

In order to uphold capitalistic values, society often must deny historical fact. So much of modern literature focuses on how these rejections, these burials of well known destruction at the fault of humanity, do not erase the memory. What people cannot recall, the world remembers. Throughout various texts read this semester, it becomes evident how the environment, the ocean particularly, exists as an archive of these tragedies people attempt so diligently to rid themselves of. By focusing on the ocean, through the lens of authors like Derek Walcott in his poem “The sea is History”, its vitality as a record and the only way to remember what our descendants do not, the necessity of trusting it and its objective view are highlighted.

My rendition of representing this came through in illustration, combined with the record of how these writers recognized the same principle. One of the most concerning and devastating historical events required the ocean to conceal its darkest secrets: the infamous Transatlantic Slave Trade. It’s almost impossible to hide the experience of Black people who lived long enough in early America to write their truth in books, of the environment that still holds the imprints of lynching ropes in its branches. However, it has been possible to cover up the darkest of truths that an incredulous number of imprisoned Africans never even reached the Americas. Boats capsized under the weight of overcapacity and untamed weather patterns, resulting in an astounding estimate of 1.8 million deaths just at sea during the Middle Passage. Numbers scattered around tell the story of those who were lucky enough to be found, to be reported on a hundred years after their suffering. The ocean in this instance holds the physical record, the literal archive humanity cannot deny exists. The presence of these ships, these bodies are undeniable evidence of what we love to pretend is so much less catastrophic than it truly was. Paying attention to these artifacts and how our seas preserved them forces an introspective look on past behaviors, and on how we must work to overcome, not just gloss over because this look

is instigated by environmental entities, rather than other mortal beings. They exist beyond being where humans reside; it sees all of our treachery, and eventually returns them to where attention will finally be pointed.

In Walcott's quote in particular, he addresses what holds the most value, this attention mentioned in society. In the first two lines of his poem, he asks to the sea and to the audience, "Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?/Where is your tribal memory" (1-2). The questions' rhetorical nature describes how there's nothing to memorialize the ocean when it does so for itself. Its all encompassing existence on the planet makes it such a mainstay for every individual human being in some way; at the same time, it's disregarded overall. His deliberate choice of wording though seems to trigger this idea of more than just being about the sea's need to be recognized for its totality. He asks about monuments, statues and physical representations of a once incredible journey given to every following generation, perceiving its bravery; he asks about "battles" and "martyrs", revered objects of discussion because of their sacrifice. All of it though ties together when analyzing all of the terms base themselves in violence, in war-like imagery. Relating what society often describes as frightening and gory when looked at in the present tense, to something as gentle and peaceful as the sea creates this greater comparison of how society deems appreciation. It ties itself to violence; we crave it to prove our superiority and simultaneously, refuse to claim our true intentions. In order to truly be seen as an object of affection, we must prove we're worthy through justifiable, or deniable, ritualistic behavior. This emphasis we place on it additionally seems to prove the reason that Walcott must ask the question at all: the way we view the ocean is the main reason we do not consider it an existence of its own. In describing it as this peaceful and beautiful place, in its gentle ebbing and flowing, it becomes associated with this antithesis of our culture's demand for practice of aggressive

colonization. The record it provides, the bodies that wash ashore to present real carnage from selfish intentions force a guilt that our populations refuse to recognize. It cannot be fathomed that the ocean is a valuable part of day-to-day life and habit if it does not revolve around these primal needs to prove dominance over the rest of the beings on our territory; rather, it is a means of seeing this destruction's impact on the world around us. In order to ever have a place, it must be a part of this torturous ideal in a way that uplifts us. To us, it must carve out its name in death, or be forgotten with those that died.

This belief that nature is isolated from our existence, that we rarely coexist, additionally contributes to social denial of its participation in our historical narrative. William Cronon's article "The Trouble with the Wilderness" addresses much of the issue with its current perception: "Wilderness gets us into trouble only if we imagine that this experience of wonder and otherness is limited to the remote corners of the planet or that it somehow depends on pristine landscapes we ourselves do not inhabit" (Cronon, 24). Claiming this complete separation, that he recognizes many people already perceive as "imagined", forms his argument on how entangled human beings have been, and always will be, with the natural world. It is an all encompassing presence, the trees watching our children grow, the rain falling with our tears, and the ocean washing away our secrets. Cronon's ideal of relying on an untouched world, on absolute separation from humanlike entities, fulfills the belief majorly held that upholds this superficial reality of our world being entirely disconnected from an environmental presence as more than just a beautiful sight. Even his word choice that places it as "otherness", as an almost juxtaposing being, allows interpretations of this complete differentiation between the human and its habitat. However, in recognizing the atmospheric world as something of historical documentation, his words further the argument. He considers this "trouble" to conceive of a

world where the lines do not blur between the surrounding world and the people that do so.

Believing in a world since humanity that did not mean the unity of the two refutes so much of how we once survived, and how modernly continue to thrive. Our reliance on it, to provide and to remember, makes it a wonder that can never truly be absolved from our thought.

While its disconnection from human reality cannot actualize, the sea's vitality persisted long before and after the presence of the first human, or mammalian existences. So much of our inhibition to see the ocean as more than something that works around our manmade ecosystem stems from human centered perception of when and how the planet itself formed. In Stephanie Burt's poem, "We Are Mermaids", she describes the sea's timelessness: "It has been there since before the beginning of tragedy" (Burt, lines 4-5). In human terms, actualizing emotions began with the human concept of naming things, meaning the existence of any "tragedy" required our appearance to really record it. However, seeing the ocean's ability to hold these devastations in its waves and floors, it becomes clear it too archives these moments as part of itself. The narrative of these Africans in the Middle Passage became titled this way not by those around them, but by the sea's ability to push them as a part of the greater tragedy of colonization. Her claim of its permanence before and after any devastation reminds humans in the simplest way that the sea truly outlasts much longer than fathomable. Not only does it exist as the most unbiased human history, it holds the story of all that came before any presence of animalkind. When the Earth simply was, without any other life or death, the oceans and the trees stood tall on it. Materializing what seems obvious in any other context allows humanity to accept it as this prevailing body, and a truthful source.

Recording and keeping note of all of this desolation finds its most relevant purpose in the losses that occurred during the Middle Passage. The world did not outwardly deny their

presences or their stories, but so many people of modern society never intended to uncover it because of how little value Black people of the era had. So much of what truly occurred during the era of enslavement remains unreported because the voices of victims were silenced, and perpetrators never considered it of value to speak of. Toni Morrison verbalized this emphasis as the lack of regard for Africans: “Africans and their descendants were not, in any sense that matters, there” (16). The mortal world around Black existence of the time utilized as much of their power to erase them, to carve out the narrative of their worthlessness. It was not until the ocean, the one existence that seemed to be absolved and at the same time an unintentional participant of the tragedy entirely, forced these presences back into the eyes of the future generation that it became of relevance. The appearance of a ship holding 400 bodies from that time period was discovered, just before another with 49 Africans, another with 68, another with 11, then 130, 26, 672, and more coming up as more time passes. It paints this image that although human existence of the time did everything possible to erase it, the environment acted as its antithesis. Had their descendants not chosen to give and understand the ocean’s desire to store information, so many of these stories would be forgotten, as it held the memory to remind these descendants just how *there* the Africans were. In every sense that mattered, the environment kept their stories of suffering and sheer horror to force the future to hear it all.

Oceanic importance as a storyteller when it comes to history we never witnessed is clearly present, but it lays precedent for how much we must give it attention now. Another major number of disappearances has occurred with migrants from the Middle East that can only access sea routes as a means of transportation. 33,220 immigrants since 2014 face the same fate as African predecessors, disappearing without any recognition on global levels and only have hope in their stories being told by the sea itself one day. The situation itself seems to ride on the backs

of what once was, a reality told by The Quest: “The end of one thing... and the beginning of another” (Drexciya, 1997). The band told the story of the African expectant mothers aboard slave ships who drowned, and the possibility of having children that survived in spite of being born in the water. These creatures became known as Drexycians, capable of life on both land and sea, exploring the ability to cross our lives with the environment’s. At the same time, it tells the tale of how the loss of these Africans did not mean the end of their stories; it simply signified another beginning for them with another living habitat. Their message conveys more than the intended though, as it represents how the end of the tragedy of Africans specifically did not mean an absence of these happenings entirely. It simply begins again, and the ocean happens to be its keeper again. The sea safeguards their stories for the world to hear once more, and signifies the continuation of its protectively historical existence that once began with the end of Africans. These ends of human lives push forth the era of recognizing the Ocean as more than a bystander; they actualize it as a part of society.

The guilt of accepting how our history holds so much significance in the most damaging of ways prompts so much rejection of it entirely. Because we refuse to acknowledge how destructive we can be as a species, the stories must be eradicated entirely. The issue arises in the fact that we cannot prevent other existences from holding these memories, and the Sea has. Unless we choose acceptance of the reality it truly demonstrates, we deny ourselves of the beauty of it as a being in our coexistence. No matter what our predecessors refuse and pretend never was, the trees will testify and the seas will sing. We must be willing to listen.

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