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Shape, Space and Typeface: Mapping Black Subjectivity through Caribbean Aesthetics

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SHAPE, SPACE AND TYPEFACE: MAPPING BLACK SUBJECTIVITY THROUGH CARIBBEAN AESTHETICS

by

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A Thesis

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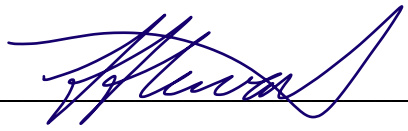

Department Chair: Professor Anthony Stewart

4/28/20

Date (month and year)

Acknowledgements

So I am growing up here and dreaming of how to write something that wd catch the gleam
the world of the water click & pebble where th(e) wave folds on/to the sand, the
fans of sunlight in the water,
its various colours & histories…. this island my island & the other islands there
just beyond horizon/
… I see them I feel how they curve away into their own space(s) their own shape(s)
out of their own histories. the waves comin in/
comin in … GENESIS

Kamau Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*

I begin by simultaneously acknowledging two poet/scholar's: Kamau Brathwaite and his typographic intervention into Caribbean poetics, and Carmen Gillespie, who uses this epigraph in her scholarship which addresses the depth and complexities of poetic renderings of the sea. While Brathwaite's work influenced the trajectory of concrete Caribbean poetry, Carmen's work, as founder and director of the Griot Institute, equipped me with the tools essential to writing this project – a safe physical and emotional space at Bucknell. Together these two figures, both of whom passed away within the last year, made my thesis possible. I would also like to thank my advisor, Rafe Dalleo, who generously helped me to navigate the waves, flows and curves of my ideas. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the unique resources my committee members, Katie Faull and Elena Machado provided, which facilitated the expansion of my project. Finally, a big thank you to my family, who has constantly encouraged me and believed in the value of my work, and to my mentors and friends, old and new, whose presence has been invaluable.

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Abstract

The Caribbean is frequently imagined and aestheticized by the image of the basin, which limits the way the region is confined in geographic and historic terms. By conceptualizing the poets as mapmakers, the collections by Kei Miller, Olive Senior, and M. NourbeSe Phillip reference the container of the basin but remediate it in poetic terms. The movement towards a distinctive lack of containment illustrates the dynamic literary and geographical operations of the Caribbean, linking typography and topography. Reading with a new lens, including digital resources that re-spatialize these poems, demonstrates the complexities that characterize the formation of these texts and how they resist neat containers and containment, thereby charting new ways to redraw and reimagine places and spaces.

Introduction

Cartographic Imaginations: Uncharted Territories and the Poetics of Space in Caribbean Concrete Poetry

I will draw a map of what you never see

Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion,* "iv."

Indeed, black matters are spatial matters.

Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*

Denouncing the precision and objectivity of mapping, Kei Miller's rastaman declares to the cartographer: "I will draw a map of what you never see" (19). The creative potential of this statement is not limited to the discrete dialogue between the rastaman and the cartographer in Miller's poetry collection but represents an ideological positioning about the production of place. The rastaman's project has resonances with how Katherine McKittrick conceptualizes geography as a way to address the erasure or invisibility of black subjects in the production of space. Like the alternative system of knowledge the rastaman represents, she questions the vantage point from which we perceive geography, stating that "black matters are spatial matters" (xii). In highlighting the creative forms of mapping executed by Afro-diasporic peoples she reveals the instability of Eurocentric knowledge systems, a system embedded into Miller's cartographer. The dialogue I see between Miller and McKittrick illustrates my project of spatializing Caribbean concrete poetry, where I make visible the important connections Kei Miller, Olive Senior and M. NourbeSe Philip make between textual space and

geographical place to critique the stability of the map. These poets respond to the colonial desire for the Caribbean to be condensed into "a single bounded space" as Mimi Sheller describes in *Consuming the Caribbean* (47). But, as Graham Huggan points out in *Decolonizing the Map*, postcolonial discourse has prompted shifts in literature from "mapbreaking to map-making" — an alternative approach to hegemonic forms of cartographic discourse (126). His work signals a move beyond the closure of mimetic representation and into the openness and flexibility of the map. Likewise, my engagement with Miller, Senior and Philip's poetry participates in the remapping project – as I both examine alternative maps of the Caribbean with literary analysis and create new maps with digital tools.

Considering McKittrick's observation that black subjects are "geographic beings who have a stake in the production of space" encourages us to pay critical attention to ways that poets produce space in their poetry using unconventional tools to map (xiv). In *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative and the Spatial Imagination,* Robert T. Tally asserts that mapping is a fundamental human behavior to orient oneself in the world. He defines topophrenia as a "placemindedness" which produces a cartographic anxiety that prompts one to map to begin with. Invoking Descartes, he illustrates the intimate relationship between mapping and being with the statement, "I map, therefore I am" (1). Acknowledging the disparity between colonial powers and colonial subjects, who is the subject of this declaration? How might Caribbean authors of the 20th and 21st century respond to this claim? The shapes that Miller and Senior invoke through "Quashie's Verse" and "Gourd" respond to the map of the Caribbean basin. The image of the basin is

projected onto the Caribbean and is one way the region has been defined and confined in geographical terms. The sphere-like images created by each Caribbean poet reference the container of the basin but remediate it in poetic terms. Alternatively, the words and letters in NourbeSe's *Zong!* almost explode over the pages, and I argue that this movement towards a distinctive lack of containment illustrates the dynamic literary and geographical operations of the Caribbean. In this way connections exist between the topography of the Caribbean and the typography of Caribbean poetry vis-à-vis the material shapes that are formed and produced by natural and manmade forces alike.

How do space and place inform the movement of Caribbean literature and geography? While the physical and ideological movement from Old World to New World initiated a literal expansion of geographical horizons, the maps produced by those who not only 'discovered' but also conquered, defined the Americas according to their agenda[1]. Thinking about the impact of place, however, does not only recall a destructive process but may generate a creative process. The Caribbean does not have a defined man-made border delineating it from North and South America, but it has been shaped by a number of literary and geographical forces. Calling attention to place can allow us to reimagine the centrality of the Caribbean "to di world"[2] in an ideological sense, and also what Caribbean studies can contribute to spatial studies.

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[1] The myth of the discovery narrative informs how the map is created. I use a postcolonial lens to understand the role and functions of the map.

[2] This references 'To di world' - a statement that illustrates the cultural impact of Jamaica in the contemporary moment, putting the Caribbean island on the map, so to speak. It is often associated with Usain Bolt's signature pose after winning the 100m and 200m sprint in the 2008 Beijing Olympics but has roots in Jamaican dancehall.

This project, however, illustrates the problem of making a voice for oneself among voices that dominate the conversation. To participate in the existing scholarship is problematic, for it requires engagement with discourse of discovery and the idea of an authoritative 'beginning' to understand the Caribbean space in the contemporary moment. But returning to colonial ideologies is valuable even if uncomfortable because that process not only contextualizes the space, but demonstrates that mapping the Caribbean did not start with the cartography borne out of Columbus' voyage, but has taken different forms prior to the 'beginning'. Since then, narrative has been identified as a way histories are told and people, places and cultures have been mapped diversely. In addition to narrative, the genre of concrete poetry can contain and map histories. In my thesis I will draw connections between the operations of the map and that of concrete poetry. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the relationship between the topography of the Caribbean and the typography of Caribbean poetry vis-à-vis postcolonial theory and literary cartography.

Literary cartography is a byproduct of the spatial turn,[3] which brings space and place into sharper focus, where geographic movement is understood to dictate the form of narrative. The negotiation of space is also privileged by postcolonial studies insofar as movement through physical space directly shapes black diasporic experience in light of ownership of bodies and geographies. Further, the intersecting temporalities of the spatial turn and postcolonial theory demand an investigation of this relationship. Franco

[3] The "spatial turn" is a paradigmatic shift in understanding of how space informs the way human beings relate to each other and their environment. It offers "a view in which geography is not relegated to an afterthought of social relations, but is intimately involved in their construction" (Warf and Arias 2).

Moretti's seminal work, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* maps the connection between geography and literature. He posits that the map's function as an analytical tool extends from cartography to the critical examination of the literary. Arguing that mapping can furnish new perspectives of the text, Moretti challenges his readership with the question "what do literary maps allow us to see?" (5). The title of his work, however, reveals the prioritization of the Western novel in the developments of literary cartography. Mapping is a dynamic process that is not always executed by a cartographer on parchment but can be done by the community being mapped using similar textual and visual media in innovative ways. Furthermore, the novel is not the only literary form that can shift how we relate to our environment, poetry is also linked to landscape.

The connection between language and landscape mirrors the connection literary cartographers make between literature and geography. However, few literary critics have acknowledged the link between the poem and the map. Tim Creswell, a human geographer and poet, discusses the importance and relevance of space and place to the poem, seeing "poems as places that can be interpreted spatially" (321). In the geocritical imagination there is an important distinction between place and space: "Place can...be understood as a relatively fixed, stable, and thus familiar or at least recognizable point, whereas space partakes of the mobile, dynamic, or unfamiliar" (Tally 18). The Caribbean region may be understood as a space, for it is not a static place, but rather a group of islands and nations that are imaginatively united by a common body of water that continues to physically shape the land(scape). Martinician poet and philosopher Éduoard Glissant addresses the question of form in *Caribbean Discourse*, negotiating the best

medium for the Caribbean writer to use in the wake of colonialism. He understands language to have an intimate relationship with the environment in that the "landscape has its language" (146). Conceiving of the landscape as a space, in *A Thousand Plateaus,* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari conceptualize the rhizome, which has no single starting point, but "always a middle from which it grows and which it overspills" (1458). The function of the rhizome is important to how I understand the way the Caribbean relates to the world. Moreover, it informs what Glissant believes about form, as he builds on Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic thinking: "The book is always a more contrived medium in its dependence on contaminated materials to transmit meaning and its temptation to freeze what is shifting and elusive" (xxvi). He distrusts the realist novel and "alien" forms to represent the Caribbean space. Glissant's commentary on the ability of visual art and sculpture to transcend these representational trappings can be adapted to think about how the use of textual space in poetry in tandem with language of any origin may disrupt narrativity.

Often perceived as an art object, concrete poetry is a medium that can confound narrative as is blurs the lines between the visual and the literary. Pushing further against artistic/aesthetic and textual boundaries, I examine other media, particularly digital media in the form of visualizations that re-present and re-form linguistic data. For in a similar way that poetry may be a tool to create maps, network graphs and visualizations also perform cartographic functions. Addressing the ways networks are (de)coded in *Visual Complexity,* digital humanist Manual Lima states that:

> network visualization can be a remarkable discovery tool, able to translate structural complexity into perceptible visual insights aimed at a clearer understanding. It is through its pictorial representation and interactive analysis that modern network visualization gives life to many structures hidden from human perception, providing us with an original "map" of the territory. (Lima 79)

The idea that network visualization may have cartographic qualities does not immediately position it alongside colonial-like mimetic discourse, but rather, the field of digital humanities is inherently dynamic and creates room for the multiperspectivity of mapping[4]. The tools I use in this project perform network analyses, mapping relationships between words and poems and re-spatializing the existing linguistic data. The visual quality of these alternative maps demonstrates how space carries meaning in new forms. Moreover, like concrete poetry, the forms I examine and create digitally may also be understood as aesthetic objects.

The Caribbean concrete poetry under examination uses space in ways that mirror European forms and narratives while departing from them. Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics* and Miller's *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* each contain one concrete poem and Philip's *Zong!* contains a concrete long poem. Senior and Miller's "Gourd" and "Quashie's Verse" stand for the conventional appearance of the concrete form while Philip's *Zong!* resists containment. On one hand, "Gourd" and "Quashie's

[4] Multiperspectivity is a narratological term I have appropriated here to demonstrate both the multiple points of view the tools used in digital humanities support, and the connection between mapmaking and storytelling. According to the living handbook of narratology, multiperspective narratives "highlight the perceptually, epistemologically or ideologically restricted nature of individual perspectives and/or draw attention to various kinds of differences and similarities between the points of view presented therein" (Hartner).

Verse" can be understood as containers owing to the way words are shaped to form the shape of the gourd and the clay jar respectively. On the other hand, the words and letters in *Zong!* almost explode over the pages. In light of the differences between how space is utilized by Senior and Miller versus Philip's interventions, it is important to define the form this argument will begin to engage with: "concrete poetry is the creation of verbal artefacts which exploit the possibilities, not only of sound, sense and rhythm--the traditional fields of poetry--but also of space" (Draper 329). Miller, Senior and Philip's manipulation of shape and space signify methods that black subjects subvert European and/or colonial structures using 'foreign' language, formal elements, or both. Spatializing the poetry makes the underlying structures and intentions more visible. There are existing assumptions about concrete poetry that trivialize the form. Compared to other poetic forms it receives a superficial level of engagement and is often dismissed as simplistic. Furthermore, it has been criticized for not having syntactic logic, unlike other forms who make use of particular rhythmic patterns.

The work I will examine is not just a novelty, it has a governing structure which it subtly destabilizes with alternative sign systems. While Senior and Miller's concrete poems are self-referential and may appear to 'show' everything they 'tell,' they also play with space in a subversive way, exploiting the self-reflexivity of language, through the adoption of a particular contained form that is arguably just as radical as Philip's *Zong!* —where there is space between the letters and not just lines or even words. Furthermore, the unconventional form that Philip's poetry takes is not only a visual phenomenon, it also resists narratological unity and takes the form of antinarrative. The fragmentation

that characterizes the long poem seems diametrically opposed to the more common contained concrete poetry, yet both interventions demonstrate movement while resisting colonial conceptions of boundaries and containment. I intend to organize my analysis of the texts starting from the idea of the contained space then expanding outward, starting with the concrete poems then exploring how those operations translate to Philip's long poem. Generally, I am moving from the idea of a real or concrete world to multiple experiences of reality, and from ideas of rootedness to the rhizome.

It is notable that my primary texts are not narrative poems, but lyric poems. The lyric offers a new perspective; a genre emphasizing experience/feeling rather than the totality of plot or narrative and demonstrates that the element of sensory experience is also important to mapping. The African diasporic literary space is intimately linked with the politics of geographical space, and plotting a map is like plotting a story. The plot in postcolonial studies is not an innocent structuring of events, but rather it has historically functioned as a method of control that extends beyond the page. As an illustration, I argue that Philip's long poem *Zong!* charts the space of the Atlantic waters, an antinarrative of the Atlantic slave trade. Her work attends to Derek Walcott's assertion that History is sea[5] not in form but in sentiment, where history is in constant motion. She produces a lyric from a court case in a radically different form that destabilizes the narrative form and thereby the plot of history. Whereas the Gregson v Gilbert case positions the receipt of insurance money at the forefront of its text, NourbeSe gives attention to the massacre of 150 slaves by dismembering the available historical record.

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[5] This refers to Walcott's poem "The Sea is History"

The deployment of concrete poetry provides an avenue to chart the interaction between the spatial turn and postcolonial theory.

The connection between literary cartography, biased to narrative forms, and the poem, as a literary genre and a visual object, is informed by their similar mechanisms and the ability of the lyric poem to invoke a sensory experience. Standing apart from the mapped space recalls a colonial posturing while experiencing or interacting with the space makes room for a more nuanced project with a sense of immediacy. The perspective of interacting with a space is similar to doing a close reading. Being closer also makes one aware of space or distance between points. The position of the poems in the whole collection then are important. I am interested in the position of the poems in the whole collection, an approach informed by spatial studies. This impacts how I will treat the poetry; instead of isolating the text or containing it, my approach fosters openness with the goal of rhizomatic interactions among the words on the pages.

Miller's *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* is at once concerned with charting the ideological journey both the rastaman and the cartographer take, and meditating on journeys of flora, fauna and even inanimate objects, giving them agency whilst negotiating colonization, language, religion and place. Both the title of the poetry collection and the typographic elements within it make clear the centrality of the cartographer's interaction with Zion, and therefore the rastaman. But rather than organizing the narrative between the central characters in an Aristotelian begining-middle-end scheme, it works more rhizomatically. Instead of discrete thematic divisions, the sequence is disbursed throughout the book, and in between the reader may find

dedications for animals or satirical commentary on place names, in each drawing attention to aspects of the landscape that are easily overlooked or discounted by the likes of a cartographer. In the table of contents and within the collection itself, each of the poem titles in the sequence are emboldened. This highlights the position of these parts within the whole collection, emphasizing their spatial relationship to the other poems through contrast.

Because *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* is not only made up of the titular twenty-seven poem sequence, and interspersed before, and in between the sequence are numerous poems that may be written from the perspective of the rastaman or an unknown speaker, multiple discourses materialize. The poems outside the sequence are in conversation with the dramatization of the argument between the cartographer and the rastaman about the way each one understands his relationship to place. As their dialogue continues the disparity between the cartographer and the rastaman becomes less clear. It becomes difficult to determine who is speaking in some of the poems outside of the sequence. Further, towards the end of the collection the cartographer adopts some of the traits and practices of the Jamaican rastaman, like sucking his teeth and attending Reggae Sumfest. The overlap between what appears to be their discrete identities speaks to the significance of relations in resisting totalizing views and embracing nuance and complexity. Beginning with a groundation and closing with a benediction, Miller's collection is framed by a celebration of Rastafari religion, which points toward and emphasizes the "*immapancy of dis world*" illustrating multiple simultaneous map-making projects (21).

Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics* begins with emboldened words shaped into a gourd where the poem bears the title of the object it signifies: "Gourd." Her collection is then separated thematically, beginning with *Travellers' Tales* - the longest section - which addresses different kinds of local and international travel motivated by natural disasters and the possibility of economic opportunity. She reaches back in time to address movement on the slave plantation, across the Atlantic, and makes connections with the postcolonial moment. The second thematic section is *Nature Studies*, and these poems illustrate how nature itself is neither static nor neutral but that plants can be deceptive, insidious even. Many of the poems seem to be simple as most are titled by the fruit they discuss, but the poetry gets at the layered history of the plants. Making use of personification this section demonstrates how the landscape is kind of silently resisting the "colonizing impulses" both before and after colonization. *Gardening in the Tropics* is both the title of the collection and the title of the third section. Here, there are multiple iterations of what "Gardening in the Tropics" looks like - for each poem in this section begins with that line, though gardening here is a metaphor for living, being and remembering. The final section, *Mystery: African Gods in the New World*, describes several deities with ties to nations across the Caribbean, often applying human attributes as a technique of understanding how these gods function. Each poem is about a god or goddess and speaks to the part of the natural world they govern. The themes within Senior's collection are all encapsulated with her "Gourd" and in turn they make appearances throughout my own argument. Senior's collection deploys a series of

geographical disturbances, natural disasters, and African mythologies, where the gourd,[6] which appears first in the collection, simultaneously opens up and encloses these elements. Much of her work functions as a catalyst for my discussions of the materiality and immateriality of time and space in the African diaspora.

The clay jar and the gourd both have the capacity to contain water, which is perhaps their primary function. Yet these shapes contain words, much like the way Philip's *Zong!* uses text in a way that charts the space of the Atlantic waters. A comparison between Miller, Senior and Philip produces interesting depictions of what navigating through land versus navigating through water may look like. Similar to Senior's collection Philip's text is composed in several sections she refers to as movements. Though these movements may be described as thematic, the sections — *Os, Sal, Ventus, Ratio, Ferrum, and Ebora* — do not transparently align with their content. Not only are the movements titled in Latin and Yoruba, the language in the long poem is a mixture of European, African and Semitic languages, and these words are consistently broken up by Philip's use of textual space, complicating identification and meaning with her poetics. Much of her poetic technique aligns with concerns regarding her content; the silenced narratives of the enslaved Africans on the Zong ship. The source text available to the poet is the extant document closest to a documentation of those aboard the ship. Though it is purely written in English, Philip's intervention recreates new and alternative meanings from the 'static' document.

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[6] The gourd is a "the fruit of either the Calabash tree (*Crescentia cujete*), common in the Caribbean; or of a vine (*Lagenaria siceraria*) more common in Africa and elsewhere" (Senior). "Gourd" signifies the fruit in shape and function.

Like the complicated movement of the ship from West Africa to Jamaica, the landscape or rather seascape of Philip's text is replete with repetition, opacity and absence. Continuities exist between and among the six movements but those become more apparent not only as one moves linearly through the text, but also and especially back and forth. Unlike Miller or Senior's collections, *Zong!* holds within it a Glossary with the subtitle "Words and Phrases Overheard on Board the *Zong*." This section, complete with fourteen languages, appears to be a tool to equip the reader to understand the long poem, yet it is positioned at the end of the poem. For the reader to engage with these meanings they must frequently flip back and forth from the poem to the glossary, a motion that recalls the rhizome. The rhizomatic movement mirrors the back and forth or circular action that the ship unintentionally took due to navigational errors. Turning the concept of navigating on its head, Philip intentionally scrambles the path for her reader. In this way I argue she demonstrates what the movement through the Atlantic Ocean and into the Caribbean Sea may look like – including the discomfort, confusion and horrors, unlike the likes of Gregson v Gilbert or even what the lost ship logs would contain.

My first chapter defines concrete poetry and situates "Quashie's Verse" and "Gourd" in the critical conversation. I analyze how concrete poetry is deployed, specifically in relation to the natural world. I examine how containment and enclosure may function to be an expansive mode of thinking, acknowledging the dynamic possibilities of the container. Juxtaposing the container of the basin with the Caribbean basin, I argue that the expansiveness of the poetic containers not only open up what map-

making may look like by black Caribbean poets, but how maps may be mobile, using theories that build connections between language and landscape.

Miller's collection presents multiple ways of interpreting a map and mapping while addressing the philosophical disparity between the figure of the cartographer and that of the rastaman. He uses the opposition of the cartographer and the rastaman to demonstrate the tension between the scientific certainty of representing the real and the knowledge that comes from experiencing or ranging over what is seen and unseen. Embodying a major theme across the text, "Quashie's Verse" is constructed in the shape of a clay jar and juxtaposes measurements of space using spherical systems with linear systems. Quashie's imprecision or "just about" measure that takes it shape from an Ethiopian system is immeasurable by European metrics, highlighting how bodily measure offers something different from linear measures. The precision surrounding poetic lines and arguably cartographical lines, is coupled with and complicated by the spherical shape of the clay jar — both in its materiality and its appearance on the page. With a similar intention, Senior's "Gourd" presents its audience with both the pictorial representation of the instrument and invokes the ritual which calls people together. In doing so, her work calls forth the material and immaterial elements that form the 'whole' poem, a double metaphor that creates channels between itself and the other poems — illustrating the impossibility of wholeness and the complexities of interpretation of a sign.

Thus, it provides a good foundation to continue my argument, for in my second chapter I explore how mythological Afro-diasporic figures move between several poems from *Gardening in the Tropics* and *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion.* In

form and in content Chapter 2 illustrates the back and forth movement referred to earlier; using Senior's collection as my starting point I discuss how peoples and deities negotiate travel across and outside of the Caribbean, utilizing her frame to understand and analyze Miller's collection. The movement of several figures, including Papa Legba, Agué, Yemoja and Anansi, complicate geographic and spatial boundaries within Caribbean waters and with a reach to West Africa. Papa Legba and Anansi feature largely in this chapter for in addition to a governance of immaterial elements these trickster figures are unique in that they both possess material elements that can be read spatially. Approaching these with an eye for making invisible structures visible I borrow from methodologies used to analyze concrete poetry in addition to digital tools. In Chapter 2, I begin to take a digital humanistic approach not only in order to dynamically engage with the network of poems in *Gardening* and *Cartographer,* but also to produce visualizations from poetic data using a network analysis program called Gephi.

This practice largely informs my approach to Chapter 3, wherein I focus my analysis on *Zong!* – closely examining the spatial relationships between each part of the 'whole' text. Ending with an exploration of the sea demonstrates how place and space reach outward from the Caribbean in a rhizomatic way, not only decentering the map but also destabilizing the idea of centrality and wholeness at large. The format of Philip's text and her own commentary on the process within it draws attention to an element that mediates her poetry: the word processor. Despite the absence of a container or sphere-like structure in her work, this digital tool is a type of container. In addressing how she negotiates textual space differently than Senior and Miller I employ a digital tool to

examine her source text, *Gregson v Gilbert*, including it alongside my examination of her long poem. In doing so I participate in re-forming the original text, much like Philip does, through digital media. My thesis, then, charts the gradual increase in my level of engagement with the texts under examination, from using a more formal literary analysis to spatialize "Quashie's Verse" and "Gourd" in Chapter 1, to employing digital theories and tools to spatialize *Gregson v Gilbert* as a part of *Zong!* in Chapter 3 – in effect, participating in the production of space as a black Caribbean subject.

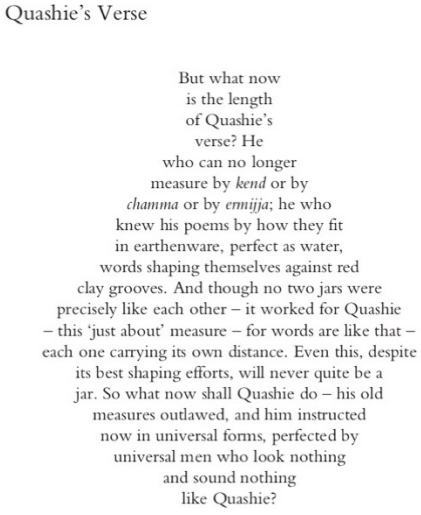
Chapter 1

Caribbean Basins: Containing the Im/material in Kei Miller's "Quashie's Verse" and Olive Senior's "Gourd"

The Caribbean is often perceived as a place, one that occupies a particular location on a map, cradled by the Americas. However, this placement is not self-evident but imagined, for people have engaged with the region both as a place (stable, fixed) and as a space (dynamic, mobile), acknowledging the absence of a defined shape and responding either with frustration or acceptance. Its formation is not like the African continent or North or South America with man-made borders between countries, but instead a group of many islands including nations that kiss the Caribbean Sea. This lack of definition, however, has not prevented colonial and neocolonial powers from shaping, confining and mapping the region — all of which are methods of containment. While this occurs in dynamic ways, the common technique is to draw connections between the physical and the artificial, the real and the imagined, and further, the landscape and the language in order to accomplish a sense of closure, or enclosure. I argue that enclosure extends from the sociopolitical and geographical boundaries of the Caribbean region to the versification that bounds literary forms. In this way connections exist between the topography of the Caribbean and the typography of Caribbean poetry vis-à-vis the material shapes that are formed and produced by natural and manmade forces alike.

Like the Caribbean, the concrete poem operates as a dynamic space though it is often read as a static place, in part because of the rigidity implied by its name. According

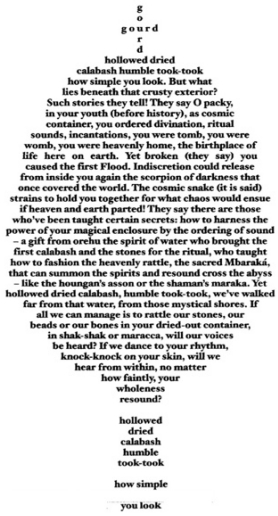
to R. P. Draper, “concrete poetry is the creation of verbal artefacts which exploit the possibilities, not only of sound, sense and rhythm--the traditional fields of poetry--but also of space” (329). Compared to other poetic forms, critics often view concrete poetry as simplistic and it therefore receives less engagement than other forms. But Kei Miller’s “Quashie’s Verse” in *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* and “Gourd” from Olive Senior’s *Gardening in the Tropics* are complex spaces, not static places. Examining the play between the interiors and exteriors of the poems illuminates how these concrete poems can operate like a map, in this case a postcolonial map that challenges the mechanisms of what was once a colonial tool. While the creation of a map usually rests on the interaction of scalable elements to be precise, “Quashie’s Verse” and “Gourd” use words and shapes that are by nature indeterminate. Part of the indeterminacy is movement, where the writing/drawing of the poem calls for a kind of rhizomatic spatial and textual motion, ultimately showcasing that the concrete poem’s power is in imprecision.



Quashie's Verse

But what now
is the length
of Quashie's
verse? He
who can no longer
measure by *kend* or by
chamma or by *ennijja*; he who
knew his poems by how they fit
in earthenware, perfect as water,
words shaping themselves against red
clay grooves. And though no two jars were
precisely like each other – it worked for Quashie
– this 'just about' measure – for words are like that –
each one carrying its own distance. Even this, despite
its best shaping efforts, will never quite be a
jar. So what now shall Quashie do – his old
measures outlawed, and him instructed
now in universal forms, perfected by
universal men who look nothing
and sound nothing
like Quashie?

Figure 1. Kei Miller, "Quashie's Verse", The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion, 2014



g
o
gourd
r
d
hollowed dried
calabash humble took-took
how simple you look. But what
lies beneath that crusty exterior?
Such stories they tell! They say O packy,
in your youth (before history), as cosmic
container, you ordered divination, ritual
sounds, incantations, you were tomb, you were
womb, you were heavenly home, the birthplace of
life here on earth. Yet broken (they say) you
caused the first Flood. Indiscretion could release
from inside you again the scorpion of darkness that
once covered the world. The cosmic snake (it is said)
strains to hold you together for what chaos would ensue
if heaven and earth parted! They say there are those
who've been taught certain secrets: how to harness the
power of your magical enclosure by the ordering of sound
– a gift from orehu the spirit of water who brought the
first calabash and the stones for the ritual, who taught
how to fashion the heavenly rattle, the sacred Mbaraká,
that can summon the spirits and resound cross the abyss
– like the houngan's asson or the shaman's maraka. Yet
hollowed dried calabash, humble took-took, we've walked
far from that water, from those mystical shores. If
all we can manage is to rattle our stones, our
beads or our bones in your dried-out container,
in shak-shak or maracca, will our voices
be heard? If we dance to your rhythm,
knock-knock on your skin, will we
hear from within, no matter
how faintly, your
wholeness
resound?

hollowed
dried
calabash
humble
took-took

how simple
you look

Figure 2. Olive Senior, "Gourd", Gardening in the Tropics, 1994

There are useful parallels to be made between the motion of Miller and Senior's poems and that of the Caribbean landscape. Generally, the earth is subject to all kinds of environmental changes, but the terrain of the Caribbean in particular has been subjected to countless natural and artificial changes through slavery, colonial and postcolonial times. Of additional significance is the lens through which the space has been presented to other regions, for here the environmental design marries the manufactured tropical design. Though we may think of narrative as the main culprit of circulating these custom-made images, the map – an object that is perceived to be objective, scientific even – shapes, defines, contains and prescribes the Caribbean space. Taking on the characteristics of the map, "Quashie's Verse" and "Gourd" use pictorial and linguistic signs like the map does to subvert the static trace of the cartographer's hand and draws or traces out an alternative map of the contained space. This type of containment is familiar, for the term Caribbean Basin maps out the space by defining it through confinement. Not simply an alternative term for the Caribbean region, the image of the basin is significant for it conjures up depressions in the earth, almost like a drainage pool — reinforcing its negative connotations in the Caribbean imagination.

There is an intentionality behind the shapes of Miller and Senior's poems and their relation to the environment they are borne out of. It is as if the map emerges from the concrete poem, each a combination of spatially symbolic and textual elements, both characterized by borders that clearly distinguish interiors from exteriors. Eminent formalist Cleanth Brooks lauds wholeness and completeness in the lyric poem with the signifier of the well-wrought urn. For Brooks, "the poem itself is the well-wrought urn"

and he uses John Donne's "The Canonization" to demonstrate how form may bring contentment or closure for the conflict in the poem (17). The urn resolves the poem, and the metaphor of the urn not only gives closure to the operations of the poem, but also literally encloses the work. While this urn stands for the bounded whole it also shares the spherical shape of the basin. Moreover, the shapes formed in the concrete poems of Caribbean poets Kei Miller and Olive Senior are sphere-like; the gourd and the clay jar resemble Brooks' urn, although the poems and containers resist enclosure.

Like the map, the poem is a rhetorical device that functions like a metaphor. Whereas a map signifies a physical place using signs and symbols on the material page, the concrete poem signifies a physical object using linguistic and pictorial signs in a similar way. However, the signs literally come together to signify others, creating multiple levels of signification. Locating concrete poetry in the literary tradition Abbie Beiman states, "In the concrete poem there is also a metaphor within the greater metaphor" (206). The operations of the concrete poem differ from those of the map insofar as the former implies a kind of imprecision that the latter ostensibly lacks. While the map is not an objective tool or representation of a place it presents as such. The authority and precision of the map are challenged through the deployment of concrete poetry by Miller and Senior.

The map signifies and therefore refers to things outside itself, and these things are slippery just as the Caribbean landscape it attempts to represent. Miller's collection uses the opposition of the cartographer and the rastaman to demonstrate the tension between the scientific certainty of representing the real and the knowledge that comes from

experiencing or ranging over what is seen and unseen. Senior's collection calls forth the material and immaterial elements that form the 'whole' poem, a double metaphor that creates channels between itself and the other poems — illustrating the impossibility of wholeness and the complexities of interpretation of a sign. The work of each poet demonstrates that lyric poetry operates in a way that fosters the use of peculiar linguistic and pictorial signs in order to map the unseen. To this end, the defined shapes of the gourd and clay jar subvert the claim to wholeness that is supposed to be found in the well-wrought urn and therefore speaks back to the British literary canon and its colonizing impulses.

Unlike the funereal urn, the gourd is a container of life and life-giving stories. Its natural origin contrasts with the manufactured urn and attests to the movement it fosters between the past, present and future along with the movement of the natural world it illustrates. Additionally, unlike the urn, the clay jar is not glazed and painted; it is not 'finished'. Instead, the words are constantly being molded against its grooves and instead of being caught in a static state characteristic of death, the material of the clay jar is linked to the natural world. There is a play between the appearance of concreteness and the fluidity of the text that creates these forms. The common element contained in the basin, gourd and jar is water, which defines fluidity. An urn filled with ashes signifies the fire used to produce them — an element in opposition with water. The implications of these metaphors then complicate the process of interpreting the materials these writers call on. At once a literary object and a material object on the page, Senior's creation is referred to as a "poem-calabash" by J. Michael Dash who cites it as a multifunctional

container (50). This characterization is reinforced by Anne Collett's moniker, "poetry-gourd" which describes the powerful connecting force contained in "the body and spirit of the ancient calabash" (91). I borrow from Dash and Collett, calling "Gourd" a poem-calabash and Miller's "Quashie's Verse" a poem-jar. This means they work both as texts and the physical objects they visualize. Moving from one form to another, these works actually demonstrate the fluidity that is possible in enclosure — a fluidity that extends to the Caribbean region, and consequently the basin.

The sensory experience that comes with movement and observation is both common to the process of mapping and to the reading experience. The lyric poem is designed to engage the emotions and the senses of its reader, and in doing so the concrete poem in particular is able to simulate the experience of apprehending places and spaces by ranging over the material page. Acknowledging the significance of typography poet Heinz Gappmayr draws attention to the intricacies of the process: "The text is a fixed connection between thought and physical reality, a unity of concept and sign, and each change of the sign (size, placement, etc.) and its material condition (color, typeface, paper) changes the concept" (Beiman 211). Just as changes in geographies create real disruptions in the formation of the land, spatial choices impact the dis/continuity of form. With this understanding of how the elements in the text function, the intentionality that underlies the creation of the concrete poem and the layout of the page speaks to the complexities of remediating place and space.

Of the two poetry collections, Miller's *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* most directly addresses the multiple geographies that are borne out of a humanistic

approach to mapping. In an interview with fellow Jamaican writer Marlon James, Miller comments on his interest in mapping the Caribbean space and his fascination with the common imperial street names among colonies, as an attempt to remember a place: "Kingston is London insufficiently imagined," for "the landscape always resists this memory" but that it produces something new, different, and valuable in its own right ("From Jamaica to Zion"). Is the concrete poem a map insufficiently imagined? In the field of geocriticism the literary object and the map are usually understood to be linked vis-à-vis the container of narrative prose. The stories a narrative tells readily parallel the stories a map may tell: "To draw a map is to tell a story, in many ways, and vice versa" (Tally 4). However, the invisible lines drawn around the concrete lyric poetry under examination hold stories within that both resemble and challenge the narrative of a map. The lack of defined lines mirrors the borders drawn around nations, where the natural edges are obvious, and yet the geopolitical lines are no less invisible/imagined. Miller's theorizing draws from place-minded criticism inspired by Donald Hinds' explanation of the diversity of Caribbean nations. The author of *Journey to an Illusion* states, "Superimpose a map of Europe on the West Indies…and Jamaica is Edinburgh, Trinidad is north Africa, Barbados would be Italy - that's how far apart we are" (Thompson). This quote gets at a spatial imaginary and reinforces Miller's understanding of "how the world gets to know each other, often starting from the Caribbean and how the Caribbean moves out" ("Caribbean Culture"). This relationship is a spatial one and the repetition of multiple geographies is a quality possessed by narrative and concrete lyric poetry.

Kei Miller's "Quashie's Verse" invokes a sphere-like shape, specifically a clay jar, and in doing so deploys a complex system of signs particular to its use of space. Though this poem appears before the titular sequence of *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, it is positioned among other poems that intentionally exploit the position of words on the page to produce particular visual and rhythmic effects. This attention or sensitivity to textual space and meaning production is likely due to the cartographic concerns of the collection. The poem that appears just before Miller's only concrete poem is "Establishing the Metre" which points toward the relationship between cartography and writing most directly and explicitly by punning "metre." The juxtaposition of the poetic metre with the linear metre and its implications, reverberates in "Quashie's Verse" considering the question at hand: "But what now / is the length / of Quashie's / verse?" (1-4). The precision surrounding poetic lines and arguably cartographical lines, is coupled with and complicated by the sphere-like shape of the clay jar — both in its materiality and its appearance on the page.

But another shift from the angular poem "Establishing the Metre" to the poem-jar is the discourse around the unit of measurement.[7] Unlike the prior reference to the European metric system, this case highlights Quashie's system of measure which comes from Ethiopia. Though it may seem that the *kend*, *chamma* and *ermijja* are one to one with the centimetre, decimetre, and metre, the Ethiopian system is not so linear but instead uses the body as its primary tool. Two bodies, like the jars Quashie makes, are

[7] Miller's "Establishing the Metre" is constructed in such a way that each line of the poem is slightly more indented from the left margin than the last, creating a 135-degree angle as opposed to a 90-degree angle if all lines were uniformly left justified.

never “precisely like each other” (12). This is significant because the *kend*, *chamma* and *ermijja* span the elbow to middle finger, the heel to the toe and one’s extended walk or gait respectively. Not only are the angles and curves of the elbow, finger, heel and toe not shaped like rulers, they vary in length and size. The *ermijja* deserves particular attention in light of the spatiotemporal argument, for despite the linear implications of a stride this measurement of usually a yard is dependent on movement. Movement in “Quashie’s Verse” is invoked by subverting the European system of measure, using a word that appears static on the page in the same way the yard(stick) does, but also signifying motion. The speaker not only uses an Ethiopian word, his/her use of *ermijja* allows for both the yard and the movement to exist simultaneously, and the bodily movement fosters dynamic interpretations.

The poem-jar also couples the movement of the body on the earth with imprecision, which offers a critique of the cartographer’s operations. María Alonso offers an analysis of how the poetic voices in Miller’s collection “re-write contemporary diasporic experiences” (6). Concerning the form and content of “Establishing the Metre” she notes that “[b]y creating a sense of movement...the poem indicates the need to travel in order to shape the world” (8). However, there are limits of the rhetoric of movement, and while she discusses how the visual poem demonstrates these limits regarding another poem, this idea can be extended to “Quashie’s Verse.” The concrete poem’s defined shape certainly evokes limitations, yet within the container of the clay jar movement is signified in ways that draw lines connecting to elements outside of the poem. The diction in the poem allows the reader to move outside the geographical region of the Caribbean –

Jamaica in particular – to Ethiopia, despite the apparent inaccessibility and dislocation of the one who "can no longer measure" in a familiar way. The invocation of the Ethiopian system of measurement, then, is a resource for the creation of an alternative map. The poem-jar engages in a different sort of cartography supported by an Afro-diasporic sign system. In this way, the clay jar – filled with words that resist European epistemology – operates like a map insofar as it creates traces between the real and the virtual by telling stories of physical places (Jamaica and Ethiopia) and imagined spaces (Zion). The clay jar presents as an unassuming package; however, it may be used to navigate places and spaces that a conventional map does not provide access. The process of mapping is a combination of observation and drawing, both of which involve movement, but the spatial and textual movements to craft the poem are necessarily rhizomatic. These conditions of production demonstrate that the poem-jar's power is in imprecision.

The personification in the poem emphasizes the relationship between words, containment and movement. Not only do the words shape themselves the speaker details how they accomplish this under the writer's hand: "it worked for Quashie / - this 'just about' measure - for words are like that - / each one carrying its own distance" (12-14). The image of words carrying themselves points back to how *ermijja* is defined by the dynamics of movement and is specific to who is moving. The previously established connection between language and landscape complicates this image and adds nuance to the various materials that create the poem-jar. The speaker then goes on to establish the limitations of the poem-jar: "Even this, despite / its best shaping efforts, will never quite be a / jar" (14-16). The self-reflexivity of the poem allows the speaker to acknowledge

the attempt to create a jar from a peculiar verse, its similarity to the material object and its falling short. This sentiment bears similarities with Miller's commentary on his interest in mapping the Caribbean space and his fascination with the common imperial street names among colonies, as an attempt to remember a place.

Using a peculiar verse form Quashie creates something new, and valuable in its own right; effectively pushing back on the memory of old, established forms. Measurement and form are inextricably linked in "Quashie's Verse" as the speaker comments on the uncertain position Quashie has been put in: "his old / measures outlawed, and him instructed / now in universal forms" (16-18). The use of the terms "universal forms" and then "universal men" have resonances in colonial discourse, where traditions and ideologies from Europe are imported and transplanted by colonial powers onto colonized people and places in the name of universality. Approached like untamed land in need of ordering, this is one of the methods designed to erase literatures and the identities of peoples who do not align with familiar standards, structures or expectations. Quashie - "he who / knew his poems by how they fit / in earthenware, perfect as water" - has been instructed in a universal form that is not only restrictive but clearly not made with him in mind (7-9). The length of Quashie's verse resists artificial universality and instead is shaped by natural elements: the water that will fill the vessel, the clay from the earth, and his own hands. In this way he participates in his own placemaking: his concrete poem shapes itself along the guidance he provides from the intricacies of the clay grooves instead of being shaped by arbitrary theories or forms.

Even the title of the poem challenges established European poetic forms that writers have patterned after for many years. In the way that the Shakespearean sonnet and the Spencerian sonnet are named after the prevailing sonneteer for their distinct formulaic rhyme schemes and meters, it may be argued that "Quashie's Verse" responds to that tradition. However, it disrupts said tradition considering the unabashed imprecision that forms the poetry and connotations associated with the name Quashie. In the Jamaican context Quashie signifies a person of low upbringing and for his verse to be juxtaposed with those of respected English sonneteers is radical and suggestive. His lyric poem is a new verse form, but the only defining feature is the play with textual space. The shape of the clay jar is certainly a form, but it is a form governed by the words that fill it and not by a set of 'universal' rules.

As in Miller's work there is significance in Senior's positioning of both the words on the page and their location in the collection. Considering the collective makeup of the Caribbean and the spatial concerns of this argument, a useful starting point to examine Senior's work is the position of the calabash-poem within the larger work of *Gardening in the Tropics*. The archipelago that dominates the image of the Caribbean is an arc made up of many islands that together (among others) form the basin. Though they are separated by water, they are united by the waters they share. Just like a map's legend has an array of symbols understood to represent similar phenomena, there are themes/elements common to understanding the collection as a 'whole.' The container holds contents that present themselves in the entire collection. In this way, the Caribbean basin, map and concrete poems collectively display or visualize how space, and not only

signs are imperative in creating meaning. Many critics of Senior's collection consider "Meditation on Yellow," the first poem in the section titled 'Travelers' Tales' to be the opening poem of the collection. "Gourd," however, is presented on the page before that section and has been largely ignored despite its bold face type - or perhaps because of it. Its presence before the four sections Senior creates may be the reason it is overlooked, but the absence of a titled section points not to its exclusion from the collection but its ability to enclose the collection.

The typography of "Gourd" is of particular interest because of the defined shape it produces. The words on the page are organized to signify a "hollowed dried / calabash" or "humble took-took" and move beyond the conventional syntactical logic of lyric poetry in order to do so (6-7). The speaker addresses the gourd, questioning its history and reflecting on its magical power in the past and how that power translates to the present. In doing so the poem not only displaces the poetic line, but also displaces History with stories. "They say" is a repeated phrase and demonstrates the distance between prevailing narratives and oral histories, which mirrors the distance between the state of the "cosmic container" then and now. Before being broken the speaker reminisces, "you were tomb, you were womb" (13-14). These spaces signify enclosure or containment. Further, the poem itself may be understood as a container.

While the gourd does not contain water any longer, it contains words, and shapes them into meaning by playing with space as it plays with history using stories. Like in Miller's "Quashie's Verse" the words shape themselves into formations that subvert European sign systems. Draper points out that in "European printed language it is an

automatic assumption that letters forming words…march across the page from left to right, and that the lines so formed are strictly parallel and progress downwards at equal intervals. Concrete poetry plays upon these expectations, but itself takes nothing for granted" (337). The personification in Draper's definition ironically contrasts with the agency words have in Miller and Senior's work. Words marching have an authoritative cadence, one that aligns with the authority with which the map presents itself. However, "Gourd" plays with imprecision and instead of "strictly" moving down the page, moves outward in different directions.

Working against established spatial expectations, the typographic treatment of the title displaces the horizontal logic or convention by using a vertical logic that juxtaposes the conventional one with perpendicularity. This function creates a particular shape at the top of the page but what must be the bottom of the gourd. To connect the type "gourd" to the shape of the gourd without merging it with the body of the poem Senior places the letters g, o, r and d vertically:

g
o
g o u r d
r
d

The manipulation of this 'title' results in a unified shape yet maintains some distance between the perpendicular "gourd" and the container or 'poem.' Yet this untraditional treatment blurs the lines between the poem and what the poem talks about. The typography of the poem then speaks to the reductive categorization of self-referentiality of the concrete poem, in that they 'show' everything they 'tell.' Further, the mechanics of

this choice reflect movement in the natural world. The horizontal line invokes the horizon while the vertical line invokes the ostensible upward and downward movement of the sun. This appearance of linearity is simply that, for the earth's spherical shape and revolutionary movement cause this phenomenon. In a similar way the apparent simplicity of the poem and the fruit alike belie a complex system of signs.

There are forces at work that underlie the immediate visual impact of "Gourd" both linguistically and pictorially. The poem contains a number of rhetorical devices that demonstrate the dynamics and complexities of its contents. The speaker of the poem seems to engage in a dialogue with the hollowed calabash, asking questions whose answers come from both within and without the instrument. Though the first question simply points inward, "But what/lies beneath that crusty exterior?" (7-8) Like a call and response, a sort of answer follows in the next line: "Such stories they tell!" that is indeed telling (9). "They" here could either refer to the community that shares oral histories or the "crusty exterior" itself. The speaker continues to repeat this pronoun with a significant addition: "they say" - used as both a descriptor and a qualifier. "They say O packy, / in your youth (before history)" is followed by propositions concerning the creation of the material and mystical world. "They say" as an imperative certainly suggests personhood in general and community in particular. However, personification has characterized the concrete poetry in this discussion so much so that the gourd clearly has the capacity to tell, especially considering its textured surface — a combination of linguistic and material elements.

Michael Bucknor's conception of 'grung' poetics illuminates the complexities of the relationship between community and the natural world: "Like her community griots, Senior finds value in 'putting [her] ear to the ground' and, with her own confession that 'grung tell *me* word too', she invites us to consider her work as a kind of (what I am calling) 'grung' or grounded poetics" (85). The conditions of Senior's narrative transmission[8] reveals the significance of her position as a member of the Caribbean community generally, and the Jamaican community in particular. It also demonstrates that grung poetics rests on oral communication that does not originate between people but begins with the ground. The creation and positionality of the calabash-poem reinforces this reality; it contains lines on its surface to illustrate the beginning of the conversation, where "listening to the underground or submerged voices" comes from engaging with the materiality of the gourd (Bucknor 85). What can we glean from its surface?

The gourd is "the fruit of either the Calabash tree (*Crescentia cujete*), common in the Caribbean; or of a vine (*Lagenaria siceraria*) more common in Africa and elsewhere" (Senior 1). Senior's invocation of the multinational gourd works in a similar way as Miller's inclusion of *kend, chamma and ermijja*. The use of the Ethiopian system of measurement highlights the immaterial connections between West Africa and Jamaica. Furthermore, as a fruit that emerges from the ground itself, the gourd connects the divine with the community through natural elements: water, "stones for the ritual" and even bones (7). With this understanding the textured surface of the gourd not only tells a story

[8] Delivering the Annual Philip Sherlock Lecture, "The Poem as Gardening, the Story as Su-Su: Finding a Literary Voice" (2005) Senior transfers ancestral knowledge to her audience through oration.

through its connection to the ground/grung in a rooted sense, but also parallels the terrain insofar as marks silently tell a story of the past. Like a tapestry that forms a complex design, the form of the calabash-poem is designed to tell stories that are not as simple as they look. Intricacies of landscape or topographic formations commemorate events, and, in this way, histories have their own marks. This relationship between the marks on the land and the marks that create or form the poem is essential to acknowledge in order to crack open the "crusty exterior" of the poem, or at least "rattle" the "dried out container." This kind of reading is a topopoetic[9] one that emphasizes the connection between language and landscape that the poem hints at. With these linguistic conditions in mind, the relationship between typography and topography becomes more complex, for at work are a complex system of signs that have ties to the space on the page, the ground, and each other.

The concept of topopoetics has a lexical relation to mapping and makes this operation more legible, where "topopoetics [is] a *lang*scaping of literature or a reading that maps the work as a *land*guage. The fusion of 'language' with 'land' or 'landscape' points to the way a work's language may be laden with the natural and cultural symptomologies of its setting" (Moslund 30). Reading the poem as a complex space, each line that "they say" appears indicates a new territory. First the *lang*scape describes the gourd as "the birthplace of / life here on earth" then "they say" or, they call into being, several spaces, events and objects that, while significant, manifest as approximate

[9] The etymology of topopoetics defines it as "place-making": a combination of topos, meaning 'place' and poiesis meaning 'making'

musical instruments "like the houngan's asson[10] or the shaman's maraca[11]" and imprecise locations like "that water" (7). Here, imprecision has the power to encompass multiple temporalities and geographies that in fact share common ground. The "mystical shores" from which "that water" comes is a unifying force that draws both cultural and geographical connections between Jamaica, Haiti and South America. "Gourd" creates an immaterial or invisible network that is informed by the poetic lines that form the calabash-poem and even the lines forming each word, and here visibility works in tandem with invisibility. The gourd's surface showcases that the symptomologies of the Jamaican setting are plural, for the *lang*scape of "Gourd" demonstrates that its *land*guage is rhizomatic, extending from Jamaica to the Caribbean, South America and Africa. In calling forth the immaterial realm through the gourd, Senior makes a map, much like the one Miller does, that we need special tools to read. The single images they draw/write have simple appearances but are layered with meaning — simultaneously containing the im/material.

The simultaneity of containment in the calabash-poem and jar-poem recalls Beiman's argument for the double metaphor of the concrete poem. In putting forth the concept she encourages the reader to move beyond 'concrete' conceptions of this poetic style and embrace the dynamic power of the metaphor. There is a play between the figurative nature of the metaphor and the concrete figure the metaphor invokes. Further, Beiman's commentary on the ability of the metaphor speaks to the remapping projects of

[10] "In Haitian Criol, the asson is the scared gourd rattle of the Haitian Voudon priest – the houngan" (Senior 2).
[11] "The sacred calabash rattle of the medicine-man (shaman) of the Amerindians" (Senior 2).

Miller and Senior: “it has provided a way in which the unknown and intangible could be experienced through the known and tangible” (198). The Caribbean basin as it has been placed or mapped onto the Caribbean space attempts to illustrate only the known and tangible, while the sphere-like shapes of “Quashie’s Verse” and “Gourd” play with tangibility and concreteness to contain the material and immaterial in their unique Caribbean basins.

Dissimilar from the urn in the intricacies of its form and the particularity of its function, the clay jar and the gourd both resist wholeness in their openness not only in form but also in function. Instead of the ornate design that commonly characterizes an urn, the gourd and the clay jar are objects celebrated for their use value, ones that afford an opportunity for reorienting oneself in the ‘New World.’ For example, Dash notes how Senior uses the “dried out and not particularly beautiful container as an ideal form,” taking the particularities of her purpose into consideration (Dash 50). While Brooks invokes the well-wrought urn as an ideal form for all poetry, the calabash-poem and the jar-poem are each utilized by the poets for a specific purpose. Collett, discussing the symbolism of “Gourd” posits: “The poetry book itself constitutes a gourd (or indeed, a miniature tropical garden) in which the individual poems are seeds of a story — their rhythmic voices resounding and reverberating in an ancient vessel” (91). The symbolism of the gourd in *Gardening in the Tropics* as a magical enclosure translates to the way in which words shape themselves to form the container of “Quashie’s Verse,” and thereby redefine the concept of measurement. Together they resist the idea of a universal form, for each iteration of the sphere-like shape enters into a new sphere of poetic form. By

extension Miller and Senior's concrete poems challenge the limited geographical scope of the Caribbean as a single basin.

The space on the page is not a mere container for the poetic line, just as the Caribbean space is more than just a backdrop for the events of colonization or the European novel. Concrete poetry makes clear the significance of space in literature in a material way. The works of Kei Miller and Olive Senior at once point back to the material world and point toward or even transcend the real with the imagined. Containing the material and the immaterial in a way the map of the Caribbean basin resists, the poems are maps that make connections, not maps that are meant to contain or confine. That the shapes are sphere-like and not perfect spheres illustrates Miller's postulation regarding the attempt to remember a place. These "insufficiently imagined" shapes then embody a sort of resistance to the memory of the well-wrought urn, subverting the expectation of perfect repetition. When one considers the insufficiency as intentional and powerful, not attempting an artificial mimeticism but moving towards new and slightly different forms, it opens up the cartographic view. Comparing the poems reveals the many networks produced by this insufficient reimagining of the Caribbean landscape. Exploring the fluid enclosures of Senior and Miller's work shatters the ornate urn their poetry seems to fit into, and gives rise to multiple basins, and therefore multiple maps that have never stopped moving.

Chapter 2

Travelling Forms, Shifting Formats: Aestheticizing Spatial Forms and Folklore in *Gardening in the Tropics* and *The Cartographer Tries to Map a way to Zion*

Place is a vexed term, intimately linked with both colonial and postcolonial thought, yet its paradoxical fixity is a helpful starting point from which to explore the dynamics of space. My argument is not just an examination of place(making) in "Quashie's Verse" and "Gourd" for example but placement with *Gardening in the Tropics* and *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*. Form is the predominant medium through which place and space are negotiated in the concrete poem. However, when one turns an eye toward the collections these poems are situated in, their surroundings become important. Yet the other poems are not simply a backdrop from which to understand the ones with sphere-like shapes, but like the networks produced within the containers of "Quashie's Verse" and "Gourd," additional networks exist between the poems within *Gardening in the Tropics* and *The Cartographer Tries to Map a way to Zion* and among them. These connections are not made predominantly through form as demonstrated in Chapter 1, but through shape. While the shape of the spherical basin is not found plainly in the form of the poems I will examine, in form and content they share a concern with circularity, linearity and movement. These relationships are often mediated by travel and this travelling may be geographic, crossing between the Caribbean and West Africa via the Atlantic (as in this chapter), or generic, crossing between poetry and graphs via network visualization (as in chapter 3). Place and space

are negotiated in dynamic ways throughout both collections and with the addition of shape, various mapping projects become more visible.

While textual space remains significant to my examination the series of poems located in Senior and Miller's collections, space is most clearly mediated by Afro diasporic deities. In this chapter I build connections between the concrete lyric poetry in Senior and Miller's work, and other poems in each of their collections through African/diasporic folklore and mythology. The first and most dominant figure, perhaps owing to his position as head of the lwa or loa[12], is Papa Legba. He has both feet in the realm of folklore and mythology, operating simultaneously as a trickster and as a deity, governing the gateway between the natural and spiritual worlds. Agué and Yemoja are more solidly located in the mythological realm, where this god and goddess respectively reign over bodies of water and often negotiate aquatic travel. Finally, like Papa Legba, Anansi is also a trickster figure, but instead of standing at the interstices of divinity and humanity, existing as both man and spider, Anansi stands at the interstices of truth and negotiates linguistic interpretation. While these folkloric and mythological African/diasporic figures appear all over the collections of Senior and Miller most of my focus is on the two tricksters: Papa Legba and Anansi. These trickster figures are unique in that they both possess or produce material elements – veve and spider web - that can be read spatially. Each figure not only crosses between collections, they also cross from West Africa to the Caribbean — a vexed but transformative journey.

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[12] According to George Eaton Simpson the lwas are "African deities who have been inherited through succeeding generations by the descendants of those who brought them to Haiti" (495).

Movement of black peoples in the colonial era is inextricably linked to the transatlantic slave trade through the Middle Passage. But this not only impacts the movement of black bodies in ships, it colors the movement of cultural and religious practice – evidenced with the figures under discussion. Coupling divinity with the physical movement of West Africans to the 'New World' demonstrates power, exemplifying another manifestation of power in movement. The importance of movement in Chapter 1 is connected with poetic and cartographic imprecision. This power in movement, then, not only impacts how one shapes poetry it also calls attention to how one shapes the world. This chapter then focuses on the two collections that contain the poem-calabash "Gourd" and the poem-jar "Quashie's Verse" and seeks to demonstrate that the Glissantian rhizomatic map is not only contained in Miller and Senior's concrete poems, but also extends to and flows through the collections.

Identifying and analyzing how the mythological and folkloric figures move make the fluidity of the collections more visible. In illustrating the fluidity in Senior and Miller's comparatively structured work my intention is for this sense of movement to enlarge the map and enhance the cartographic view from the limitations of particular closed or measured systems. Though the apparent concreteness of poetic containers may make them seem less fluid, the basins complicate traditional notions of containment. And moving outward from the specific containers to multiple basins within Senior and Miller's work reveals continuities in this construction. The pivotal position of place demonstrated in the concrete lyric poetry, extends to the variety of poetic structures within the collection and how these collections are formed as a 'whole.' The idea of

locating or placing them within the container of the book gets at a kind circularity within and among movements that is reified through the image of the basin. A variety of spherical and sphere-like shapes emerge from *Gardening in the Tropics* and *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* that are as multiple in function as they are in kind. In examining and comparing these shapes between collections I am charting the iterations and reiterations of the Caribbean basin with attention to movement of peoples and geographies through water. This project requires special tools to examine the play between circularity and asymmetry as ways that complicate the 'fixed' shape of the Caribbean basin.

Olive Senior's collection most explicitly foregrounds the idea of the basin through the poem "Caribbean Basin Initiative." The poem begins with an epigraph from Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa (1897)*. The epigraph draws parallels between Kingsley's journey from Liverpool to several West African countries in the nineteenth century, and the perilous journey of Haitian refugees to the United States in the twentieth century. It also fosters a postcolonial critique by implicitly comparing the impact of European colonialism with the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) launched under the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.[13] Senior provides an explanatory note that gets at the irony embedded in this contrast: "In the poem this externally imposed 'solution' is contrasted with the initiative of individuals – in this case the Haitian people

[13] The Caribbean Basin Initiative was launched through the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act, and according to the US Trade Representative: "The trade programs known collectively as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) remain important elements of U.S. economic relations with our neighbors in the Caribbean. The CBI is intended to facilitate the development of stable Caribbean Basin economies by providing beneficiary countries with duty-free access to the U.S. market for most goods."

who from time to time choose the dangerous route of migration in small open boats" (5). The open boats recall the canoes that feature quite prominently in Kingsley's narrative. While the experience of travel by water – albeit motivated by different reasons – tie the colonial moment with the postcolonial, a more salient evocation coming from the movement of the Haitian peoples is the transatlantic slave voyage.

The boat, however, is not an enclosed space in the way that black bodies were confined in the hull of a slave ship. Instead, the openness of the boat had to be negotiated by the entrance of water: "we know / to keep still, we are / still in our graves" (11-13). Édouard Glissant's "The Open Boat" opens the discussion within *Poetics of Relation,* where he highlights the significance of the slave ship experience, moving from the experience of the abyss of the boat to the abyss of the sea and into the abyss of land. He positions the boat as open, where related experiences of the abyss may be continuously exchanged. This continuous exchange is informed by rhizomatic thought where, "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (11). The outward movement of the rhizome speaks to the relation between poems not only to place vis-à-vis mapping, but also within the collection.

Deleuze and Guattari argue for the similarities between the rhizome and the map: "The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" (14). In this way, the maps produced by each poem are necessarily negotiated by other poems in a continuous motion. Further, the flow of my argument mirrors the journey of the open boat that Glissant describes throughout *Poetics of Relation*. He refers to the boat as a belly and illustrates the beginning of what

he calls a deportation experience: “The boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death” (6). The enclosure Glissant examines is an abyss, which not only contrasts with the sense of confinement evoked by the ship’s hull but also with the idea of knowability. The reference to the open boat in the poem signals open-endedness as opposed to rigidity or concreteness. This process extends from the ‘enclosure’ of the concrete poem to what we may call the other (poetic) basin.

Within this poetic basin there is a stark disparity between the life-giving space of the womb and the deathly abyss, or tomb to invoke Senior. The image of the womb is a familiar one, for it presents itself in Senior’s “Gourd” where the kumbla was both womb and tomb before being broken. The play on stillness in “Caribbean Basin Initiative” also presents the reader with the living-dead condition borne out of negotiating the boat experience. On the one hand “we / are still in our graves” refers to the lack of movement necessary to keep the boat from foundering. But on the other hand, the stillness may also refer to the temporal, that those on the boat have not yet entered into the New World or a new world. What each of these readings have in common though is the allusion to the boat as a potential grave. While the morbidity suggests a closed boat as an alternative to the open boat.

The space and shape of the grave recalls the metaphor of Brooks’ well-wrought urn, and yet the sphere-like shape of the basin resists enclosure in the way the ‘finished’ urn signals both finality in death and resolution in meaning. In addition to the clear signification of the gourd in her opening poem, “Gourd,” discussed in Chapter 1, the

poem “Caribbean Basin Initiative” makes clear the connection between the geographical region and a material basin: “My mother sought a sign / in the basin” (26-27). This recalls a small basin of water “a method of telling the future (divination) by looking into a container of water” and uses the expanse of the sky to mediate the material and immaterial realms. In this way, the image of the basin opens up the world for even in the small space, the elements of the world are potentially held within, much like the way the gourd was once a “cosmic / container, you ordered divination // the birthplace of / life here on earth” (11-15). With the image of the basin in mind, her diction in “Caribbean Basin Initiative” may define and redefine the space of the Caribbean, performing a similar operation as the concrete poem. The language of containers juxtaposed with that of deities expands the operations of the divine in the Caribbean imagination by almost liquifying the boundaries of land, sea and sky as the poem illustrates the movement within and without the Caribbean. Additionally, by reaching back to the imagery or sign of the gourd, the poem locates itself within the (im)materiality of the concrete poem. This movement exemplifies the way that “Gourd” holds or contains the entire collection within its unassuming shape.

Form is not only significant to my analysis of concrete poetry but extends to my analysis of “Caribbean Basin Initiative” which is not an overtly concrete poem. The poem is formed with nine sections of different lengths where the first stanza of section 1 functions as a frame or enclosure:

Like limpets we cling

On craft that ply

In these waters

Where our dreams lie. (1-4)

Here the narrator starts to address the fragility of the boat that is tasked to transport them to the U.S. The metaphor of the limpets not only link the "boat people" to aquatic life, it also gives us something to unpack. Unlike barnacles, limpets are capable of movement and they usually cannot survive forced separation from the surface they attach themselves to. In this way it is almost as if the "boat people" are limited to this identity, never separated from the water – and therefore trapped in a static state. The first stanza also closes the poem. At the end, however, the "we" is transformed to the future tense, "Like limpets we'll cling" not creating a closed circle but setting off a continuation or perpetuation. Glissant illustrates the functionality of Senior's technique: "Repetition...is an acknowledged form of consciousness both here and elsewhere. Relentlessly resuming something you have said. Consenting to an infinitesimal momentum..." (46). The momentum is more than the drifting boat, "reclaimed" and returning to Haiti it pushes beyond this particular journey and figures for numerous if not limitless journeys. The structure of this poem offers something similar to the concrete poem in that it expands beyond the container of the text and makes connections outside of it by building linguistic and material containers.

Another way of reaching beyond the poetic basin is illustrated in section eight of "Caribbean Basin Initiative" which is comprised of a single line: "*louvri baryè pou mwen*" written in Haitian creole which means "open the gate for me" (Senior). Papa Legba is the one to whom this request is addressed. A figure with many names and

existing in many places, Legba, as Heather Russell states, "Esu or Eshu, as Esu-Elegbara is sometimes called, operates in the Yoruban pantheon as god of the crossroads—residing literally at the gateway, the interstices of truth, meaning, and interpretation" (9). The invocation of Legba after being bound in "this cage / on Guantanamo" is significant in terms of placing or locating access to the material and immaterial realms the gate offers. Is Legba's gate only functional on land or does its use extend to water? Commenting on his journey in "The Crossroads" entry of *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Folklore,* "The orisha came to the New World by the way of the Middle Passage" (Williams 65). It is notable that Papa Legba is invoked by drawing a veve on the ground – a kind of map – at the beginning of a Vodun ceremony in order to facilitate an exchange between the physical and the spiritual realms. The veve's inscription on land compares with the gourd's texture and my engagement with 'grung' poetics, where traces speak silently of the past or history. In keeping with the practice of "listening to the underground or submerged voices" concerning the material surface of the gourd, the actual traces of the symbol on the ground open it up for a similar exploration (Bucknor 85). Yet unlike the gourd as object and as poem, the veve's inscription operates in ways that do not tether it to the ground. The question then is where is the metaphysical gate grounded, if at all?

In an attempt to find ground, we may consider Tim Cresswell's assertion that a poem is a place that can be interpreted spatially. Furthermore, this conception of place-mindedness concerning poetry operates much like Legba insofar as connecting the immaterial with the material: "Topopoetics means closing the gap between the material

form of the poem (topos in the sense of rhetorics) and the earthly world of place (topos as place). It means attending to the presence of place within the poem" (323). The presence of place is not only signaled by the discrete locations of "the Gulf Stream" and "Guantanamo" the speaker reveals, but those that are absent, somewhere "in the basin" (34). With the waters within the basin featuring so largely in the poem is becomes clear that the fixity that place suggests is somewhat inaccessible. Unlike the invocation of Papa Legba, Agué Lord of the Sea has multiple places in the poem. Is the water exclusively the territory of Agué? In the *Encyclopedia of African Religion,* he is "recognized as the only true patron of sailors and fishers. Haitians pray to him when embarking on seaward journeys…Agwe prefers the isolation of his underwater realm to the ostentatious Vodou ceremonies where the other Lwa or Vodou spirits manifests themselves to the faithful" (Daniels 20). The possibility exists that this deity, despite being present in "Caribbean Basin Initiative" was not present on the speaker's journey, despite libations and offerings, considering the "turbulent seas among other misfortunes" represented in the poem (21). The sign the speaker's mother sought in the basin contrasts with the speaker's assertion: "I said: Agué Lord of the Sea / rules over me" (Senior 30). Here lies a paradox: the Caribbean basin versus the underwater mansion in which Agwe/Agué resides. Both are ostensibly situated within a singular geography, yet the mansion points toward a physical structure within a larger liquid one (the sea) getting at the indeterminacy and complexities of signs, nature and divinity. In considering the potential limits of interpretation and divine intervention, and the movements of these mythological figures

across time, space and literature it seems that their identities and movements are too slippery to pin down.

While "Caribbean Basin Initiative" recognizably invokes circularity through the basin in the *Travellers' Tales* section, another poem from *Gardening in the Tropics,* this time from the *Mystery* section, "Yemoja: Mother of Waters" participates in a similar project, albeit more mysteriously. Both poems address the strength of water and allude to the various containers of water and of life (and death). The re-iteration of sphere-like containers in Senior's poetry collection is significant. Whereas "Caribbean Basin Initiative" literally signifies a basin and therefore a circular shape, setting off a cycle moving from past to present, in "Yemoja: Mother of Waters" circularity takes form in the repeated stanza, "Always something/cooking in your pot...blueing in your vat...growing in your belly" (10-15). Senior illustrates the goddess's pot, vat and belly and juxtaposes these enclosures or containers with water. Furthermore, there is a connection to be made between the formal elements of these two poems and the multiple shapes illustrated in the poetry. The shapes exemplify the multiplicity of expression, yet each one functions differently. While the narrator of "Caribbean Basin Initiative" appeals to Agué Lord of the Sea (along with Legba), the narrator of "Yemoja: Mother of Waters" appeals to the titular deity.

Similar to Agué/Agwe, Yemoja governs waters: "in Yorubaland she is an orisha of the river, in the New World queen of the sea and salt water" (Senior). Characterized as a mother, she is not simply an inaccessible deity, but rather her motherly role suggests a familiar link between herself and those who invoke her. Functioning similarly to the life-

giving gourd, and even Papa Legba, she is the "Mother of origins, guardian / of passages; / generator of new life in flood / waters" (Senior 1-4). Her waters are personified as a blue cloth to "let us cross over —" a similar operation as Legba, who negotiates the gateway and Agué, who guides water travellers across the sea (20-21). Also worshipped during Vodun, the perspective of Yemoja in this poem is personified or rather humanized further than the previous deities discussed. The reader witnesses her acting out her role, in another case of repetition:

> Always something
> cooking in your pot
> Always something
> blueing in your vat
> Always something
> growing in your belly
> Always something
> moving on the waters (10-17)

She is constantly moving, constantly acting, and performs similarly to the mother of the speaker in "Caribbean Basin Initiative" who looks for a sign in the basin. In this case Yemoja is one and the same with the basin, or sphere-like shapes invoked in the diction of the pot, vat and belly. These shapes, particularly the belly, recalls the boat as Glissant metaphorizes it. Like a chant or song, the poem repeats her movement five times, focusing on the movement within these shapes rather than the space of the shape itself.

The final lines of this chant, “Always something / moving on the waters” not only ties the containers to water, it also recalls the voyages of boats.

A topopoetic reading highlights the movement “From Caribbean shore / to far-off Angola” that she facilitates (133). It not only visualizes those who travel across waters as appealing to the water goddess, it also ascribes a measure of divinity to boat or ship travel. How may travel by water be a divine process? The transition from different bodies of water fosters links between different temporal and thematic forms of movement. It makes room for divinity not only during elective travel in the postcolonial era, but also – and perhaps more forcefully – the journey through the Middle Passage. Movement between waters is not only exemplified by different geographical water bodies, but also different classifications of water. From salt water to fresh water to ground water to rain water, “white water: blue water / the circle comes round” (135). The repetition of the multiple kinds of water on the one hand suggests the circle or cycle of life but also appears to create the circle with the words themselves. The circle coming round is not necessarily an automatic movement of water, though it could be; it may also be attempting to shape the physical with the oral and the textual. This poem is divine.

In alignment with the creative appearance and invocation of divinity in Senior’s poetry, the phrase “let us cross over” regarding Yemoja’s blue cloth, actually alludes to Legba as god of the crossroads (133). The shape of the crossroads embedded in this line complicates the circular imagery that fills the majority of the poem. The linearity of intersections and gates seems to resist the roundness or circularity of aquatic movement. But the variance between these shapes, both of which are connected to water and travel,

demonstrates the complexities inherent to the (transatlantic movement) especially with the physical and metaphysical transitions in mind. Taking a closer look at the particularities of Legba's shape in comparison to Yemoja's with a topopoetic lens gives insight into the simultaneity of these divine yet indeterminate movements.

As the gateway god, access to Legba is found only through invoking an intersection, one that signifies his governance of the path between material and immaterial realms. Like the materiality of the gourd that is presented at the beginning of *Gardening in the Tropics*, the veve warrants a closer examination with respect to space, place and shape (see figure 3). While one of the easiest crossroads to envision is the simple intersection of two lines, Legba's veve has that major cross along with a number of notable details. A brief return to "Gourd" to reexamine its simple appearance that belies a complex system of signs is instructive. The typography of the title has additional significance here; the cross shape at the top of the poem-calabash not only signals movement, it also invokes Legba, albeit in a subtle form. This simple textual cross is linked to the more intricate veve that, like the gourd, is intimately connected with traces and with the ground. While the process of tracing the religious symbol on the ground for a ceremony involves lines, these are not the straight lines that the gourd title presents. Instead there are curved lines that augment the central point of intersection,

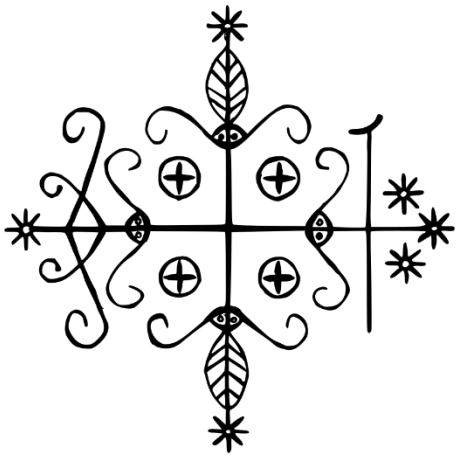

Figure 3: Legba's Veve Open source image.

which each intersecting the straight lines at different points. In this way the signifier for Legba's crossing is not only made up of conventional straight lines, it is also one of multiple crossings and therefore crossroads. This speaks to the complex, and in many cases untraceable paths ships, bodies and traditions make across the Atlantic. Considering Legba's crossing from West Africa to the "New World" it seems appropriate that his symbol invokes the complexities concerning his interaction with the physicality of the ground and the metaphysical nature of the sign traced upon the ground.

Here, the apparent opposition between the linearity of the crossroads and the circularity of the Caribbean basin and the waters within it are disrupted. The circular movements of the waters between world's Old and New, and even within the Caribbean are part and parcel of the aquatic crossing of ships, bodies and traditions. In this way the veve holds within its symbology both kinds of movement: the kind that can be geographically charted in lines cutting across the waters and the unmappable waters that complicate the sure paths of captains navigating their ships. Barbadian poet and theorist Kamau Brathwaite's concept of tidalectics illuminates the complicated relationship between two opposing modes of negotiating movement. Brathwaite's tidalectical is "a term whose revision of 'dialectical' replaces the latter's totalizing, recuperative teleology with a more stoic recognition of erosion, oscillation, drift" (Mackey 12). Referring to the Hegelian dialectic, Nathaniel Mackey uses Brathwaite's concept to offer a critique of the prevailing approach by which one arrives at resolution between contradictory positions. He does this by highlighting the differences between the theoretical underpinnings of the

three dialectic stages – thesis, antithesis and synthesis – and Brathwaite's remediation of the formulaic rationale through environmental phenomena.

In an interview with Mackey, Brathwaite illuminates his concept further: "In other words, instead of the notion of one-two-three, Hegelian, I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear" (Interview 44). If one were to simply transplant Hegel's dialectic from Europe to the Caribbean it would result in the imposition of an order or synthetic unity in tension with both the social and geographic environment. With respect to shape, the Hegelian triad evokes a triangle which, in the Caribbean context, recalls the triangular trade[14]. The routes of the triangular trade are often represented by lines connecting West Africa, the Caribbean and Europe, signaling the exchange of commodities among regions. This is an imposition not only drawn onto a map, but one that forcefully disrupted and displaced peoples, cultures and resources to benefit European nations at the expense of others. In contrast to the exploitative triangulation the triad evokes, Brathwaite's island logic inherent to the neologism tidalectic, evokes a roundness particular to the natural movement of waters surrounding the Caribbean. To borrow language from Mackey, the oscillation and drift that tidalectics recognizes are particularly significant with respect to the phenomena that Legba, Yemoja, Agwe and Anansi – who will be addressed later – govern, along with the shapes they both evoke and invoke. In

[14] The triangular trade refers to the directional exchange of goods in the transatlantic slave trade between Africa, the Americas and Europe. This exchange included enslaved people, rum, textiles and sugar. Here the enslaved people represent an eruption within the economic and abstract logic of the triangle trade, where people should not fit alongside commodities.

this way, the intricate curves of Legba's veve take on additional significance, especially with respect to place and space, for this method of access represents not only an alternative mode of approaching and accessing religion, it is also designed by, and, as a result, specific to a particular set of people in a particular place.

Exploring Legba's veve with a specificity commensurate with the particularities of its design is essential to understanding its significance. Arguably, based on the veve's aesthetic qualities, its multiple crossings displace and problematize the idea of centrality. The aesthetics also speaks to the process of production, where the unconventional map recalls the movement required to produce the alternative maps of the Caribbean basin. These maps that take the sphere-like form of the clay jar and the calabash called for non-linear movement in their drawing/writing figure for the material creation of the veve – albeit with a difference. Patricia Mohammed's examination of the significance of artistic skill in ceremonial production is useful here, where "the makings of these drawings would have required a steady hand, sure eye, knowledge of the symbol, memory for detail, and finally, artistic skill, in order to apply with precision the powdery or granular material being used" (125). The non-linear and rhizomatic movement I argue for does not preclude precision. In the same way that the writing/drawing of the Miller and Senior's concrete poetry relies on imprecision for resisting conventional cartography, but produces an intentional image, so too does the image of the veve. In the postcolonial theoretical framework, the veve itself is resistance, for it symbolizes a tradition maintained despite the colonial influence and power. Further, the rather specific and specialized skill necessary to produce these ceremonial drawings point to their subversive operations

concerning interpretation. Mohammed argues that both "the hidden messages and belief system of Vodun and the underlying symbolism represented by the scripted *vèvè* remain hidden from prurient eyes" (125). This function not only existed in the colonial moment out of necessity, but the protective mystery surrounding Vodun generally and the veve particularly, still exists today.

Ranging over the intricate collection of lines that comprise Legba's veve it becomes evident that unlike a circle, his veve is not symmetrical. The elements that differ from one side to the next are ones specific to his operations: his cane and keys. While the inner portion of the most central crossing has symmetry, the outermost curved lines on the left and right do not quite mirror each other. As god of the crossroads, there are several important objects associated with Legba in carrying out his operations. Like Senior's treatment of Yemoja in her poem, these items lend insight into his personality, and provide a way of understanding him as a man in addition to a deity. These items are also telling of his movement across the waters. The keys are fairly straightforward, as they provide access to the gates between the physical and metaphysical realm he oversees. His cane or walking stick is a symbol more vexed. For example, the image of Legba in the New World is often an old, limping man – his cane like a third leg – lacking the power he once had. However, this depiction, much like the apparent simplicity of Senior and Miller's concrete poems, and perhaps Legba's veve, contains hidden complexities that are easy to overlook.

In *Istwa Across the Water* Toni Pressley-Sanon discusses gods who manifest themselves in Haitian art, noting the transferal of power between West and Central West

Africa and Haiti in particular. While Legba's role and appearance may have shifted, she showcases he has no less power through his cane:

> in the diaspora, Legba and his crutch take on different meanings. His cane, as a transformed phallus—a sign of virility in Benin—no longer points up and outward but downward. It is nonetheless still potent. While in Benin his phallus is erect, perhaps indicating the way to new life, rebirth, and the future, in the diaspora the cane descends, in constant contact with the earth (100).

As previously mentioned, the veve's inscription on earth evinces Legba's connection with the ground. Considering the vital function his cane performs in linking him to the earth, it is significant that the image of the cane is a part of the ceremonial marking. Furthermore, Legba's keys and cane are the elements that interrupt the potential symmetry of his veve. In light of the combination of the linearity of the crossroads and the circle-like curved lines of the veve, it seems natural that the whole image would allude to a circular symmetry – with a difference. The veve resists the circularity of conventional understanding in the same way Caribbean concrete poetry resists the conventional understanding of the map and the process of mapping.

Just as the Caribbean basin reimagined through Caribbean poets introduce unconventional uses of space and shape, so too does Legba's asymmetrical marking insufficiently imagine his identity. Here I return to Kei Miller's commentary regarding the attempt to remember a place as being insufficiently imagined, but "something else is formed, and that's kind of magical" ("From Jamaica to Zion"). It appears as if the veve, an image or rather an imagination of Legba's identity and activity as god of the gateway

or crossroads is such an attempt by the "*oungan*, or Vodun priest, and taught to his *serviteurs*" who inscribe it on the ground (Mohammed 132). The inability to completely pin down a distinct place onto another that Miller observes directly relates to Legba's movement between physical places (and metaphysical spaces) and consequently his veve. But the similarity between the conditions of his person and his symbol, exemplified by the presence of his representative elements, speaks to "this capacity to remain unmapped and to resist decoding" (Mohammed 125). It is as if Legba and all he represents embodies the "immappancy of dis world" (Miller 21).

Addressing the path to divinity more overtly, but with no less complexity, the cartographic concerns of Kei Miller's collection are found in the title: *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion.* Miller's text captures an extended dialogue between a cartographer and a rastaman, who each have different ideological stances to mapping. After learning that cartographer's intention of plotting a way to Zion the rastaman informs him: "you cannot plot your way to Zion // You cyaa climb / into Zion on Anancy's Web – or get there by boat or plane or car" (4-7). In Rastafari belief, Zion is derived from the biblical Jerusalem and represents an immaterial ideal, though it is simultaneously a place name for Ethiopia or Africa generally, where Rastafarians in the African diaspora claim as home. Drawing from Afro-diasporic folklore the speaker uses a spider web to illustrate the inability to map Zion. The Anancy figure is significant, for he is a trickster who plays with and plays on language, and on an epistemological level invokes an endless play of signifiers. Mirroring the multiplicity of Zion and language alike, both parties, cartographer and rastaman, use poetry to create maps, this is much of

which takes place in twenty-seven-part sequence Miller names after the title, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*. In this sequence some poems have descriptive titles and others are only numbered. The first poem I will focus on has both number and title: "xii. in which the rastaman begins to feel uncomfortable." This poem visualizes the expanse of the horizon and how the perceptions of the cartographer and the rastaman differ. In order to accomplish this Miller incorporates an important folkloric figure.

The figure of Anansi is located in Miller's "xii. in which the rastaman begins to feel uncomfortable" for this poem draws upon the Anansi tales. The Anansi tales or *Anansesem* have roots among the Ashanti people in Ghana where "the term Anansy or Anansi, is the Tshi or Ashanti for spider" (Flowers 6). Anansi is a Pan-African figure who travels from West Africa to the Caribbean and is constantly metamorphosing from man into spider and back, assuming multiple names in each location. He plays on and plays with language much like he engages with other gullible characters in the Anansi tales, usually from some self-interested purpose. Miller's "xii" calls on a tale concerned with the fulfillment of Anansi's hunger: "In the Jamaican folktale 'Anancy and the Magic Pot', the trickster spider finds a dirty magic pot that on his instruction becomes full of food. The only rule is that the pot must never be washed" (Miller 71). This poem's cartographic concerns make for an unlikely integration of the magic pot and the Jamaican landscape and seascape.

The perceptions of the curve of the earth from the view of Rose Hall Great House set up the entrance of Anansi and his wife. The speaker states, "For the cartographer / the sea becomes / a glittering parabola, / an arc / of shining measure" (7-11). In contrast, for

the rastaman the same view is “an upturned dutch pot, / the one unwittingly shined / by Anansi’s wife” (13-15). The parallel the poet draws between the cartographer’s parabola and the rastaman’s upturned dutch pot illuminates the numerous conceptions of the topographic features of the earth in general, and the Caribbean Sea in particular. Here the image of the dutch pot is linked to Anansi’s wife, where the washing of the pot fosters multiple interpretations of the circumstances surrounding “the tragic/ fullup of big-men’s belly” (18-19). The filled belly recalls the image of the belly of the boat in Glissant’s “The Open Boat,” where the abyss of the boat contains black bodies in transit. In the postcolonial era the significance of the belly has transitioned from the commercial boat of the slave holder to the metaphorical belly of neocolonial capitalists, ones who have their fill of the landscape from a distance.

The signifiers the cartographer and the rastaman use have different implications insofar as the parabola recalls scalable measures while the dutch pot reaches back to the jar-poem “Quashie’s Verse.” The basin-like shape of the dutch pot signals the indeterminacy Quashie uses as both a poetic and cartographic tool. The poet/sculptor negotiates how to create this poem in the shape of a clay jar — as opposed to a traditional verse form like a sonnet, complete with fourteen lines and iambic pentameter. Quashie’s project of writing with a verse form intuitive to him instead of the way he has been “instructed / now in universal forms” generates similarities between his task and that of the rastaman (17-18). Both of these men resist what the iambic metre represents. Playing on the meaning of metre as a unit of measure to create maps and a measure with which one crafts poetry is not only a way to showcase the rigidity traditionally associated with

these endeavors, it also links these elements in a way that resist the synthetic unity purported by European systems of measure.

The contrasts between the filled belly in Miller's "xii" and the hollowed calabash in Senior's work shed light on the value of the tidalectic. The former alludes to the idea of containing the vastness of the sea in a finite natural space - not containable by the manmade dutch pot. The latter, at once a natural fruit and manmade instrument, does not hold water but an infinite number of elements. The emptying of the pot, however, results in "the wash-weh / of small people's magic" (20-21). This image of washing away in this sense has negative implications. The motion, however, also calls the wake to memory, both the wake of a ship and the wake respecting the dead. The water imagery not only reinforces the dichotomy between the colonized and the colonizer but highlights the tension between the sea and the retention of folklore. This is a repeated tension that instead of finding resolution finds revolution, a circularity exemplified by the metaphors or shapes referring to the Caribbean.

This kind of circularity or repetition is not always easily identified, for it is often rendered invisibly. The rhizomatic movement between geographic places and textual spaces, and the network of shapes that flow into each other – like a web Anansi spins – are fine, delicate and intricate, yet barely visible to the human eye. In addition to a traditional literary analysis, a different vantage point from which to view these connections, one that is specific to examining the complex network between words may reveal new relationships. Respecting the rastaman's ideological position of experiencing and thereby mapping the world in a way unfamiliar and at times incomprehensible to the

cartographer, it is particularly useful to visualize how the larger network of the collection functions. Like the unique visual language of sphere-like shapes and Legba's veve, network visualization offers a new interpretive tool to examine how Miller produces invisible maps through his poetry. This inquiry is motivated by digital humanist Manuel Lima's statement that "network visualization is also the cartography of the indiscernible, depicting intangible structures that are invisible and undetected by the human eye" (80). Investigating the cartography of networks is a method that is commensurate with Anansi's operations.

Network visualization is a form that resists arboreal structures, because like the rhizome (and the spider web) it does not have a single identifiable root or source, and it embodies decentralization and nonlinearity. The emphasis on relational flexibility and multiplicity of communities lends itself well to exploring the complexities of poetic language. Furthermore, mapping the relationships between words in a visual manner opens up a new cartographic view. To do this I used Gephi, a network analysis and visualization program, to map words that signify systems of measure used in the collection, beyond "Quashie's Verse." In doing so, I paid attention to the shapes produced by the community of words among the poems. I borrow from Johanna Drucker's assertion that "graphic expression is always a translation and remediation" (242). For and I am concerned with demonstrating how data may be understood as an art object and ways that the re-spatialization of the text carries meaning differently from its original form. Gephi facilitates this kind of humanistic analysis using a number of algorithms to analyze quantitative and qualitative data alike. Though these algorithms are

only partially visible to the user, the elements of the visualizations themselves reveal a great deal about the operations of this program. Discussing network analysis in *Exploring Big Historical Data,* digital humanities scholar Shawn Graham points out that "the rhetorical utility of networks can occasionally overshadow their formal nature" (Graham 201). Just as my analysis of poetry and its sign systems is attentive to formal criticism vis-à-vis circular and linear forms, my argument will pay close attention to the processes that make the visualization cartographic networks possible.

While the project of mapping linguistic communities in Miller's collection clearly begins with the text, the network visualization begins with identifying and grouping two different kinds of textual elements within the text. Graham describes the structure of networks and how these elements fit in: "Despite their name, networks are dichotomous, in that they only give you two sorts of things to with: entities and relationships. Entities are called nodes and the relationships between them are called edges. Everything about a network pivots on these two building blocks" (202). In Figure 4 the nodes are words signifying systems of measure, and the edges represent occurrence in the collection, where each word is attributed to a particular poem in the collection. Examples of the words are "measure," "arc," "distance," "miles," and "length" — each appearing at different frequencies. In light of the dichotomy of networks the words are significant for this is an ego network, where all the words are ones the rastaman uses concerning measurement. The process of creating the nodes and edges data set prompted me to read around the words I found, for some words surprised me, and I discovered language of measurement is almost only used by the rastaman and not the cartographer. These words

are linked to him, and each node is partitioned according to degree (sized proportionally to number of connections), the colors of the nodes and edges representing modularity class. The visualization contains linguistic data spanning 18 poems, where the largest pink colored node signifies the rastaman, the one to whom this cartogram is centered around.

Bringing centrality into sharper focus, the spatialization of *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* in this Gephi rendition has both rhetorical and formal

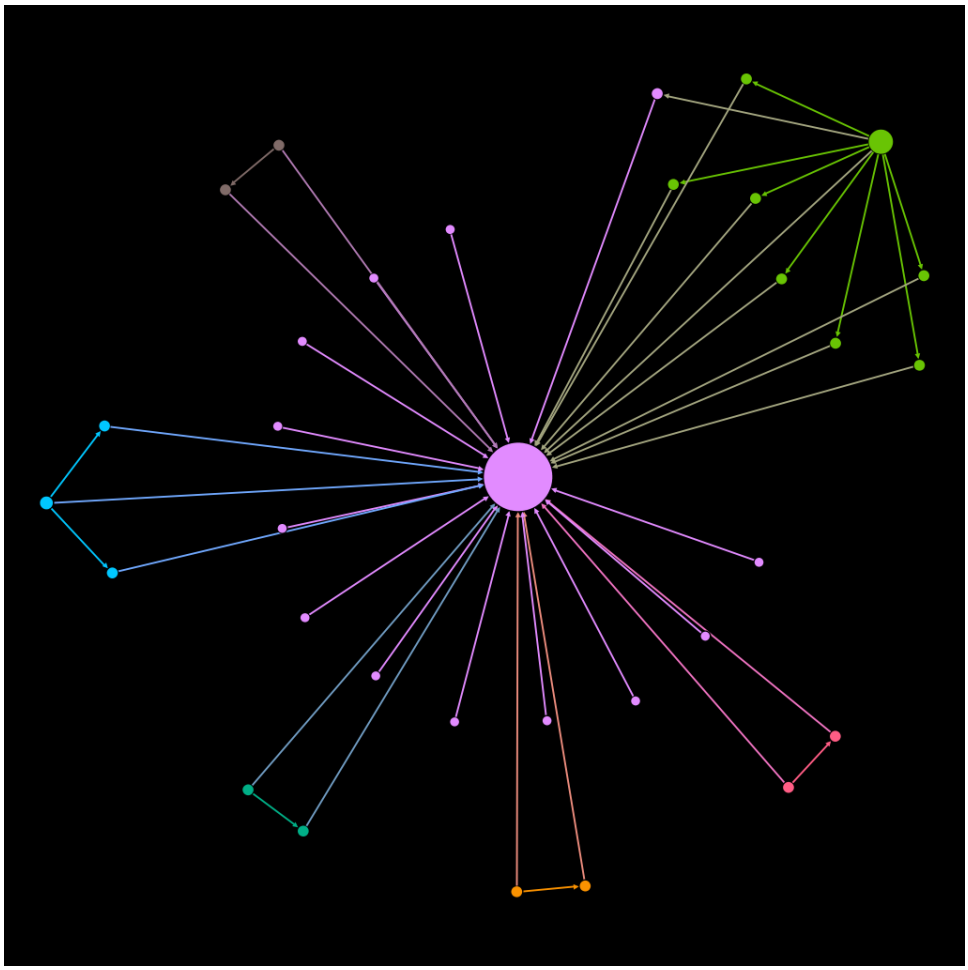

Figure 4: Visualization 1 was created by Force Atlas, with an increased repulsion strength and partitioned by modularity class, each color representing the grouping of linguistic communities related to measurement.

significance to the shape argument when coupled with the building blocks of the network. Elements of the collection are re-formed through the Force Atlas layout. This layout may be categorized as a force-directed one that utilizes mechanics of repulsion and attraction in order to simultaneously increase proximity of connected nodes and reduce crossover of edges. In this way this feature uses space to transform the community of words and poems. The transformation undergone here creates a new map, though one not directly informed by the original layout of Miller's text. I am concerned with relations within the text, not simply visualizing geography. While I could have colored the nodes according to their position in the collection with the objective of placing them strictly in the relation to how they appear in the physical text, resisting a simplistic or straightforward approach to cartography, like the rastaman I attempt "to portray a new unfamiliar territory" with this new form (Lima 80). Perhaps unsurprisingly the largest grouping of nodes, green in color, are ones connected to "Quashie's Verse" where the largest green node signifies "measure," the most frequently used word within the community of the poem. I was fascinated by the shape produced by the Force Atlas layout, for in the top right corner of the visualization emerges a spider. Then, a version of Anansi appearing in this new map begins to demonstrate how maps can be visible or invisible, and ways that lines, measurements and algorithms may be humanistic.

The linear and curved shapes that form the visualization (see figure 4) not only invoke the trickster figure, their formation also resembles that of concrete poetry, insofar as the whole image moves in dynamic ways. Though this visualization does not possess a sphere-like or even basin-like shape, it has similar qualities to the jar-poem in that it

produces an unconventional map by subverting certain scientific practices. There is a play between the certainty of scientific/mathematical quality of the viz and its dynamical execution: "the [force-directed] layout is generally stochastic, or random; there is an element of randomness that will orient the nodes and edges slightly differently every time it is run" (Graham 250). The randomness of the orientation of words signifying measure is symbolic on a number of levels. On the first, it recalls the limited depiction of "the Orient" or, the imperial object, in the schema of the colonial map, where place-making appears to be arbitrary[15]. The second is connected to the first, where this once invisible subject upsets or scrambles previous coordinates thereby producing an alternative map. Though the layout may be a 'random' one, its operations mirror those of the concrete poets insofar as indeterminacy is demonstrated to be intentional. Further, the unexpected appearance of the trickster here has epistemological and structural significance alike. The fact that Anansi may have only appeared in one iteration of this mapped network speaks to the indeterminacy in cartography, and the playfulness that the algorithm supports. The function of the layout itself resists conventional computational properties, for "the traditional spatial dimensions (vertical and horizontal) that are so often meaningful in visualizations have no meaning here. There is no *x*- or y-axis, and spatial distance from one node to another is not inherently meaningful" (Graham 250). The absence of meaning in the mathematical realm stimulates epistemological uncertainty of a kind that would be incited by a figure like Anansi. This characteristic also recalls my examination of Miller's "Quashie's Verse" in relation to cartography, measurement, linearity and

[15] I borrow from Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

meaning. That the sphere-like form and the words that fill the jar-poem resist European epistemology critiques the operations of the cartographer and reinforces the similarities between the mapping projects of Quashie and Anansi.

Quashie's hand in the creation of the jar-poem features prominently in understanding the ways that movement of geographical and bodily varieties inform the poetics of cartography. Honoring the rhizomatic movement that Quashie makes more visible and the impact it produces called for an expansion of my initial map. Since the

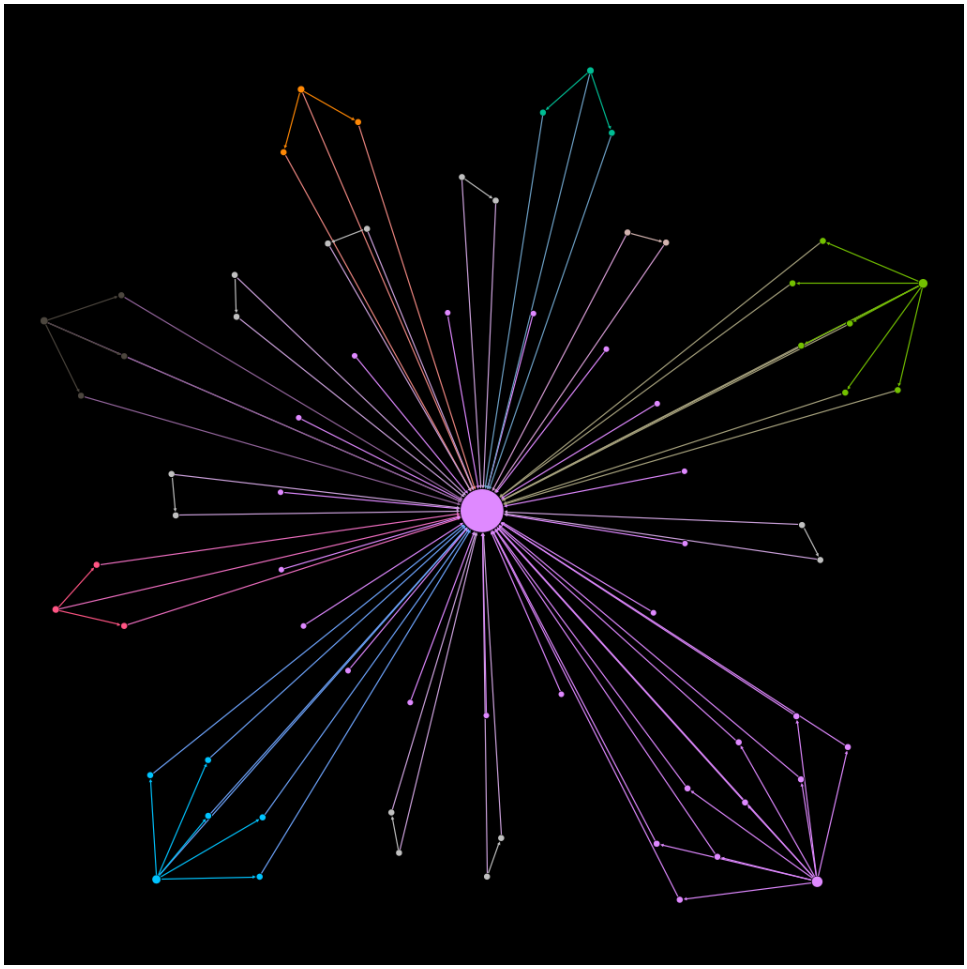

Figure 5: Visualization 2 was created using Force Atlas with an increased repulsion strength and partitioned by modularity class, each color representing the grouping of linguistic communities related to measurement, writing and mapping.

practice of writing/drawing the poems functions to create maps I decided to extend the community of words I map to words related to poetry and verse. To do this I appended my initial nodes and edges dataset to include words like “shape,” “draw,” and “lines,” along with the poems they appear in. To create a more fulsome picture of the mapping relationships, I also decided to include all the iterations of the word “map” in my dataset.

The image produced (see figure 5) using the same force-directed layout as the first has a striking resemblance to a compass, much like the one pictured on the cover of *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*. That the cartographic concerns of the text are reflected in this visualization is useful precisely because it is a remediation. An

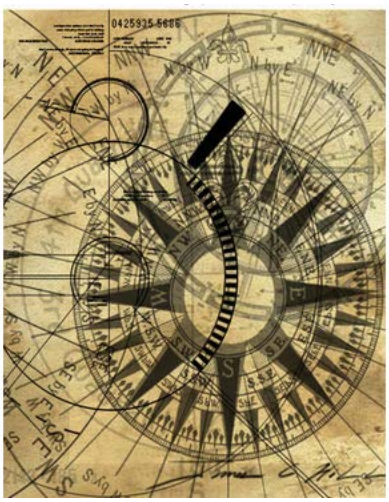

Figure 6: Cover Image by James Christopher Hill

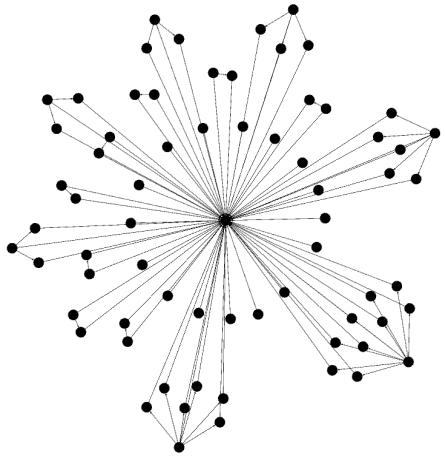

Figure 7: Black & White rendering of Visualization 2

important distinction between the compass and figures 6 and 7 is that in my design the rastaman at the center. This displaces the cartographer as the symbolic figure of mapping and map design. The visualizations I created also demonstrates the play between each of the character’s operations. Insightfully, in “xx” the cartographer states that “every language, even yours, / is a partial map of this world” (2-3). Comparing the first network

to the second one I produced in Gephi, it becomes clear that the first (figure 4) – with fewer nodes and edges – is indeed a partial map of the collection. But the same could be said of the second one (figure 5), as the biases of my own research (specific words chosen) implicate the resulting image. No one view or perspective is definitive.

I understand the visualization to operate as a compass, not necessarily to orient the viewer within the collection but to point toward its complexities in a nonlinear way. Unlike a traditional compass there is no single arrow, in fact there are many arrows in each visualization owing to their being directed networks. Directionality indicates a one-way connection and these arrows all point toward the largest node in the center. Yet this sort of orientation, though displaying qualities of centrality, is asymmetric in nature, whereby the relationship between the rastaman and the words related to measurement, writing and mapping is not reciprocal. In other words, all the communities are connected to the rastaman in different degrees, but he does not 'own' these words. Because the relationship is asymmetric, it is not totalizing in the way a colonial cartographer would command the language used to describe a place. Further, the less visible asymmetry of the networks parallels the visible asymmetry of the visualizations. But the catalyst for the absence of asymmetry is what makes these visualizations so important, like Legba's veve, it is the unique material qualities that impact shape, and therefore impact meaning. In figure 4, the spider is clearly more dominant but even within that structure there is a noticeable difference. Each of his eight 'legs' are associated with signifiers of measure where the one outlier colored in pink (indicating a higher modularity class) is "ermijja" a word that demonstrates the dynamics of movement within the poem. Figure 5 is also

clearly uneven, especially compared with the unity of a circular compass. Between the two there is even more variation. Because the colors are determined by modularity class between the two visualizations the image that was once an eight-legged spider in the top right corner is a much larger, less readily identifiable structure with pink nodes and edges. These dynamic movements speak to the multiplicity and indeterminacy involved in a mapping project. But each partial view does indeed offer something.

In lieu of a close reading of several poems as I did for *Gardening in the Tropics*, in *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* the combination of close reading and network visualizations give a similar survey or 'bird's-eye-view' of the interactions among shapes within the collection. Yet instead of reproducing an imperial gaze, the work is self-consciously subjective whilst acknowledging the power of the symbol in being able to apprehend the shape all at once and acknowledge the presence of layered meanings, ones that can both mirror and oppose.

The repetition of both sphere-like and entirely asymmetrical shapes throughout both Senior and Miller's reveals flows not only between poems and among collections, but also between waters and among nations. The temporal difference between *Gardening in the Tropics* and *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* demonstrates how repetition may function as a remembering. Published in 1994 and 2014 respectively, Senior and Miller's texts are separated by twenty years. Yet the image of the basin creates linkages between the two in several ways. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* offers a useful conception of the function of the past: "In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (9). With a deconstructionist posturing Sharpe

presents multiple meanings of wake. One that is quite relevant to my argument is the wake of a ship, “the track of water left on the water’s surface by a ship...a region of disturbed flow” (Sharpe 3). If the Caribbean basin as object and region is defined as a disturbed flow, it is one that facilitates the multiple directionalities of flow – flows back and forth through time, across literatures, and between nations. Then, there proves to be both connectable and detachable maps among Senior and Miller’s collections, fostering a unique and dynamic kind of repetition.

Chapter 3

Digital Travelling: A Computational Remediation of Nature and Technology in M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*

Besides visible content, all contemporary documents carry with them a layer of hidden information.

Plain Text, Dennis Tenen

The relationship between M. NourbeSe Philip's poetics and her physical text is mediated by a container. It is clear from the visual impact of *Zong!* that it resists containment in a way more distinct and arguably more radical than the other Caribbean authors under discussion, yet there exists under the surface of the text, a tidalectical play between the familiar containment of the Caribbean basin and its disruption or pouring out of said container invoking oscillation and drift. The underwater (anti)narrative relationship between the poetry and the written text, *Gregson v Gilbert*, mirrors the complex relationship between the Caribbean as basin and the Caribbean as containing a rhizomatic structure that extends outside itself – often in unseen ways. That this play is negotiated by a word processor impacts the way I conduct my literary analysis. While the the Zong poems occupy the most space in the text, there is room to consider the additional elements like the court case or the glossary of the text as part of NourbeSe's poetics, forming a multi-generic collection – albeit one that operates atypically or rhizomatically. The title *Zong!* quite clearly signals the subject matter of the collection:

the journey of a slave ship. But this is not the only journeying taken up by the text: my examination begins to think about the journey the text makes from the digital realm into the physical realm. For in addition to the physical and spiritual travel the physical text invokes, I consider how those more familiar ways of travel are mediated by the digital travelling, a contemporary operation hidden in plain sight. In doing so I not only examine the dis/order of *Zong!* but I participate in the disorder and reordering processes to reveal significant iterations of containment and expansion.

Widely described as a long poem, M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* operates differently from Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics* and Kei Miller's *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*. Like a poetry collection, the long poem is divided into six sections. The first five are titled in Latin: *Os, Sal, Ventus, Ratio, Ferrum*. The sixth is titled in Yoruba, *Ebora*. The titles of the sections that dominate the text are reflective of what may be understood as the roots of her visual poetry: the only extant legal document from the 1783 Zong case, *Gregson v Gilbert*. The language of the law being rooted in Latin, it seems apt to name the first five sections in this way. However, like the outlier *Ebora*, NourbeSe's poetics operates differently from the language and impact of the court proceedings. Instead of focusing on the *ratio decidendi* or 'the reason' in the context of the case – the insurance coverage of the ship's cargo – she brings the *obiter dicta* or 'by the way' – the enslaved people labelled as cargo – into sharper focus. In this way, NourbeSe reverses the traditional emphasis away from what is usually thought of as important—the ratio—in favor of the marginal, the dicta. In "not telling a story that must be told," NourbeSe utilizes multiple genres throughout her work, from the

distinctive poetic sections to a Glossary, Manifest, Notanda, and finally a reproduction of the text of the *Gregson v Gilbert* case. A complex story with many facets hidden in plain sight, *Zong!* illuminates the complex map that links the African continent to the Caribbean, charting the deep waters that lie between the two regions. That this water at once separates and connects speaks to the unconventional movement inherent in the antinarrative poem, for this mode of writing is interested in subverting the linearity of a historical timeline generally and of narrative particularly.

While the spatial organization of *Zong!* is similar to a conventional poetry collection, the formation of the concrete poetry of Senior and Miller is visibly different than that of NourbeSe's. The way that the calabash-poem and the jar-poem are written/drawn in an enclosed form seems to oppose the broken or disjointed pieces of language that NourbeSe intentionally places spaces between. In this matter it is pertinent to reiterate the literary cartographic statement that, "To draw a map is to tell a story, in many ways, and vice versa" (Tally 4). Whereas the sphere-like concrete poems use imprecision in a subversive way, questioning the 'concreteness' or wholeness through a unified structure, this long poem pushes against the boundaries of this genre of poetry, and consequently the boundaries of the map. The topopoetic relationship between the text and the map transforms between each variation of the concrete poem. While the lyric poems produce alternative maps of the Caribbean, the antinarrative poem – though it has certain lyrical elements – seems to efface the map altogether. Then the thrust of Tally's statement changes, where to (un)draw a map is to not-tell a story, where this not-telling aligns with *Zong!*'s project as illustrated by NourbeSe in Notanda. Her work certainly

challenges the narrative of the map, transforming the continuous prose of the *Gregson v Gilbert* case that stands in for totalizing plot structures, yet it also lends itself to the lyric genre and invokes a sensory experience.

Examining the transformation that occurs between 'contained' concrete poetry and 'uncontained' concrete poetry illustrates the complexities of remediating place and space. Yet there is also a transmutation that occurs between the concept of the well-wrought urn and "Quashie's Verse" and "Gourd" that parallels that of *Gregson v Gilbert* and *Zong!*. This parallel between well-wrought urn and *Gregson v Gilbert* functions to demonstrate the significance in form as it concerns meaning making. Concrete poetry is self-consciously visual and, "Dick Higgins identifies three characteristically spatial elements of visual poetry—the breaking of linearity, the transcendence of the verbal text, and a near separation of *langue* from *parole* (the quasi-division of signifying systems from concrete speech acts through an emphasis on the text as a visual object" (McAllister 235). Both Senior and Miller along with NourbeSe challenge linearity, albeit through different mechanisms, moving from a focus on shape to space. I would argue that NourbeSe's work more forcefully, if not obviously, carries out the functions that Higgins points toward. In addition to using space, her work also transcends several layers of verbal text, where both the source text and the poems themselves challenge concrete speech. Drawing attention to the layers of texts that constitute *Zong!* and the distance between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) produced visually also points toward the layers embedded in the typed word. NourbeSe's experimentation with typography is conglomerated with the court document and is one of the ways she deviates from the

original form. Her typographic playfulness and intervention take numerous forms, but from cursive fonts to superimposed text, the Zong poems cross lines that separate meaning and typeface – calling attention to the value of investigating the appearance of text.[16] That this text has both material and digital lives and layers necessitates a digital intervention.

The formal qualities of the concrete poem facilitate a unique level of fluidity. In the case of NourbeSe's long poem, the textual movement concrete poetry enables flows into the way that NourbeSe charts the Atlantic through visual poetry. Instead of a container holding water, her poetry spills over the page. Beiman's meditations on concrete poetry as literary genre amplifies our understanding of the flow that permeates NourbeSe's work: "The poem then can move in many directions at once. This multiplicity and often simultaneity of movement demand an ordering principle to replace discursive grammar and linear progression" (201). Highlighting that critics also refer to the genre of concrete poetry as the "kinetic poem," Beiman not only makes the rhizomatic mechanics of *Zong!* more distinct, but her statement also maps onto my discussion of various kinds of movement and travel worked out through language and space.

German concretist Max Bense is a poet who uses space in such a way that almost foreshadows NourbeSe's textual rendering. His content, however, is much different. The thematic difference is demonstrated most clearly by the title of his poem: "set of words

[16] Kamau Brathwaite's typographic interventions, named Video Style, "with the help of computer software a poetic rhetoric which attempts to outwit the restraints of the book, the written text, by drawing on resources of visual arts" (Savory 209). His video poems seek to express sound through sight (exploiting shape, size, space) and has laid the foundation for this kind of experimentation in Caribbean writing.

(homage to mathematics).” But despite the more mathematical approach to poetry and poetics, or perhaps because of this, a number of his arguments concerning the formal and structural qualities of the concrete poem are particularly illuminating bearing NourbeSe’s intervention in mind. In “Concrete Poetry II,” a 1965 article he states, “the language of material poetry is not subject to the conventional rules of grammar and syntax in the common speech, but is ruled by unique visually and structurally oriented models. The communication scheme serves less an understanding of meaning than an understanding of arrangements. It is therefore an aesthetic communication scheme” (Bense). The aesthetics of concrete poetry loom large in my argument, where arrangements and rearrangements of *Zong!* root and route my understanding of place(making) and unmaking. Additionally, much of Bense’s work highlights the use of computational devices to create art, which furnishes the connections I see between not just what words appear in the text but how they do so, and where they are positioned or arranged. In “Concrete Poetry I,” the prelude to the article previously cited, he notes, “The word is not used primarily as an intentional carrier of meaning. Beyond that it is used as a material element of construction in such a way that meaning and structure reciprocally express and determine each other” (Bense). Here lies a useful starting point from which to discuss ways that the text functions as an anti-referential sign system as opposed to a self-referential map. This rhetorical arrangement is materially manifested in physical and digital forms, each bearing different implications and illuminations.

The first section of the text, *Os*, exemplifies NourbeSe’s subversive poetics and speaks to the transformation between forms. *Os* is Latin for bones, indicating the

foundational function of her only numbered section. The first 26 numbered poems use the same words, either broken up or replicated in their entirety as those in the *Gregson v Gilbert* document. NourbeSe takes the same language that was used to justify the massacre of 150 enslaved people to create an antinarrative poem grouped by thematic movements: bone (*Os*), salt (*Sal*), wind (*Ventus*), reason (*Ratio*), iron (*Ferrum*). This mechanism acknowledges a set of people thought to be voiceless through space on the page. The play with space also gives voice and space to the reader of the poems. Because *Zong!* defies conventional use of the poetic line, the Western approach to reading text from left to right falls away. It is as if her play with text and space in her visual poetry demands the reader to give up control of how he or she ranges over the page, complicating what order to read the words: "The reader cannot verify whether their suppositions are 'correct,' just as Philip cannot—and ultimately, does not want to—'right' the wrong at stake through aestheticized language" (Gervasio 9).

That the legal and poetic language in *Zong!* are one and the same creates a radical and illuminating parallel. These words are not simply transplanted into a different textual landscape, the author's poetic technique plays an important role. Instead of quoting block sections as in academic writing for example, NourbeSe takes the words and moves them around, and in the case of "Zong #1" she takes one word "water," expanding and stretching it – both literally and figuratively. An alternative map of the Atlantic, "Zong #1" exemplifies this expanded exploration of the seascape – a part of the Caribbean that has been romanticized and packaged for consumption but has a different layer of meaning when considering what lies beneath the surface. The orality of the poem has

resonances that draw invisible lines between the voice of the legal text and the enslaved people aboard the Zong insofar as the absence of drinking water contrasts with the abundance of saltwater, which drowned those who were thrown into it. With both the thirst for water and being overcome by water at work here, death is ever present and so is the ambiguity of black subjectivity. Moving these words in a new way across the page makes a bold statement about legal language, in that it purports to be whole, total, and complete. Her poetic transformation reveals the incompleteness of the language of the Zong case with the indeterminacy more visible in poetic language.

The tension between fresh water and salt water and its possible fluctuations in linguistic meaning recalls Yemoja and how she negotiates travel through water via language. Where Senior's "Yemoja: Mother of Waters" invokes circularity, it becomes clear that the African/diasporic goddess' movement is informed by the different localities of fresh and salt water. In her notes on the collection Senior states: "in Yorubaland she is an orisha of the river, in the New World queen of the sea and salt water." Her governance therefore shifts based on her own physical shifting. This kind of back and forth movement is illustrated in "Zong #1" where the kind of water referred to is not determinate. This speaks to the presence of this deity in water travel, and in textual travel as the words are transformed almost from a stanza-like body of water to numerous droplets in their disjointedness. This disjointedness is not meaningless, for in Notanda NourbeSe points out how the logic of language is usually performed while noting, "Exceptions to these requirements exist in religious or spiritual communication with nonhuman forces such as gods or supra-human beings, in puns, parables, and, of course,

poetry" (NourbeSe 197). Though overt engagement with African diasporic deities does not come until the following sections, there are elements that signal a sort of cry or appeal to the metaphysical realm. One such element is the (dis)placed poetic line: "The sea was not a mask" which functions as an epigraph for the *Os* section. The epigraph comes from Wallace Stevens' poem, "The Idea of Order at Key West" in which the speaker is interested in the voice of a woman whose singing overpowers the sounds that come from the sea. The musicality of this context speaks to the disjointed sounds and arguably songs, that come out of this devastation, of this catastrophe.

It is interesting that both NourbeSe and Senior negotiate travel and water using a textual source outside of their own work and context, for NourbeSe's use of the epigraph is similar to Olive Senior's technique using Mary Kingsley's *Travels*. What is different about Stevens' poem though, is his concern with voice and its connection with, or disconnection from, the natural world. Moving away from the physicality of historicity to the immateriality of sound and sense. In this way, there is an unmasking of the sea and the ways in which human life not only impacts its movements, but also shifts its existence and flow. The opacity of the water that Stevens' mask evokes does not indicate an empty abyss, but instead, holds much within its depths. Yet beyond the epigraph a close reading of the poem opens up the language beyond the confines of the page, for the poem has an oral quality in addition to its visual impact. The element of performance undoubtedly associated with the poet's creation and dissemination of the Zong poems may be perceived separately from the spatial negotiations. Yet, just as I have illustrated a

connection between physical and textual space, her performance practices serve as an intermediary between space on the page and physical experiences of space.

At the risk of oversimplifying the parallels between material and immaterial elements, language has similar connections with a landscape and a soundscape alike. Addressing the soundscape NourbeSe establishes, Erin Fehskens states: "In a recording of the poem performed in Toronto, Philip multiplies the phoneme "wa" and enunciates it with increasing speed as if to both underscore its significance and to mimic the sound of an echo, a reverberation from which we can no longer trace an origin" (408). While this example is focused on sound, it illustrates how the movement of words on the tongue and in space plays a part in meaning-making. Further, it evokes a Glissantian repetition, the phoneme "wa" in an "infinitesimal momentum" that reveals the absence of a root by emphasizing the circular route it continues to take (Glissant 46). Repetition, however, does not equate to unity, for: "Water in the poem resists graphic and aural cohesion while demanding repetition" (Fehskens 408). This intentional lack of cohesion or logic illustrates the "region of disturbed flow," to return to Sharpe, that the waters between the Atlantic and the Caribbean signify (3).

With the rhizomatic nature of *Zong!* in mind, especially the relationship between and within the poetic movements, inquiry into these mini containers is a helpful starting point from which to consider containment and flow. A brief comment NourbeSe makes in Notanda caught my attention regarding the structure of *Os* for example: "and what's happening is little bits of poetry appearing within the larger poem" (195). This fragment appears at the end of a bulleted list within her series of journal-like entries that begin the

Notanda section. Like dicta, or marginal parts of an argument, this musing is connected to the structural makeup of the *Os* movement not only in form but in theme. Within *Os*, and beyond "Zong #1" there is Dicta, which appears to be mimicking the case analysis format, or order. The poems in this subsection are unique in that they have number signs attached to their titles, but no actual numbers, appearing as: "Zong #". Kei Miller uses a similar strategy in his naming of the Cartographer sequence, but here the values are reversed; while Miller's poems are all numbered, they are not all named, and NourbeSe's all have the same name outside of the numbers made to distinguish each one. Whereas the (un)numbered Zong poems are not spread out but intentionally placed in Dicta (which is usually seen as unessential), it creates separation from the previous poems that may be deemed the ratio (the apparent main focus) in this schema. That these poems lack numbers is a metaphor for the absence and the silences in the 'by the way' parts of the text. However, NourbeSe is clearly interested in reworking previously defined categories, so it calls into question whether the unnumbered poems say more or less about the story she is not-telling.

In examining the relationship between Dicta and what seems to be the ratio (Zong #1-26) I return to NourbeSe's dicta-like comment with a question: what constitutes the "larger poem"? Are the "little bits of poetry" the numbered Zong poems or may they be the unnumbered ones in Dicta? Dicta does not have a place in the table of contents, indicating that it is indeed a category for less significant parts of an argument. Yet if the argument is the whole text of *Zong!*, the significance of Dicta comes from its limited visibility. Somewhere between the *Os* and *Sal* movements, Dicta has its own title page

and its intentionally blank page carefully distinguishes it from other sections. In this way, it occupies its own space and declares its ownership in ways that resemble six 'main' movements in that they are surrounded by blank pages. In terms of typography – all of the letters are capitalized, albeit in a different font than the six movements. There are six "Zong #" in Dicta which mirrors the six movements of the "larger poem." The use of columns, order and ordering is juxtaposed with the absence of numbers in the titles, speaking to the uncertainty of the number of enslaved people massacred during that journey. Smashing together numbers in the third poem of this 'sequence': "150sixtyfortytwoandahalfeleventhreesevenfiftythirtyseveneighteenseventeenonesix" appears to be commentary on the arbitrary nature of numbers, order, and so on, especially as they appear in *Gregson v Gilbert* (51). While NourbeSe's treatment of both the "little bits of poetry" and "larger poem" within the container of *Os* is a useful starting point, thinking of the container more globally, within the entire book and how the book is contained to begin with, is instructive. Considering what determines the limits of the larger poem, where does the container end?

The politics of *Zong!*'s formation is not confined to language or even defined by it; the use of space is incredibly significant in meaning making. The position of Dicta here in the *Os* section works much differently than it does in Notanda, where the poet discusses her writing process and her approach to the 'original' text, *Gregson v Gilbert*, which she describes as "*a mother document"* (200). Displacing the ratio decidendi with the obiter dicta. With the organization NourbeSe uses for her first section in mind, it becomes significant to examine just how each part works together to form the 'whole'

long poem. *Zong!* is accompanied by several documents that inform the body of the poem. But these parts do not quite work like a poetry collection, with discrete stand-alone sections. Rather, the glossary mirrors the operations of endnotes in that one needs to move back and forth between sections to understand the complexities of the text. The movement that the text seems to require from its reader solidifies its connection to the rhizome in design. The expectations of the reader are not clear due to the lack of linearity, for despite the text's boundedness by the structure/form/container of a book there are silences or absences that past and present parts equally inform.

The network formed by the sphere-like shapes and images in Miller and Senior's texts are further remediated through NourbeSe's long poem. Instead of the textual space lending itself to circular images and imagery, the disruption of the poetic line produces indeterminate shapes. In fact, if concrete poetry can be likened to an emphasis on shape, NourbeSe's visual poetry appears to be more concerned with space. Yet, the space on the page functions as a kind of container, especially considering how she understands the peculiar writing process that created *Zong!*. In the Notanda section NourbeSe furnishes the reader with ample commentary on how the long poem came in being, a process of continuous negotiation of boundaries, voice and limitations:

> "*have given in to the impulse to fragment the words of the text — using it as a sort of grand boggle game and set to trying to find words within words. The text — the reported case — is a matrix — a mother document. I did not come to the decision easily — to break the words open […] — to explode the words to see what other words they may contain. I devise a*

> *dictionary with a list of each of the 'mother' words followed by the words contained in that particular word…"* (200)

This disclosure in the "Letter to CB" addresses the element of containment that the legal document has historically enforced but with the author's figurative and literal expansion of the containers that the words in that case form. The multiple levels of containment she navigates calls attention to the modern-day container that holds words – the word processor. Save from a single mention of a typewriter, NourbeSe does not give details on the tool she used to write *Zong!* – whether hand, or machine – in Notanda, however, it is safe to say that a digital tool was part of the production process.

One might imagine the challenges her word processing tool had in its attempt to hold or contain the text in the format she had written it where, "every word or word cluster is seeking a space directly above within which to fit itself and in so doing falls into relation with others either above, below, or laterally" (NourbeSe 203). The idea that words make space for themselves within a space of containment bears similarities with Kei Miller's article "If I Could Write This on Zinc, I Would Write It on Zinc," where, as a creative writer, he examines "the link, if any, between what we write about, and the tools that we write with" (334). Miller does so with his own characterization of remediation in the discussion of his creative writing process, one in which he moves from writing by hand to typing. Miller defines remediation as, "the movement of a genre practice across media or materials — not necessarily an 'improvement' but merely a travelling" (337). The idea of writing on zinc, a material with a spatial significance to the Caribbean landscape, has much in common with writing on the ground, or 'grung'

surfaces, like Senior's gourd. Though zinc does not have similar symbolic resonances that connect it to a transcendental landscape in the way that Senior's gourd presents, it does figure prominently in the urban Jamaican landscape. This play between the urban and coastal, or more 'natural' or tropical points toward the artificiality of the well-wrought urn and the naturalness of the gourd and clay jar. Not only does Miller make a distinction between writing practices, he also seems to weigh the movement[17] of the hand and the reproduction of the printer, both with different implications regarding meaning-making.

However, as an extension of writing by hand, writing on zinc functions as a bridge between the naturalness of the earth and the artificiality of a computer. The difference between writing by hand, and in the case of my argument, on the computer, becomes significant to the meaning and impact of the visual text that is produced. For Miller this distinction is significant: "And it is these two things — the computer and the printer — that I see as much more fundamental to my formation as a writer. The 'typed' word, much more than the hand-written word, held a particular power over me" (Miller 334). The typed word here seems to contain within it the same power the Zong case had insofar as it represented the letter of the law. In this way, there are cases wherein such a mechanism symbolizes an oppressive power, but if one moves beyond the essentialist thinking that the dichotomy between the natural world and the manmade creations are split between the colonized and the colonizer, it opens up room for all kinds of play.

[17] This movement draws attention to how rhizomatic movement adds significance to my reading of "Gourd" and "Quashie's Verse."

NourbeSe and Miller demonstrate an innovative use of what some would consider the 'master's' tool by recognizing the implicit control it seeks to exert onto non-European languages. After receiving a curiously specific error message whilst writing Miller comes to the following thought, "It is probably since then that I've had this whimsical idea of a kind of Caribbean writing that sits uncomfortably in the spaces that have tried to contain it — on Microsoft Word…" (335). Here, the word processor's attempt to contain seems to oppose attempts of remediating Caribbean language, conceived orally, while yet it's response to unfamiliarity reveals ways that black subjects play within these 'limits.' The divide between naturalness and technology is then blurred through word processing, whether via a computer program or a human mind. Further, remediation is a travelling, and dovetails with the insufficient (re)imagining of the Caribbean space. There is clearly a shift between language and landscape, between oral and written forms or between physical and digital formats, and these shifts signal imaginative movement.

While there is much critical discussion about the transmutation between *Gregson v Gilbert* and *Zong!*, what happens when the text travels from the virtual linguistic container to the physical page? Media, like networks, often remain invisible in most literary analyses. Yet, like the specificity of place and environment to literary production, the medium with which a text is not only deployed but also created, is significant. While this is not a static or definitive relationship, it does warrant close examination. David Tenen's *Plain Text: The Poetics of Computation* approaches digital texts in a way that calls attention to hidden information embedded in, and inherent to, a genre that is mediated by computers. Making visible through textual criticism the transition between

literary works and the literary object, he remarks, “Format thus belongs neither wholly to a text’s physical medium (pixel or paper) nor to a work’s ideational content. It lies somewhere between the two worlds: in a letter’s shape, a novel’s narrative structure, and spoken patterns of stress and intonation” (110-11). Tenen discusses the nature of form in a way that troubles assumptions about the fixity and neutrality of the page. His work also negotiates the boundaries between material and immaterial components of a text in a way that demonstrates the complexity of the reading process. By positioning format in the middle, it is apparent that we are travelling on two planes – the physical within the text and the text itself, and textual letters moving from pixel to paper, the computer facilitating that travel. Incorporating a variety of sensory elements, one is not simply left to read the words as they appear on the printed or digital page with a traditional literary analysis, making the mechanisms by which these words appear legible respects the inherent complexity in the creation of a text – carrying linguistic, oral and visual attributes. In this way we may analyze the form as a remediation or travelling that fosters the kind of travelling taking place with the content of *Zong!* – the travel across the Atlantic. This operation makes visible how the work itself has travelled and continues to travel.

When considering travel, one is not only met with a movement between geographical places; there is a more abstract movement between geographical place and textual space in concrete poetry, along with deities who negotiate Afro diasporic travel through language. Though it appears as if figures like Yemoja and Legba simply move from one location (West Africa) to another (Caribbean) within the negotiations of these

locations they govern the paths between material and immaterial realms. If figures in positions that occupy in-between states and embody liminality mediate movement, the same could be said for how form works. Personifying a quotidian concept, Tenen asserts, "Format stands at the gates of hermeneutics" (111). This bold statement parallels the personhood of Legba and Anansi with the function of formatting. In light of my arguments regarding the multiple locations of the gateway of Legba, or the physical and digital versions of Anansi's web, for example, formatting then signals a complex structure and process that is in constant motion despite its apparent fixity. Like the figures of Legba and Anansi, especially after crossing the Atlantic, format is widely thought to have life only in one context – literary formalism. It is necessary, then, to equip oneself with alternative tools to examine form, for "readers treat texts as disembodied artifacts—surface rhetoric—reading past the material structures that support mental phenomena. As an object, a unified image, the page presents itself in its entirety at once—hence holistic repleteness. It is as though it was always so: These words were always in this order, at these coordinates" (Tenen 111). This reference to coordinates invokes geography, and a topopoetic lens to understand form here can demonstrate just how geographies and the form that represents them – maps – are constantly shifting, as does the text. This phenomenon becomes interesting as the reader can readily identify movement from an 'original' form. I think the strategy NourbeSe uses to create her poetry shows that remediation is intimately linked with meaning-making. That she decides to not-tell the story certainly complicates this process by subverting its conventional ways of creating meaning. It thus seems appropriate to place the text in a

new context, effectively re-forming *Zong!*, undergoing a secondary remediation from the digital electronic book to the digital corpus. I posit that moving from one form to another demonstrates the fluidity that exists in the enclosure of the textual or digital container.

What happens when NourbeSe's work travels between digital formats? *Voyant Tools* is a text analysis application that works as a critical analysis tool for qualitative data and can begin to answer the question of digital travelling. In order for this operation to be executed, a corpus, or a collection of text files must be uploaded in a plain text format. Converting or formatting *Zong!* into a plain text file may appear to be more restrictive than even the likes of a Microsoft Word, the word processor Miller mentions. Without style information, plain text is as basic as the name implies: "Unlike a rich-text document, a plain text file cannot have bold text, fonts, larger font sizes, or any other special text formatting" ("What is Plain Text?"). It is sometimes described as only containing 'readable' content in the computing sphere – suggesting that other formatting choices are superficial and frivolous. While choices like font size and shape are certainly understood as adding to the meaning and impact of a text, the idea that they are inessential for deep analysis is an example of silencing elements that present 'problems' or threaten the continuity or 'cleanness' of the established order. In some ways the spaces or gaps in the long poem, along with font shifts, like cursive, represent computational peculiarities in this schema. The experience of putting the *Ratio* movement, for example, into a plain text by copying and pasting parallels Miller's error message; the order or coordinates of the text shifted, words that should have been on one plane move to another, the italics for non-English words disappear, *Voyant* may as well have rejected it

or labelled it unrecognizable. While this displacement is not inherently problematic, it does not facilitate a reading of the text that is true to its message, in part because it is clearly not true to its 'original' form. In Notanda NourbeSe remarks, "the law uses language as a tool for ordering...however, I want poetry to disassemble the ordered, to create disorder and mayhem so as to release the story that cannot be told, but which, through not-telling, will tell itself" (199). Double meanings negotiated by space like "they t/read water then they sin/k un/ der the we/ight of…" are lost, along with the names at the bottom of each page in several sections (129). The Zong poems do not fit into *Voyant* in a logical order, and is close to unreadable in ways that texts in other formats would not be – then by putting the most ostensibly logical part of *Zong!* into the application, *Gregson v Gilbert*, I aim to demonstrate how 'readable' content may become as unreadable as the long poem.

Not simply functioning as a mechanism to read large volumes of text, *Voyant* offers a humanistic way of approach literature. To this end the text analysis application facilitates a differential reading – a combination of close reading and distant reading. If close reading is like looking through a microscope, then distant reading is like getting a bird's-eye view. Differential reading is a combination of close (subjective) and distant (objective) reading and "requires the *technologies* of self-reflection and self-consciousness" (Clement 1). That these humanistic qualities are labelled as technologies support an intervention into the more standard methods of computational reading. This method defamiliarizes texts, putting them at a distance that helps the reader identify features they may not have seen otherwise. Coupled with a careful and sustained

examination of the text, it has the potential to reveal intricacies embedded in the material structure and the ideational patterns alike. Reading *Gregson v Gilbert* as a poem through *Voyant*, then, I aim to perform another remediation on the text – decentralizing it from its legal roots. In this re-formation it becomes less clear what genre *Gregson v Gilbert* may fit into.

One of *Voyant*'s tools stands out in facilitating a close and distant reading of the text with attention to the shape or shapelessness that comes with my discussion of visual poetry. The Textual Arc[18] feature works to highlight words used in a corpus in a "weighted centroid of terms and an arc that follows the terms in document order" and does so by removing all the stop words (Voyant). Stop words are common words like articles and prepositions ('a', 'an', 'the') that are filtered out before processing the linguistic data. Considering how *Voyant* reads the text by leaving off articles, a weighty statement NourbeSe makes in Notanda comes to mind: "I murder the text, literally cut it into pieces, castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard, jettisoning adverbs" (193). Reorganizing the words and visualizing them in this way does something similar to what NourbeSe does to create her poetry. What is interesting in the Textual Arc is that while the arc is oriented to move clockwise – mirroring a sphere-like shape – as the program reads the words they appear

[18] This feature is inspired by W. Bradford Paley's TextArc (2002). TextArc "is a tool designed to help people discover patterns and concepts in any text by leveraging a powerful, underused resource: human visual processing. It compliments approaches such as Statistical Natural Language Processing and Computational Linguistics by providing an overview, letting intuition help extract meaning from an unread text" (Visualcomplexity.com).

in the middle, which points toward the orientation of the rhizome, lines connect them to each point that previously appeared along with the parts to come.

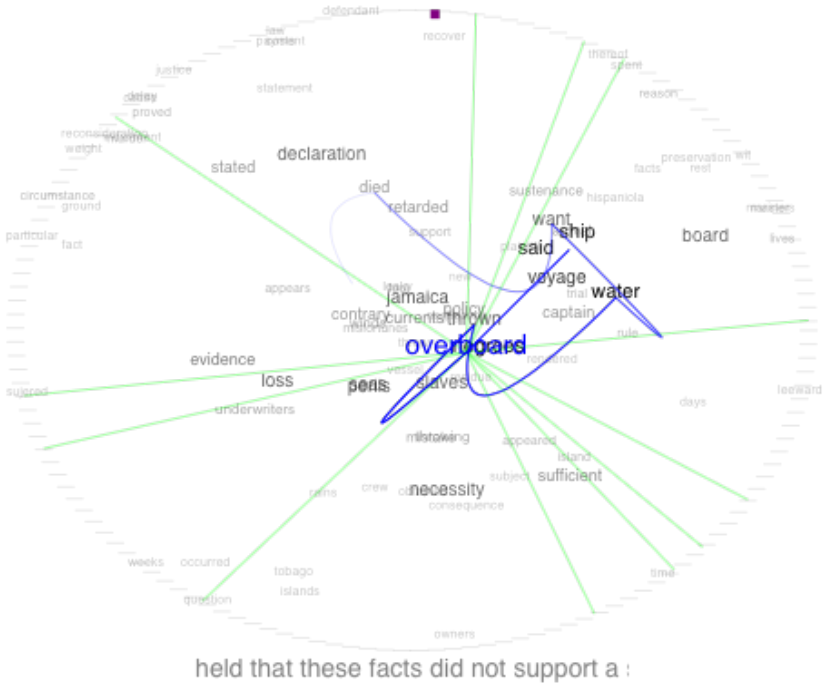

Figure 8: Voyant's Textual Arc reading Gregson v Gilbert. Here, "overboard" is highlighted in blue, along with words related via frequency or position in the text. The green lines extend from "overboard" to points on the arc signify its multiple positionalities, revealing its relationship to the 'whole' text. Simultaneously the text underneath the arc presents a linear reading of the corpus in short phrases.

This way of reading allows one to apprehend the text in a rhizomatic way, mirroring its construction: "The text is 'read' from start to finish, with repeating, non-stopword terms, visited by the animated arc. The occurrences of the currently read term are shown by lines to the perimeter. You can also hover over any term to see its occurrences on the perimeter" (Voyant). It is useful to read the brief and logic-filled court case in a way that deconstructs its apparent classical and rational construction. Experiencing the text in this way re-forms it in a sphere-like shape resembling Senior's calabash-poem and Miller's jar-poem. Thus, in the context of NourbeSe's *Zong!* it

participates in the project of reconceptualizing the Caribbean space by mapping. *Zong!* accomplishes this without *Voyant Tools*, but the data visualization tool makes visible an operation that can be easily overlooked. It transforms *Gregson v Gilbert* into a visual poem.

This alternative map of *Gregson v Gilbert* that *Voyant Tools* facilitates is not only visual for it also invokes orality. Like the Zong poems, this Textual Arc calls for an oral reading. When the individual words are highlighted in the middle of the arc the absence of connecting words creates a tension between sight and sound. The lack of recognition between nouns, adjectives, verbs and pronouns that are only spatially related seem to be made clearer or by saying or sounding out the words in succession. NourbeSe has a well-known practice of reading her poetry aloud, and I think the text arc calls for that in the same way that the text of *Zong!* does: combining the new landscape of the text with the soundscape. Processing occurs through speech and learning through speech is juxtaposed sharply with the absence of black voices – their mouths filled with water or in want of it. While it is likely the *Gregson v Gilbert* case was read aloud in its own context, that context did not take black subjectivity into consideration. In a number of ways, this *Voyant* tool functions to mediate the white (Western) logic with blackness or marginality. Namely, the written word coalesces into the spoken word, creating several levels of encoded language. This echoes the play on words in the long poem, where linguistic meaning is informed not simply by spelling (with homonyms) but also how space is negotiated: "ro/ugh winds/rip the we/ft of *wa/le sad/e & ade* th/ere are we/als on *wale s s*/kin *sade s*…" (132). An additional example of how technology has shaped the text is

significant here: “Many is the time in the writing of this essay when my fingers would hit an S rather than a Z in typing *Zong*. Song and Zong: with the exception of one letter the two words are identical; if said quickly enough they sound the same” (207). This remark at once couples the formation of her poetry with song and illustrates the tension between the author’s voice and the ‘voice’ or influence of the typewriter/computer through its latent keyboard. As the speaker in Stevens’ poem recognizes the impact of a voice outside of his own, he concludes that “the sea was not a mask” (2). Likewise, NourbeSe invites her reader, whether a in the form of a person or a machine,[19] to view and listen to unfamiliar voices that were once completely masked by the sea but are now made more visible, it is ironic that the same language does both: it masks and unmasks.

Technology plays a significant role in both facilitating production and shifting or altering the end product. The influence of technology is exemplified by NourbeSe’s experience with the printing process: “the laser printer for no apparent reason prints the first two or three pages superimposed on each other — crumped, so to speak — so that the page becomes a dense landscape of text” (206). That a technological tool produces this phenomenon is no accident. Much like the error message Miller receives, the printer resists her intended textual landscape. What is fascinating is the way this landscape of text replicates the conditions under which landscapes may be reimagined. The superimposition of the pages recalls Donald Hind’s remark about spatial imaginary and proximity in the Caribbean: “Superimpose a map of Europe on the West Indies…and Jamaica is Edinburgh, Trinidad is north Africa, Barbados would be Italy - that's how far

[19] The data visualization tool is a reader.

apart we are" (Thompson). But instead of demonstrating distance, the unexpected visual the printer creates is an amalgamation of words and ideas intended to unfold in a particular way – with specific coordinates if you will. The grey text charts landscape in a way vastly different from the Latin named movements. *Ebora*, "whose title means 'underwater spirits' in Yoruba" illustrates the tension between the presence of African/diasporic deities in mediating and assisting travel and in the context of catastrophe (Dowling 8). The treatment of text and space in this movement brings the element of natural disaster into sharper focus. In addition to the scholarship of Christina Sharpe, I turn to Sonya Posmentier and her discussion of lyric ecology in *Cultivation and Catastrophe*. Her scholarship furnishes a means of understanding relationships among the sections that make up the 'whole' text in a way that augments the technological, mechanical imaginary: "The surrounding documents are as much a part of the books' ecology as the poems themselves" (Posmentier 215). This ecologically based conception of the text begs the question: Where does technology feature in the ecology of the book?

An exploration of the play between the ecological and the technological aspects of *Zong!* could offer insight into earlier discussions of what is understood as natural as opposed to manmade. In Chapter 1, for example, much of my argument is founded upon crediting the naturalness of the gourd and clay jar and discrediting the artificiality of the well-wrought urn, but those oppositions have become even more nuanced. With the necessary nuance in mind I continue to move beyond the idea of naturalness or closeness to the environment in order to discuss the intentionality of the creation and the logic of that choice with respect to place and space. This reinforces remediation theory, insofar as

it calls attention to these choices and their impact, but also the difficulty of reimagining not only a place – in the vastness of the Atlantic – but also a story to which there is limited access. The condition of not knowing is uncomfortable for the reader, for on the page they witness a catastrophe. The disaster is one way of reading the dynamics pulling the text back and forth – back to its natural 'roots' and forth into the digital realm. Yet these distinctions are not always so distinguishable: in many cases, like the *Ebora* movement, the dominance of the text as landscape is overwritten by technology, and the to and fro motion is in such flux that it transforms into an indistinguishable form.

The media is not divorced from humanity by a robotic technological operation, for production extends outside of the author and incorporates an immaterial source. For beside NourbeSe's name on the book cover reads: "as told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng." The poet comments, "even claiming to author the text through my own name is challenged by the way the text has shaped itself" (204). This situation lends itself to comparison with the way divinity functions among Senior and Miller's collections in Chapter 2. Though it does not appear in the same ways, the divine presence still does much to mediate the diasporic travel experience, or rather the catastrophic slave trade. While NourbeSe's call to Boateng may seem to fit neatly into the ancestor/descendant relationship, the ambiguity around the identity of her shared author resists such an easy natural kinship. In many ways *Zong!* is neither organic nor natural, both the unnaturalness of the disaster ensuing on the Zong ship and the rootedness of a single author challenge the idea of a natural disaster. In this way, it highlights and subverts the

condition of being natural simultaneously in the environmental sense and concerning kinship or blood relations.

Bringing my argument to a close, it is useful to return to the roots of language to examine the routes they take and their rerouting of authorship in addition to the fluctuations between material and immaterial production. The etymology of catastrophe, like the concerns of my argument is related to structural division, where strophe refers to uneven lines and free verse. When combined with its prefix 'cata–' envisions a chaotic production of text. Creswell's work on topopoetics augments this linguistic exploration, where he calls attention to the etymology of stanza, meaning 'room' or 'stopping place' and verse as 'turning of the plow.' This part of the discussion is titled "Stasis and Flux" and it takes up the mobile journeying of the poem as its main argument. What we may call the tidalectical play among structural poetic elements, strophe and antistrophe,[20] couples elegantly with the underwater (anti)narrative NourbeSe presents and her effort to "not-tell" a catastrophic story, and to undraw an extant map. Here there is room to consider the instructive links between word and meaning as indicative of place(making) and unmaking, where catastrophe – in multiple senses of the word – provides grounds for movement in geographical, technological and spiritual.

The incorporation of *Voyant* for a computational remediation begins to illuminate a number of underlying structures in the 'whole' text of *Zong!*. Though instead of the goal to "create semantic mayhem," this is the governing structure of the application

[20] Here I consider the Ancient Greek meaning of antistrophe, "a turning back," and how it signals to NourbeSe's return to the Zong massacre and her re-formation of the Gregson v Gilbert court case.

(193). Identifying that this digital tool has a governing structure sheds light on its impact not only on the clear re-formation, but also on the initial form the text takes. There is tension between the digital container and the containment that the text of the legal case imposes along with tension between the process of reading and that of writing. Where typing may result in a missed coordinate or printing an entirely new landscape, taking a humanistic approach to the mechanics of literary production offers an alternative means of understanding our relationship to a text in addition to relationships between texts. Placing the 'original' text alongside its plain counterpart, accomplishes something similar to NourbeSe's remediation and re-formation of *Gregson v Gilbert*. Leaning into the movement of ever shifting texts repositions the image of the container and containment at large, embracing the ongoing tensions between the Caribbean as a fixed place and the Caribbean as a dynamic space.

Conclusion

The C(art)ography of (Type)setting: Towards a Formal Fluidity

how evvathing flows underwater . . .

the waves comin in/ comin in/ tidelect tidelect tidelectic con/nect/ing . . . .

Kamau Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*

An analysis of how shape, space and typeface interact with each other in Caribbean concrete poetry showcases the movement between known and unknown, material and immaterial, literary and digital – extending the literary aesthetic into the digital aesthetic. The genre of concrete poetry, in many ways spearheaded by the technical innovations of Kamau Brathwaite, illustrates the tensions among language, typography and typesetting. While these tensions exist in the most traditional left aligned sonnets, they are more clearly exposed if not amplified in poetry where Caribbean writing is in a form "that sits uncomfortably in the spaces that have tried to contain it" (Miller 335). For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the multiple layers embedded in the forms that Miller, Senior and NourbeSe's poetic interventions take – beyond that which is inherent to linguistic expression – including the container of the Caribbean basin, the word processor, and the printing process that produces the physical or digital product. These layers underneath the text flow into each other. Like the movement of the waves in *Barabajan Poems*, one of Brathwaite's multi-generic texts, both the repetition and

reiterations of shape, space and typeface points toward the tidalectic play among poets, their poetry and their cartographic engagement.

The theories I draw upon to negotiate concreteness and fluidity – topopoetics and tidalectics – are intentionally linked to the Caribbean and the way it moves and operates. Drawing a connection between the aesthetics of concrete poetry and my concern with the aesthetics of the landscapes and seascapes -- connects the visual qualities of poetry with that of network visualizations. My goal is not a transplantation or a superimposition of the Caribbean but ways of reading that pays respect to or acknowledges the way the landscapes and seascapes are formed and reformed.

While the colonial map often works to compress multiple layers of a place in order to represent it generally, or on a single plane, the poetic remediations of Caribbean landscapes and seascapes decompress and reveal the layered process of meaning making. For this reason, Miller, Senior and Philip's texts require a different approach in order to understand how to navigate the alternative maps they create. I employed special tools to read and understand the texts in each of my three chapters. Because these poets are creating alternative maps, one needs alternative tools in order to read them in a way that is commensurate with their production. The tools I used shift from chapter to chapter yet become more layered through the progression of this project; I began with the theoretical (literary) approaches of topopoetics and tidalectics as mechanisms to read, then continued with theoretical (digital humanistic) approaches of network analysis and computational poetics as tools to read and create. My thesis, then, charts the gradual increase in my level of engagement with the texts under examination, from using a more formal literary

analysis to spatialize “Quashie’s Verse” and “Gourd” in Chapter 1, to employing digital theories and tools to spatialize *Gregson v Gilbert* as a part of *Zong!* - effectively participating in the production of space as a black Caribbean subject.

The production of space, like the relationship between topography and typography, is not a linear one, rather, it is a rhizomatic one. And charting the flows between chapters demonstrates how the orientation of the rhizome informs the shifting back and forth between literary and digital spatialization. Tracing the rhizome’s movement reveals an increasing visibility as my engagement proceeds. First its influence may be perceived in Chapter 1 with how Miller’s “Quashie’s Verse” and Senior’s “Gourd” are written/drawn, their work lauding imprecision and lending themselves to a topopoetic analysis. It then appears more potently in Chapter 2 in the outward movement between geographical places (within the Caribbean and other geographies) and textual spaces (between Senior and Miller’s collections), specifically in network visualization. Finally, the rhizome is in the machine, revealing the structural similarities among different literary genres. Thinking of literary cartography as a model, my aim was to put seemingly incongruous areas, methods and fields in conversation. On one hand the distinctive methods I outline may seem to reinforce the separations between the fields of literature and digital humanities, but that I have paired these approaches indicates there is significant overlap between these categories especially when one considers these fields operating rhizomatically. Furthermore, the scholarly approaches I draw from to read and analyze the poems and poetry collections speaks to the overlap between genres, expanding how poetry is defined.

The ways that Miller, Senior and NourbeSe manipulate text on the page not only facilitates movement of many kinds including movement between genres. Abbie Beiman cites many critics of concrete poetry that understand it as an art object. Brian McAllister, a critic belonging to the generation that follows hers, notes this genre "blurs formal boundaries between the poetic and the visual" (234). My project takes this idea further, using digital humanistic lens to analyze network diagrams of *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* and *Gregson v Gilbert* as aesthetic objects. While the Gephi network visualizations remediate Miller's collection, my engagement with the Zong court case not only re-forms the text using the Voyant Textual Arc, it also places the legal genre alongside the poetic. Drawing from what Nicole Geravasio calls "aestheticized language," in the Zong poems, I consider the ways poetry has been contained, not only by way of shape or form, but through genre (9). The visual element allows us to see the how something as simple as typesetting carries significance beyond superficial coherence or even synthetic unity. Questions like, what does the arrangement of type communicate to the reader? What do spaces between sections signify on a formal level? And how are texts organized in ways that create tensions between a linear and nonlinear reading experience? have motivated this project. And I continue to think about how we conceive of generic boundaries – positioning my thesis to demonstrate an expansion not only of how we may read and analyze poetry, but also an expansion of what poetry is and can be. Fluidity, travelling, and transmutation have informed my analysis of Miller, Senior and NourbeSe's texts, extending conversations around geographic movement with particular attention to the formal and generic boundaries within their texts.

A turn towards aesthetics, both that of the Caribbean topography and of typography, shifts the focus from the 1's and 0's behind digital production – the equivalent of the characters or type that make up poetry – to the end products and onto the intricacies and nuances of how the visual poetry transcends these containers. New ways of reading, with the digital resources demonstrates the complexities that characterize the formation of these texts and ways they resist neat containers and containment like the well-wrought urn or the alignment within the word processor. The dynamics of this play are important, particularly the extremes of containment and fluidity, place and space, and so on, for these presences appear and disappear in unpredictable ways, reifying the rhizome. Then thinking about both aspects, ways the Caribbean is packaged and ways it can be unpacked, and how that mirrors the ebb and flow of the sea – attests to my interest in the multiplicity of Caribbean aesthetics.

With packaging and place in mind, I (re)turn to typesetting for it simultaneously captures a formatting practice and alludes to literary cartography – with an eye towards printing and production. While typography lends itself more to an artistic practice, typesetting is generally understood in practical terms. My interest in the interplay of typography and typesetting is a way I imagine building and reinforcing the vital link between the human (language) and the digital (machine/program) generally, and place and space particularly. The (type)setting – the arrangement of the text and the relationship between the typed word and its textual setting may be extended to its geographic setting, where each word can be imagined having a coordinate within the landscape of the text. Then literary cartography can be understood in both natural and

artificial terms. Bringing the ecological and the humanistic into a field governed by binaries – 1's and 0's – and shifting the focus to the aesthetic product, I place value and significance of formation and appearances – a seemingly superficial endeavor, but one that is overlooked at the expense of fulsome and dynamic interpretive practices. The plainness of the remediated Caribbean basins, Legba's veve, Anansi's web, and the genre of plain text itself are as elegantly intentional as they are dynamic. These qualities prove to be vital in order to tell, retell or not-tell a story.

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