

Mermaids

ECL 305: Literature and the Environment

Spring 2024. Professor Pressman

Day 22: African Mermaids

ADMIN

- **NEXT WEEK:**

- **No class meeting on Tuesday— asynchronous peer review in Google doc.**

We will not meet during class, but this work can be done during class time. Here are the directions:

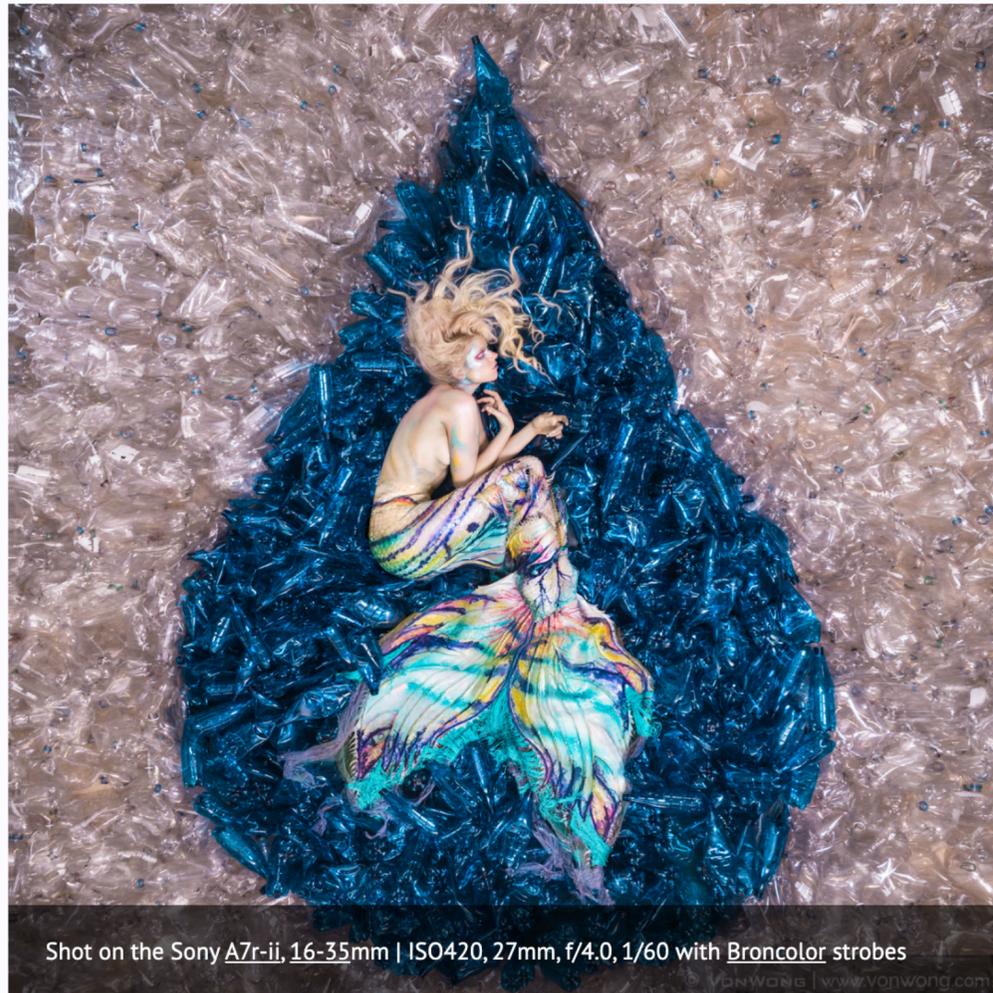
1. Post a draft of your thesis and plan for the final essay; thesis statement (2-3 sentences) before our class time (before 12:30 pm). You can add more content about your planned media format, if you want feedback on that too!
2. During class time, add comments on at least one peer's abstract— but hopefully every one— by Tuesday, November 25 at midnight.

NOTE: Do not change the content of anyone else's content. Add comments in Track Changes or below the thesis (in italics or a color, or something to denote your editorial presence) and add your name.

- **Blog for next week (if you choose to wrote one): What you need to learn/do in order to complete your final project**

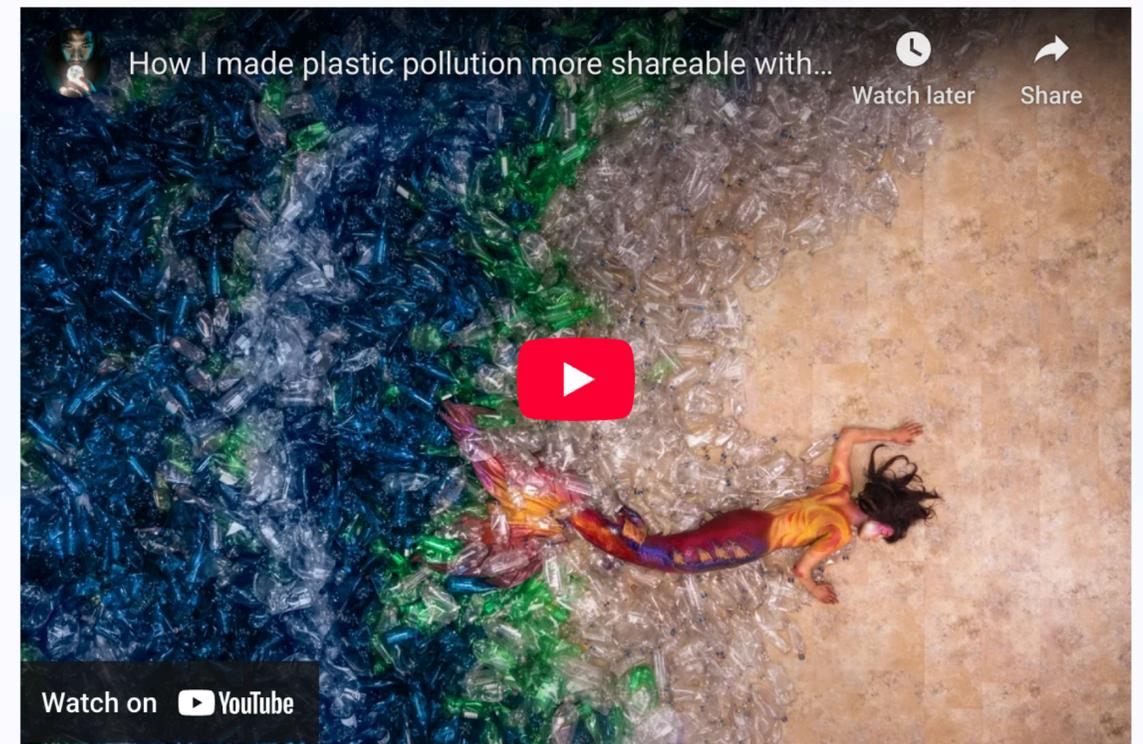
Discoveries!- thanks, Gavin

Alone, I was just a photographer – but thanks to the help of amazing individuals we transform lifeless pile of used garbage into a message: #MermaidsHatePlastic



Shot on the Sony A7r-ii, 16-35mm | ISO420, 27mm, f/4.0, 1/60 with Broncolor strobes

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Sign our pledge: www.mermaidshateplastic.com (update: petition closed)

Final Essay plan/proposal brainstorming

- What do you plan to write/do/make for your final essay?
- Which text(s) will you analyze?
- What is the theme/topic/argument you plan to pursue?

Today: where to begin? What to discuss?

Cristina Bacchilega and Marie Alohalani Brown, “African Mermaids and Other Water Spirits”
(*Penguin*, pgs. 165-7)

“Aganju and Yemaja” (*Penguin*, p. 168-9)

“African Water Spirits in the Caribbean” (*Penguin*, p. 273-274)

“Ti Jeanne” (275-77)

From your blogs- still going...

- EMILY: While we in the Western hemisphere have moved away from the unknown of myths and fantasy, the peoples of these nations have stable and strong connections with the Gods and Goddesses from the worlds of their long – ago ancestors. Their presence is not a sign of a new age, a revelation – but rather a sign of a faith remaining stable in a developing world away from legends. A fight to recognize what has always been in front of us, even if we choose to ignore what we do not wish to see. T

Transatlantic transmission

- “When Yoruba people were captured during the transatlantic slave trade, they brought their worship of Yemoja with them. Today, she is a transnational water goddess” (166)

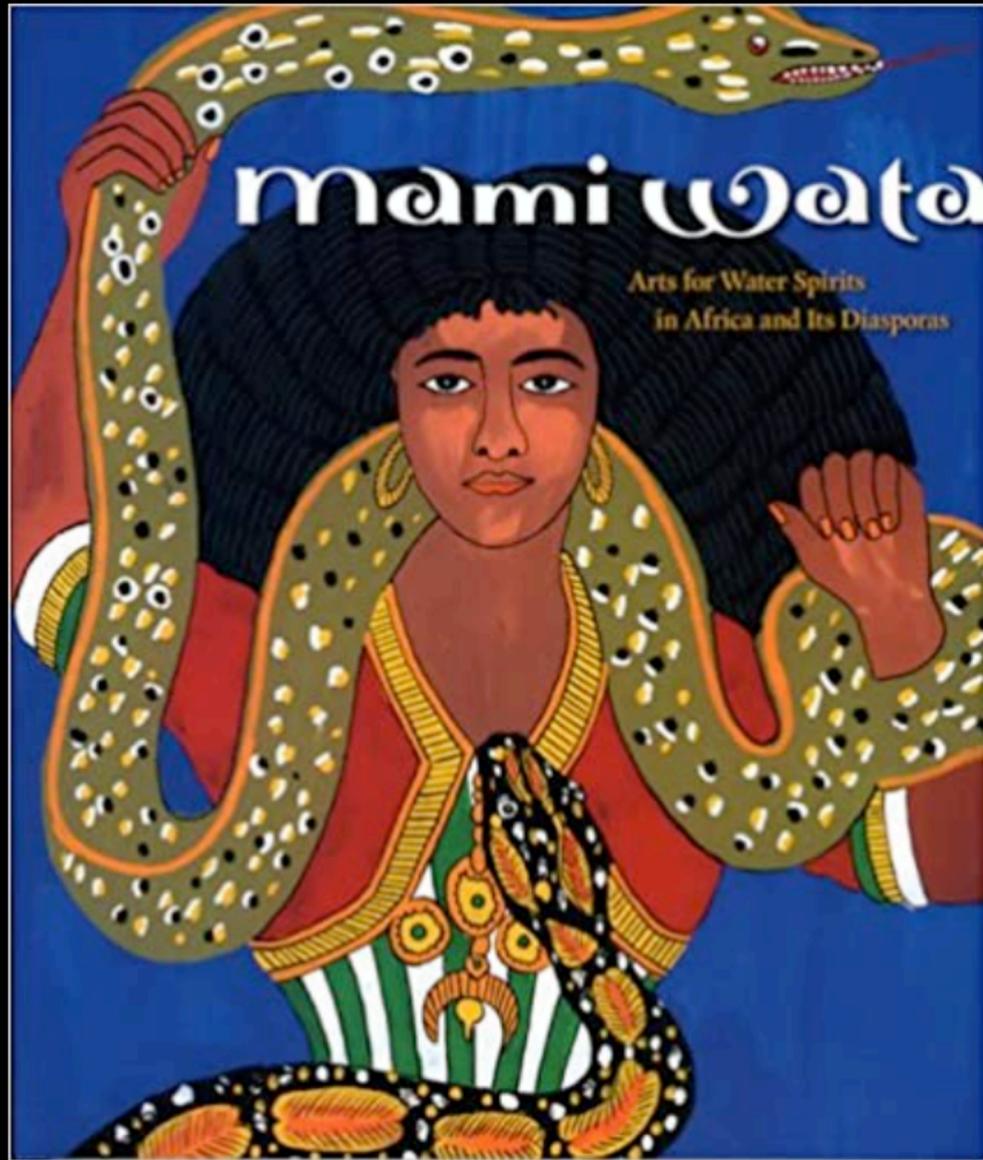
From your blogs- different types of tales and tellings

- **MORGAN:** By using personification it creates more of an ethical framework...They are part of a larger idea that treats nature as alive, interconnected
- **GAVIN:** This instance in the narrative illustrates how Yoruba mythology rejects the idea of untainted, remote generation, and instead, relies on divinity being situated in an embodied experience and emotion.
- **SALINAS:** It's interesting how Maman Dlo is portrayed as a figure that contains multitudes, she is fierce but kind to those who honor her. Beautiful and powerful. It is unlike the western mermaids that we have learned of so far that appears to be one dimensional in character (Christianity and their monsterification of mermaids and sirens being symbols of evil and temptation). Western mermaids inherently paint human connection to our environment to be dangerous. Maman Dlo is neither of those things, instead she serves as a protector of the waters, a reminder that it is to be respected.

From your blogs- Yemaja- sacred and/as violence

- BOMIN: Also, I liked this text how it personifies water as something emotional and human. In many modern views, nature is treated as something to control or use, but here, water has feelings, it can protect, nurture, and even react..For me, Yemoja's description reminded me that myths are not just old stories, they are ways to understand what it means to feel and to live in balance with nature.
- JENNA: The story of Yemaja in "*Aganju and Yemaja*" explains the origin of the world through the female body. Her body functions not only as a physical form but also as a channel that creates the world and gives birth to gods. In other words, her body becomes a medium that connects the boundary between humans and nature. ...Ultimately, Yemaja's body bears traces of violence yet simultaneously embodies natural vitality and order. Her body becomes a sacred space where destruction and creation coexist that shows a symbol of origin in which the worlds of humans, nature, and the divine are united.

Mami Wata



Mami Wata

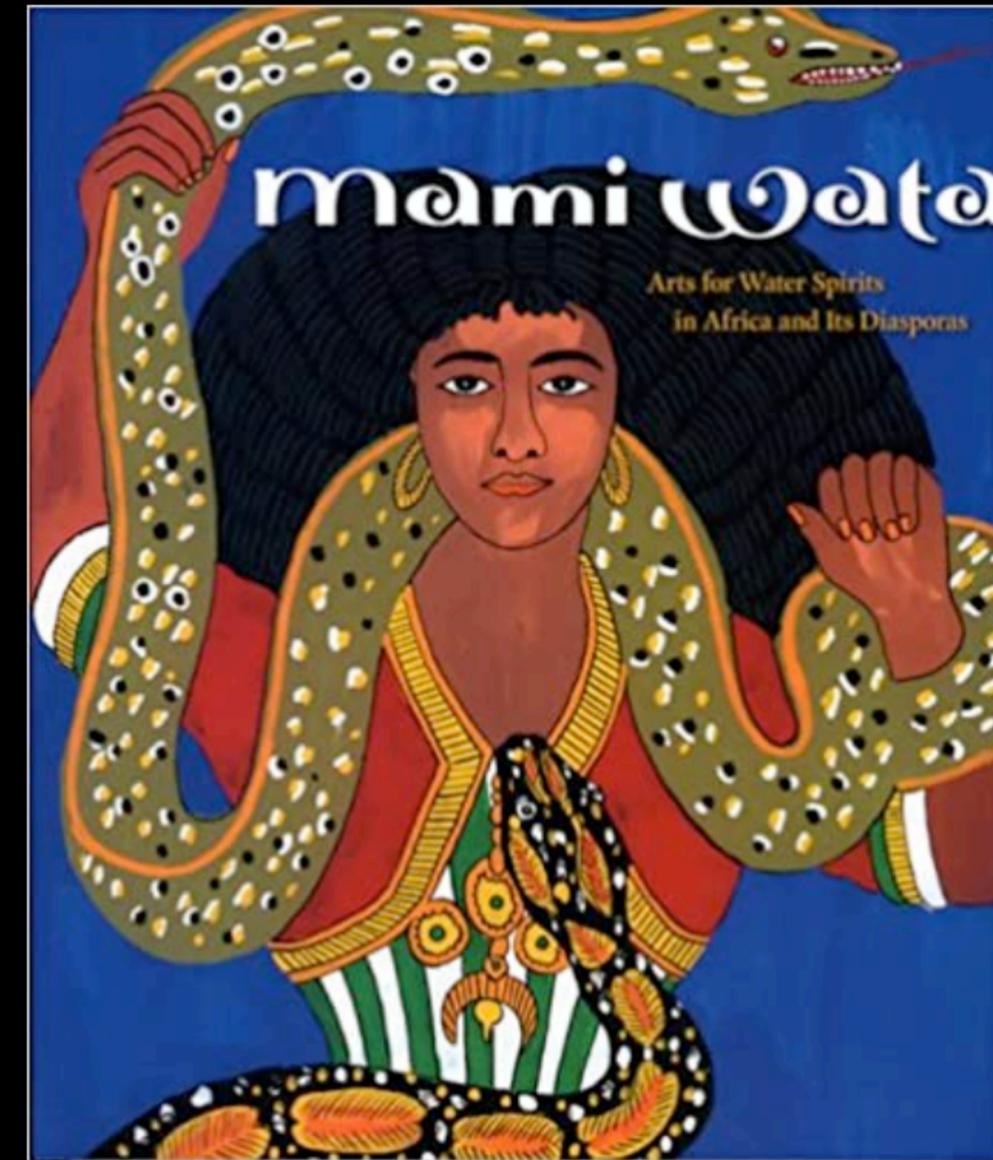
-“She is both foreign and indigenous, and somewhat paradoxically, she is a singular being of multiple incarnations and manifestations” (10)

**_“she can bring good fortune in the form of money, and as a ‘capitalist’ par excellence, her power increased between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries, the era of growing international trade between Africa and the rest of the world” (23)

“By the fifteenth century, when Europeans began to explore beyond Mediterranean waters, they carried with them images of mythic creatures—dragons, griffins, unicorns, centaurs, and especially the mermaid” (33)

Mami Wata “is a product of transcultural and transnational encounters and commercial transactions” (81)

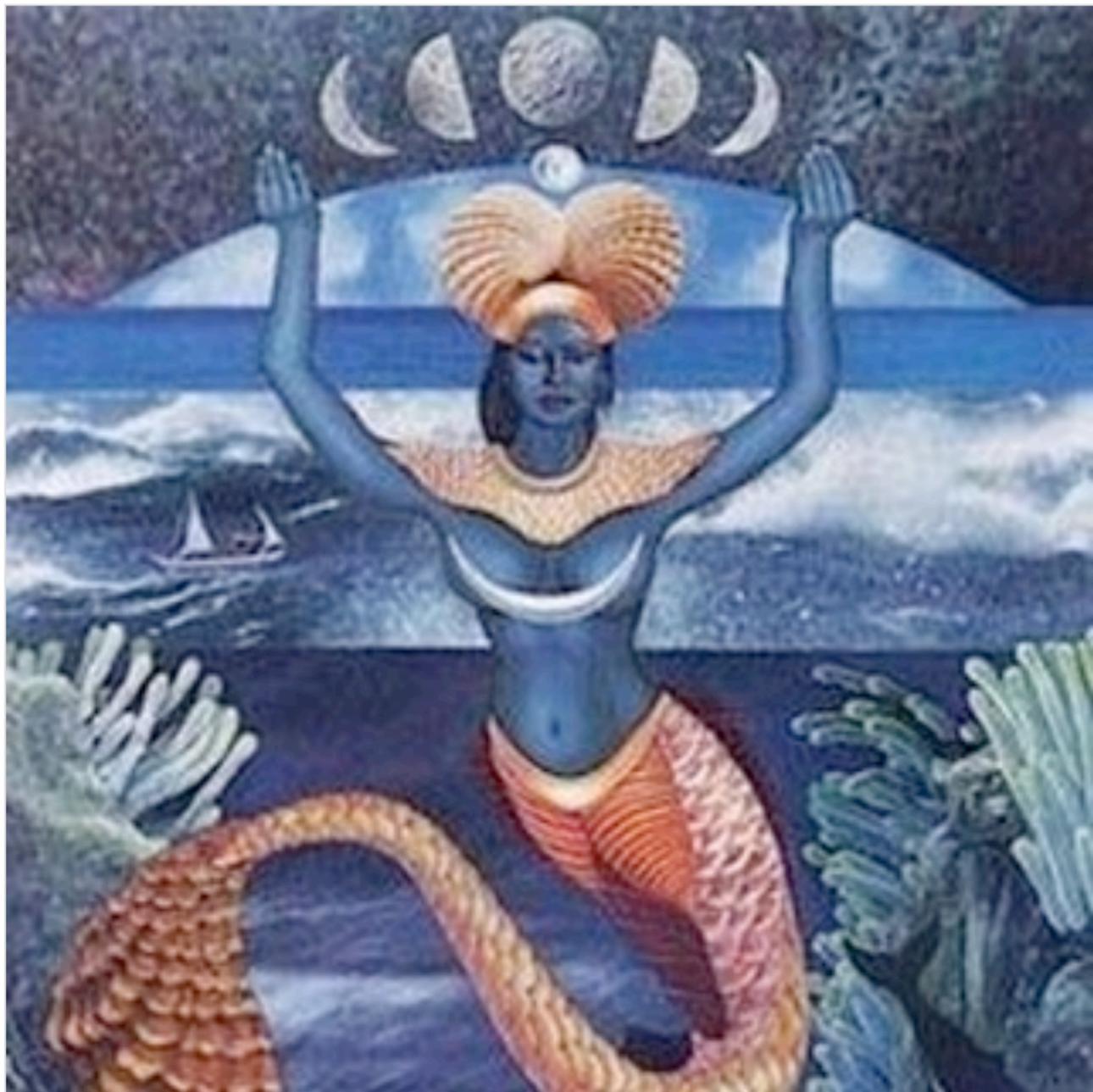
—Henry John Drewell, *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and its Diasporas* (Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles 2008)



Discussion

- What does this add to our learning, discussion, process?

Yemaja



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girlmuseum Yemaja, also known as Yemoja, depending on the traditions of the local area, is the deity of the Yoruban people found in Nigeria, Benin and Togo. Before giving birth, her waters broke and inundated the world with water thus creating the Seven Seas. This establishes Yemaja as the creator goddess of the lakes, rivers and oceans but predominantly, as the chief deity of the Ogun River. <https://bit.ly/3G3S9vy>

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February 22, 2023

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YEMAYÁ

Origin: Yoruba (West Africa)

Signs and symbols:

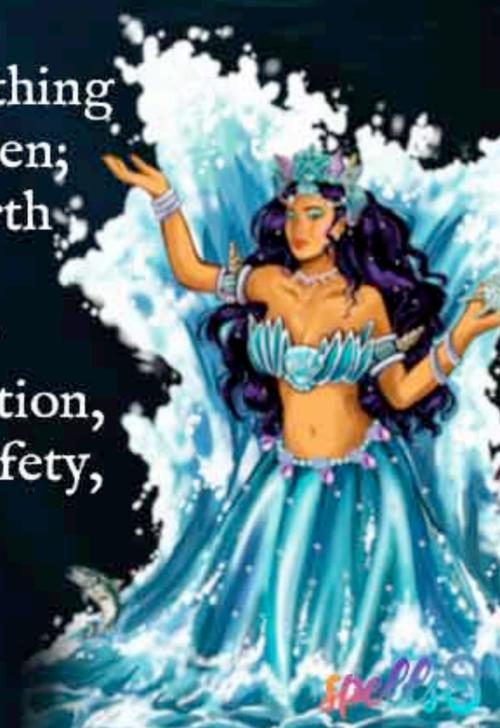
Ileke (beads), Number 7, the Moon
Cowrie shells, blue and white

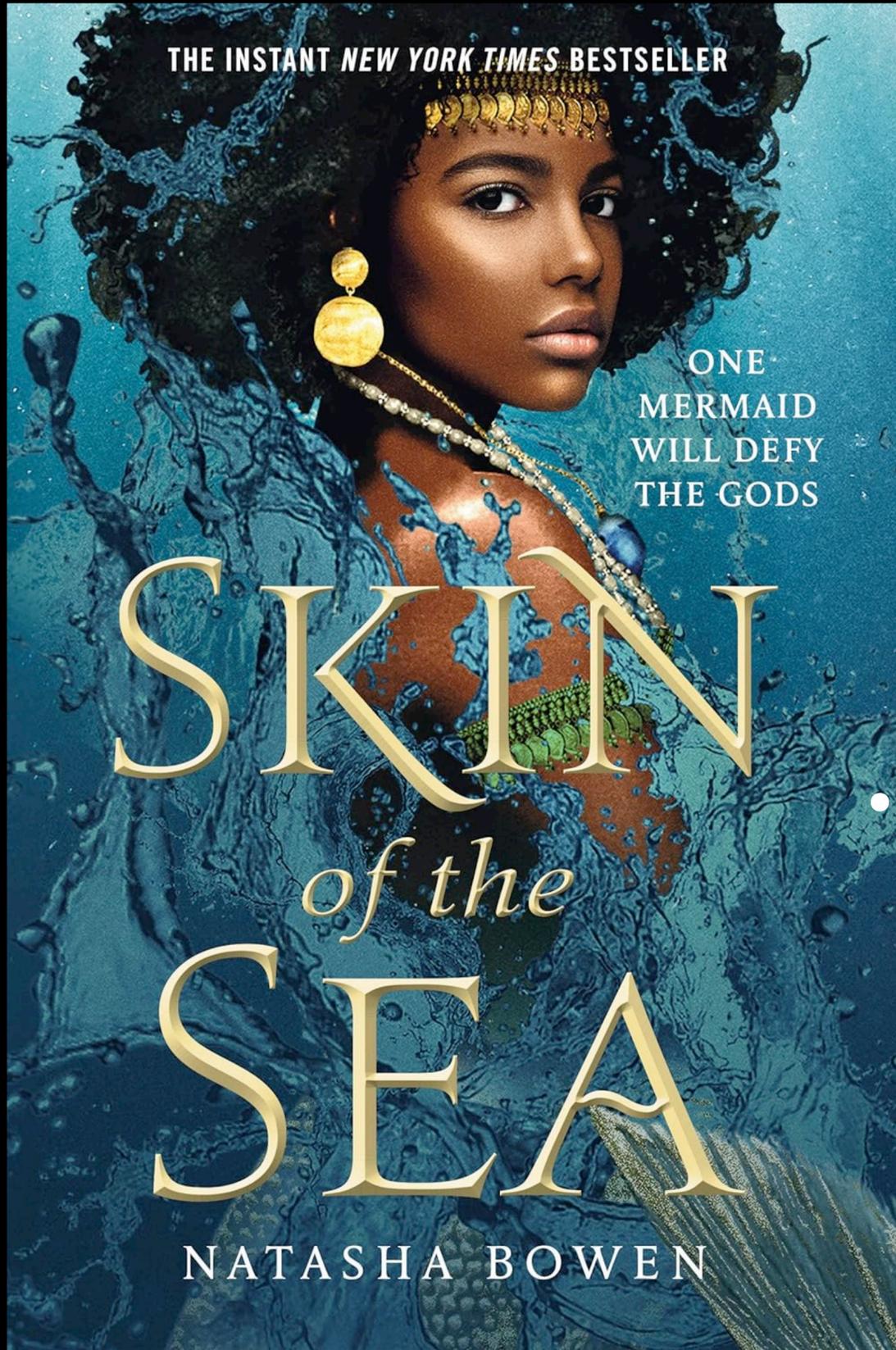
Other names:

Yemoja, Yemaja, Yemalia, Yemalla,
Iemanja. Mother of all Orishas,
Mother Whose Children are Fish.

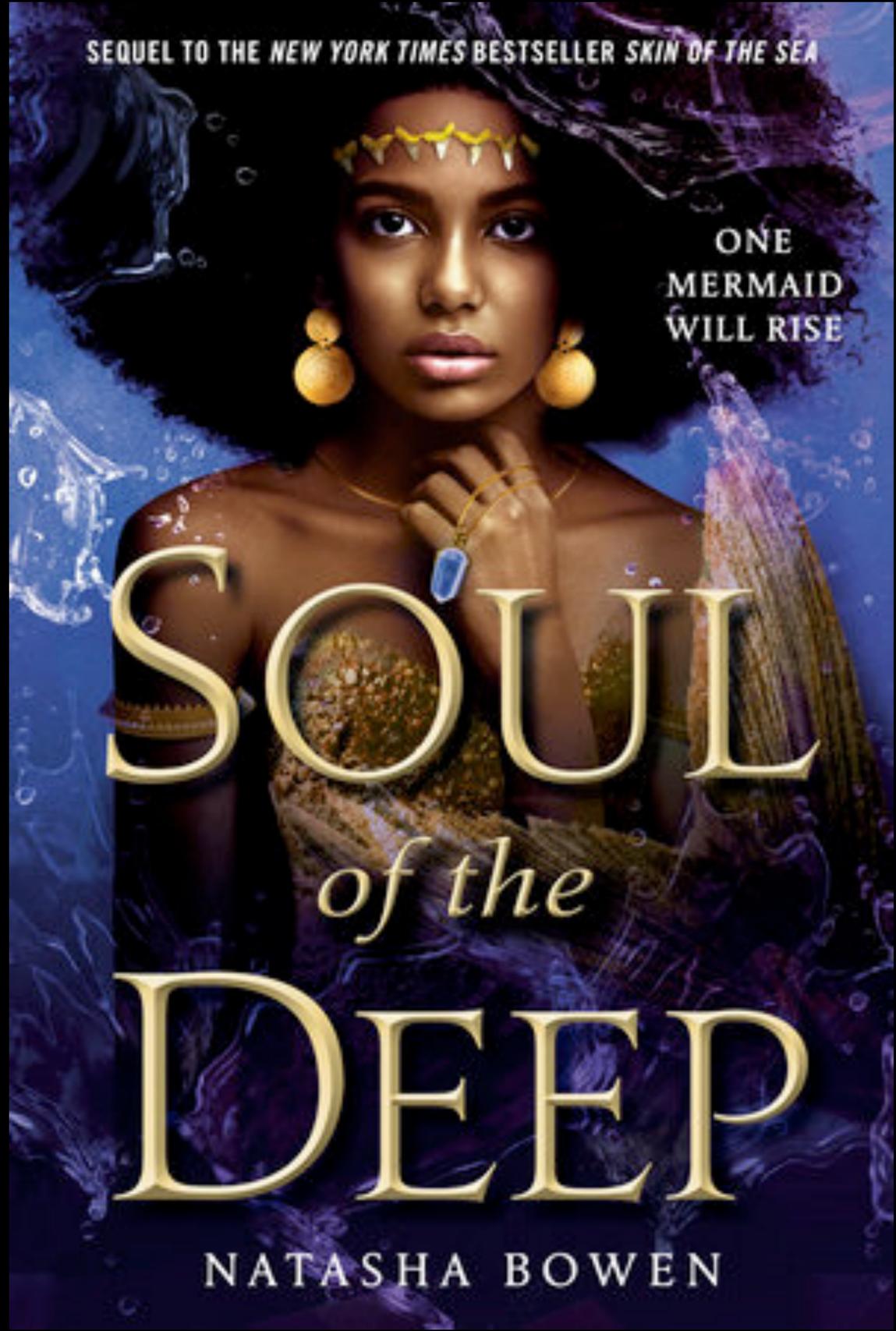
Attributes:

She governs everything
pertaining to women;
particularly the birth
and bearing of
children including
childbirth, conception,
parenting, child safety,
love, and healing.

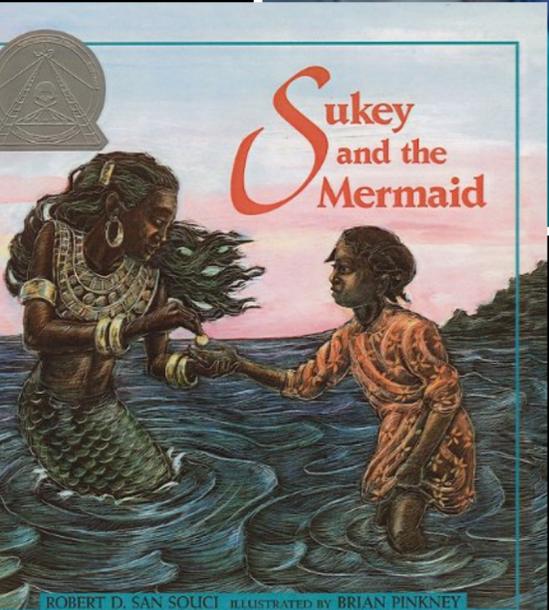
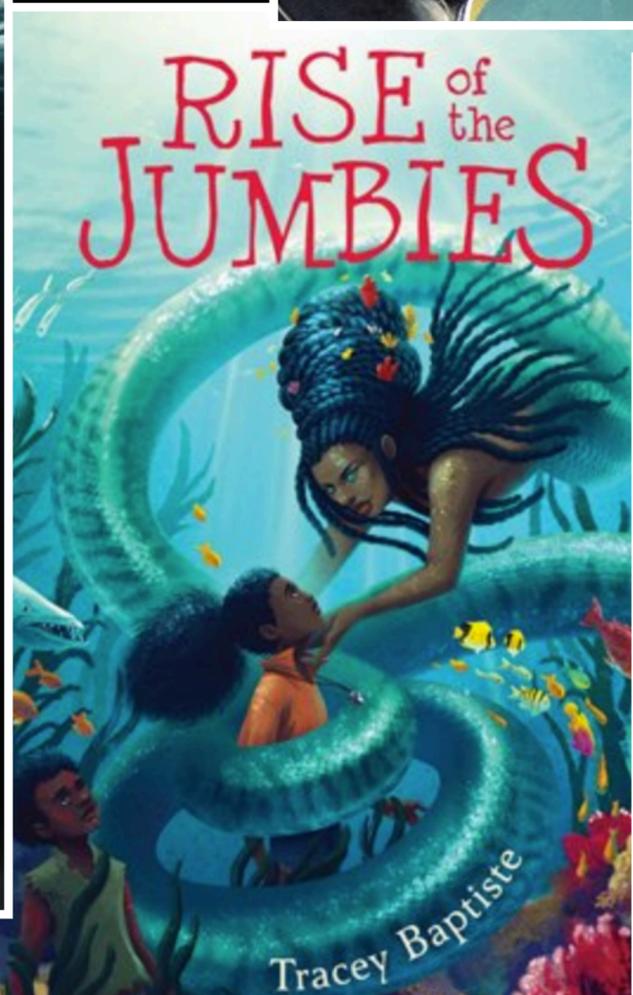
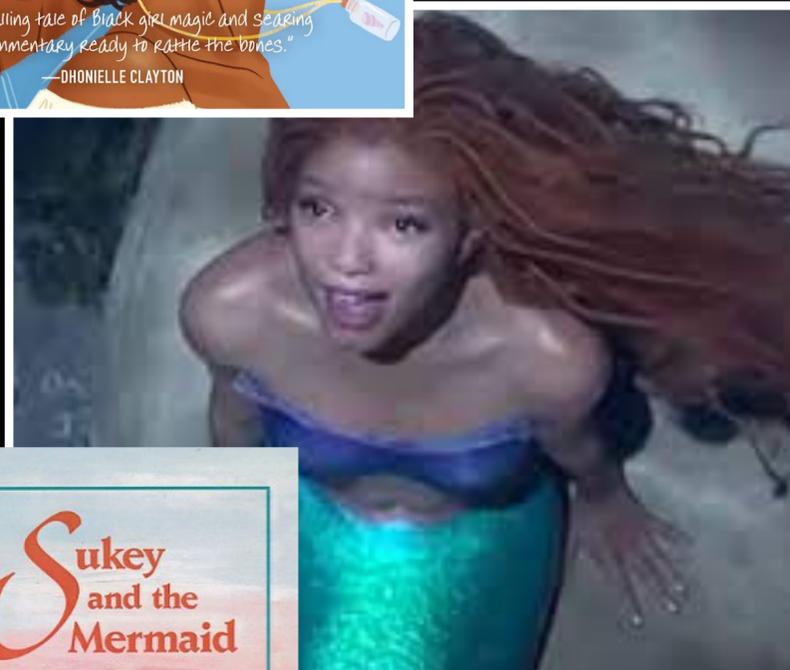
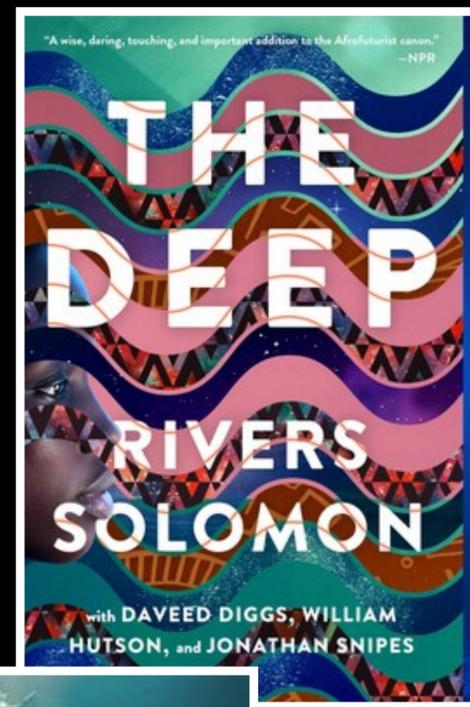
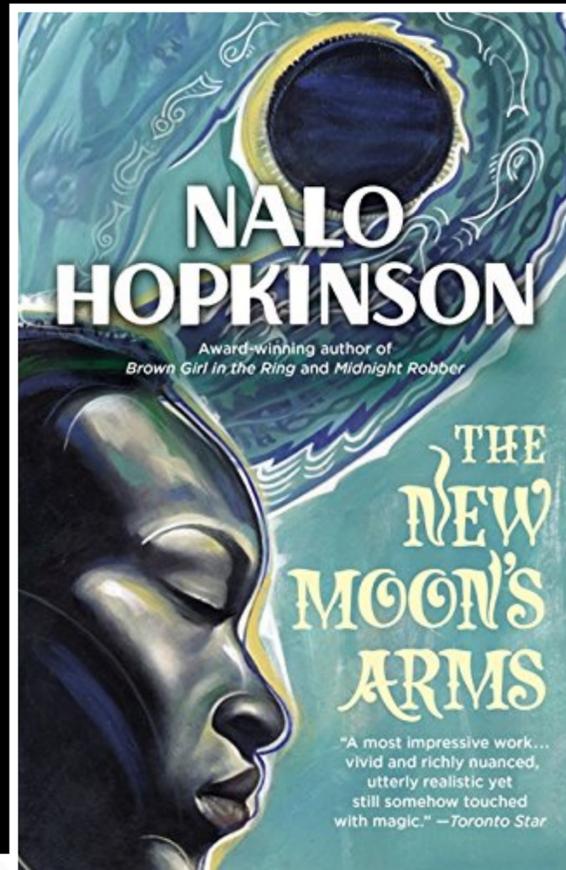
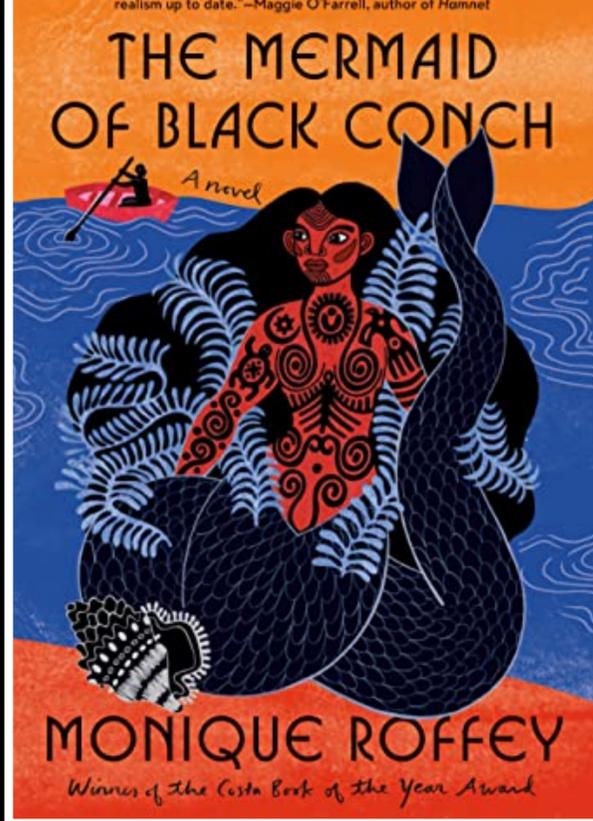
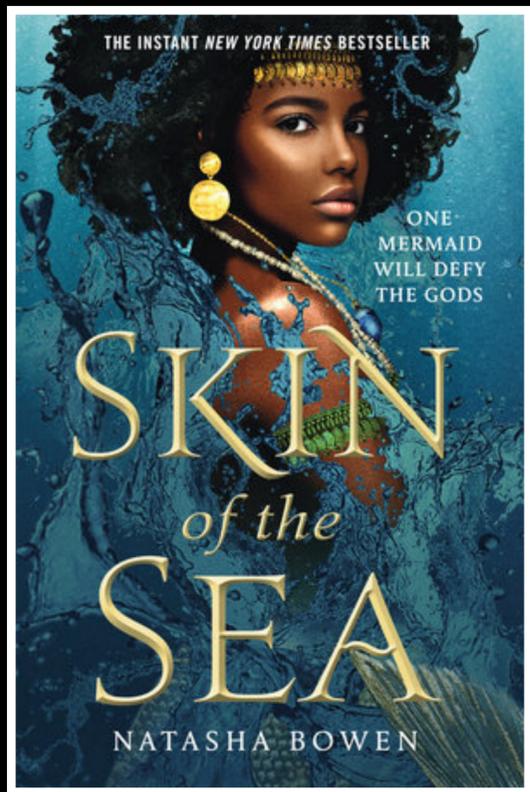
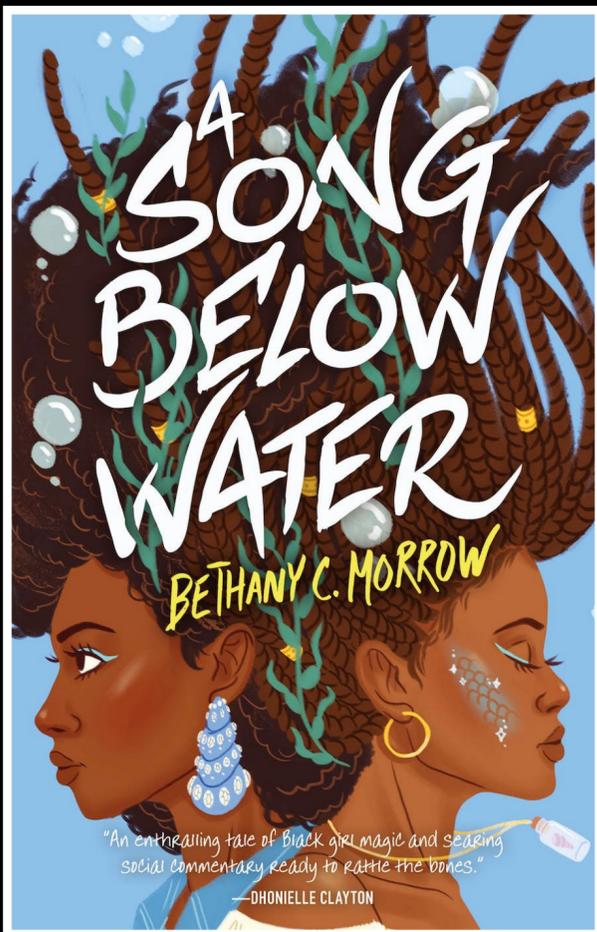




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Disney's Black mermaid is no breakthrough – just look at the literary subgenre of Black mermaid fiction

Published: December 20, 2022 8.37am EST

A coffin made to resemble a mermaid at a Ga funeral. The Ga people live along the southeast coast of Ghana. Eye Ubiquitous/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

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Mermaids have become a cultural phenomenon, and clashes about mermaids and race have spilled out into the open. This is most pointedly apparent in the backlash over Disney's much-anticipated "[The Little Mermaid](#)."

After Disney unveiled [its trailer for the film](#), which will be released in May 2023, [social media captured the faces](#) of gleeful young Black girls seeing Black mermaids onscreen for the first time. Less inspiring was [the racism](#) that

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Disclosure statement

Jessica Pressman does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would

Take aways? Questions?