712.

This “blend of inner and outer ‘being’ that releases unfathomable life of the imagination” is precisely what I see at work in Brathwaite’s protean narrator, in Cozier’s pelagic castaway, and in Leys’ pedi-vessel. I admit that I could not grasp this at the time so I wrote to him again, requesting—I realize now—a more realist, materialist response. He kindly obliged, but without relinquishing a language that asked me to think in more imaginative and intuitive terms that pressed against my secular training. Decades later I’m beginning to understand what he had guided towards in his writing, which is “an openness to the language of the imagination simultaneous with a grasp of the sacred.”¹⁹ Harris returned to much of his earlier work to look for seeds he had unwittingly planted for his future writing, much like I have done here in order to revise my earlier theories of the vessel, craft, and the depth-imagination. In that sense I am rehearsing these conversations in order to rediscover what he had termed “*unfathomable* kinships.”

Harris was a visionary in his encouragement to revise our writing and our thought in order to see differently, again and again. This is a practice and performance of “memory theatre” as much as it is about narrative and storytelling itself. It embodies the best qualities of allegory and allegoresis, which are to guide and to interpret. Let me quote at length from his subsequent letter to allow him to guide us farther. The words that are illegible I retain here, as I think he would appreciate space markers for the unknown:

November 12, 2002

Let me say something briefly about the ship as a sanctuary. It is clear, I would hope, that the ship has ceased to be the sacred architectures visualized in ancient times. It has become a warship, a slave ship, a ship of investment, a piece of insentient machinery. But the imagination which descends into the ‘unconscious’ and arises into the subconscious and the [?] may glean an architecture of space in the midst of furies that would destroy civilization.

Such an architecture of space is apparently wholly new in modern times and requires profound changes in the language we take for granted in its linear properties. It requires a sense of living natures, in suffering Earth we have abused as insentient property. This is a vast and immense creative prospect we cannot [?] in a scientific or a material way. The pulses of nature(s) differ from the pulses of Man and open themselves to quantum variations through which we may read a cross-culturality that takes us beyond our individual selves into dimensions we have closed or never opened.”

Harris’s depth-imagination is spatial, temporal, narrative, and firmly locates the human as part of and often subject to the “pulses of nature.” On the one level, we have “twinships,” a theme that runs through his entire corpus—in some novels he inscribes “ships of life sailing beneath ships whose trade is death” (Harris 103). We know that the vast oceanic is inconceivable without a localizing figure such as the ship or the body (human and otherwise) to situate the imagination. But I believe the ship is not just a vessel for the oceanic in Harris’s work. In fact, the ship allows him to allegorize space itself—the “twinships of space” (101). This is what he meant when he wrote of the ship being “*the strangest satellite* from another century” (120). He was making what he called a “peculiar bridge,” which is to say “a bridge from what one might call craft—the ship of craft—and sacrament” (Harris 71). This entanglement between literary form and *temenos* was integral to his oeuvre. In an early essay he argued that:

A sailing vessel, that one’s craft, has to be linked in some way with some unconscious force, some sacramental energy, that has been suppressed and lost. The revisionary strategy therefore discloses the deprivations within progressive realism, the deprivations of linear bias, deprivations endemic to a ruling story line by which historical conquest (sometimes refined into a model of absolute persuasion) gains its cultural and material ends at the expense of other perspectives (Harris 72).

This “sacramental energy” fuels all of the works addressed in this all-too-brief overview of Caribbean shipscapes. Although I have only skimmed the surface, so to speak, I’d like to return to the opening of my essay back to the British-Guyanese artist Hew Locke, whose work was serendipitously on display in Miami when I first delivered this paper. I think Harris would have been deeply interested in this coincidence and fascinated by Locke’s installation *For Those in Peril on the Sea*. Locke has been working with the figure of the ship extensively—his installations of wood and paper maché vessels speak especially well to the figure of the dream ship, citizenship, and especially to the “ship of craft—and sacrament.”

¹⁹ Harris, Wilson. “Imagination Dead Imagine: Bridging a Chasm”. *Yale Journal of Criticism*. 7.1, 1994, pp. 191.

Figure 5: Hew Locke, *For Those in Peril on the Sea*, St Mary & St Eanswythe Church, 2011. ©Hew Locke, Courtesy of Hales Gallery, London. Photo by Indra Khanna.

The artist has spoken of the impression made upon him by visiting fisherman's churches in Portugal and Italy, and the etymological and metaphysical relationship between the "nave" of a ship and the maritime term "naval," which we can also expand to Harris's theories of the "womb of space" as it allegorizes the potential for regeneration. Locke's representations of a fleet of ships—unlike the singular ship we've seen in representations of the slave ship, indenture ship, refugee ship, or the tourist ship—suggest the diversity of voyages and voyagers. Its location on display in a church or museum brings the ordinary vessel into the realm of the sacred, a place of memorialization and retrospection. Locke has explained that he sees the vessel as container of memory of the past as well as a catalyst to bring about change.²⁰ In that sense

²⁰ It is also a deeply personal symbol, tied to his own transatlantic history as well as larger concerns. Locke has explained that "I want the piece to stimulate thoughts on globalisation, and on illegal immigration, people smuggling, drug smuggling, contemporary piracy." See Locke's commentary offered to the Visionary Arts Charity, *Creative Folkstone*, www.creativefolkstone.org.uk/artists/hew-locke/.

his shipscales share much with Harris' concept of memory theatre and the "unfinished genesis of the imagination". His installations—repeated in radically different spaces in a "revisionary strategy"—render those voyages that are unseen and unknown into the visible public spaces of the museum and the church (Harris 88).

I began this paper with Appadurai's theories of globalization and want to bring this full circle. Locke's incorporation of freight and tourist ships brings us to the materialities of globalization that frame this conference, highlighting the wide range of vessels or craft, purposes, crew, and anticipated destinations. But I believe that Locke's work, like Harris', speaks to the more-than-human cosmos that recognizes "*unfathomable* kinships," human and otherwise. Globalization is tied directly to the climate crisis that scholars are increasingly referring to as the Anthropocene, or human epoch. Globalization's regimes of disposability, extraction, militarism, and late capitalist expansion have clear origins in transatlantic colonization and its apocalyptic wake.

I had mentioned that I wanted us to telescope from the peopled vessel to the 'Earthship' and try to hold them simultaneously in a quantum imagination. Locke's visionary work helps us do this because of the ways in which we are positioned, not on the same horizontal plane as the ship, but underneath. His shipscales, hung from the ceiling above the viewer, suggest a verticality of space that one would not normally experience on a ship which is defined by its oceanic horizon. In this way we become aware of space itself and of our body as a vessel or kin-ship in this shared space. It forces us to look up to the hulls of these individually labelled ships and calls attention to the very space we occupy, which is submarine. Brathwaite famously declared that Caribbean "unity is submarine," but in the Anthropocene our Earthship is increasingly oceanic, subject to more submarine perspectives. To conclude with the always prescient words of Wilson Harris: we achieve an "intuitive kinship with images that cease to be passive or submerged; instead each image is an apparent catalyst of discovery, it acts upon the falling or ascending weight of a subtle imagination immersed in what it appears to describe" (88).

Acknowledgement

My special thanks to Hew Locke, Rejin Leys, and Christopher Cozier for allowing me to reproduce their works.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Brathwaite, Kamau. "Caribbean Man in Space and Time." *Savacou*. no. 11–12. September 1975.
- . "Dream Haiti". *Dreamstories*. Addison Wesley, 1994.
- D'Aguiar, Fred. "Wilson Harris by Fred D'Aguiar." *BOMB: The Author Interview*. January 1, 2003. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/wilson-harris/>.
- Davies, Carole Boyce. *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from Twilight Zones*. U of Illinois P, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5406/illinois/9780252038020.001.0001>
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. "Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity." *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 3, May 2010.
- . *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. U of Hawai'i P, 2007.
- . "Quantum Landscapes: A Ventriloquism of Spirit." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 1. Edited by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, March 2007.
- Espinete, Ramabai. *The Swinging Bridge*. Harper Collins, 2003.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Translated by J. Michael Dash. U of Virginia P, 1989.
- Harris, Wilson. *Dark Jester*. Faber and Faber, 2001.
- . "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas." *Explorations, A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966–1981*, Edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek. Dangaroo Press, 1981.
- . "Imagination Dead Imagine: Bridging a Chasm." *Yale Journal of Criticism*. 7.1, 1994, pp. 191.
- . "Oedipus and the Middle Passage". *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*. Edited by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek. Rodopi, 1990.
- . *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*. Edited by Andrew Bundy. Routledge, 1999.
- . "The Fabric of the Imagination". *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks*. Edited by Alan Riach and Mark Williams, Liège Language and Literature, 1992.
- . "The Open Door". *Journal of Modern Literature* 20, no. 1, 7–12, Summer 1996.

- James, C.L.R. *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*. UP of New England, 1978.
- Madsen, Deborah L. *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre*. St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Mottley, Mia Amor. "Address to the General Debate of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly." *OECS*, 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygDuLa1adok&ab_channel=UnitedNations.
- Nichols, Grace. *I is a Long Memoried Woman*. Karnak House, 1983.
- Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth and Martha Daisy Kelehan, "The 'Children of the Sea': Uncovering Images of the *Botpippel* Experience in Caribbean Art and Literature." In *Displacements and Transformations in Caribbean Cultures*, edited by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Robero-Cesareo, 127–61. UP of Florida, 2008. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813032184.003.0007>
- Philip, NourbeSe. *Zong!*. Wesleyan UP, 2008.
- Rowell, Charles H. "An Interview with Wilson Harris." *Callaloo* 18, no. 1, 192–200, Winter 1995. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.1995.0015>
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Duke UP, 2004. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822386186>
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke UP, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373452>
- Steinberg, Philip E. "Of other seas". *Atlantic Studies*. vol. 10, no. 2, 2013. pp. 156–169. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2013.785192>
- Tiffin, Helen. "Interview with Wilson Harris." *New Literatures Review*. 1979. pp. 18–29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.4180180617>
- Vega, Ana Lydia. "Cloud Cover Caribbean" (Encancaranublado). *Her True-True Name*, edited by Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson, translated by Mark McCaffrey, Heinemann. 1989.

How to cite this article: DeLoughrey, E 2020 Shiplscapes: Imagining an Ocean of Space. *Anthurium*, 16(2): 1, 1–12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.425>

Published: 21 December 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Anthurium is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by University of Miami Libraries.

OPEN ACCESS